

Whilst composing the Hallelujah chorus Handel's assistant walked into his room after shouting for him for several minutes, but with no response. The assistant found Handel in tears and, when asked what was wrong, Handel held up the score to the music and said, "I did think I did see all heaven before me and the great God Himself!" It took Handel just under three weeks to compose Messiah. The Hallelujah chorus took only three days.

King George II was in attendance when Messiah was first performed in London. As the first notes of the triumphant Hallelujah chorus rang out the king rose to his feet and remained standing until the end of the chorus. Following royal protocol, everyone else in the monarch's presence stood, including the audience, chorus and orchestra, so beginning a tradition which has been continued for over two centuries. The Hallelujah chorus clearly places Jesus as the King of kings and Lord of lords, so it is right that even our royalty should stand in His presence.

The great chorus is based on words in the final book of the Bible where we read,

"HALLELUJAH! FOR OUR LORD GOD ALMIGHTY REIGNS,<sup>9</sup> AND OF THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS,<sup>10</sup> WHO WILL REIGN FOR EVER AND EVER."<sup>11</sup>

With such a wonderful gospel message it is bewildering that nations and people still reject the Lord Jesus. Handel took up this theme too:

"WHY DO THE NATIONS SO FURIOUSLY RAGE TOGETHER, AND WHY DO THE PEOPLE IMAGINE A VAIN THING? THE KINGS OF THE EARTH RISE UP, AND THE RULERS TAKE COUNSEL TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD, AND AGAINST HIS ANOINTED."<sup>12</sup>

Handel feared that he would go blind, as the composer Bach had done. Both were operated on by a charlatan oculist who travelled throughout Europe, and both composers went irrevocably blind. He continued to work, conducting this great piece more than thirty times, and usually to support a hospital of which he was a benefactor. He conducted a last performance of Messiah a fortnight before he died on Easter Saturday April 14<sup>th</sup> 1759 in his house in Mayfair. He had expressed the desire to die on Good Friday certain "of meeting my good God, my sweet Lord and Saviour, on the day of His Resurrection."

Above Handel's grave in Westminster Abbey is a monument where the musician's statue holds the musical score to the aria 'I know that my Redeemer liveth.'

Go and hear Messiah. Enjoy and be blessed, but more, I encourage you to read the

Gospel of Luke or John and let Jesus re-introduce Himself to you. Then trust Him as your Lord and Saviour. Ask Him who loved you and gave Himself for you on the cross, to forgive you. Receive the risen Jesus into your life to guide and keep you through life, death and into eternity.

Remember, one day

"THE TRUMPET SHALL SOUND, AND THE DEAD SHALL BE RAISED INCORRUPTIBLE, AND WE SHALL BE CHANGED. FOR THIS CORRUPTIBLE MUST PUT ON INCORRUPTION AND THIS MORTAL SHALL PUT ON IMMORTALITY."<sup>13</sup>

Are *you* able to say, 'I know that my Redeemer lives. Hallelujah!'

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 53:6, <sup>2</sup> Psalm 2:9, <sup>3</sup> Isaiah 7:14, <sup>4</sup> Isaiah 9:6, <sup>5</sup> John 1:29, <sup>6</sup> Isaiah 53:4 & 5 & 8, <sup>7</sup> Psalm 16:10, <sup>8</sup> Matthew 11:28-29, <sup>9</sup> Revelation 19:6, <sup>10</sup> Revelation 19:16, <sup>11</sup> Revelation 11:15, <sup>12</sup> Psalm 2:1-2, <sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:51-52.

For information about becoming a Christian or for a copy of John's Gospel from the Bible, see [www.tell-me-more.org](http://www.tell-me-more.org).

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# HANDEL'S MESSIAH

By Roger Carswell



A tingling down the spine, or tears rolling down the cheeks is quite normal for those who hear or participate in Handel's Messiah.

To attend a performance of Messiah is one of life's "must-do" experiences. It is a musical message telling the story of "the Anointed One", Jesus the Messiah. Composed by George Friedric Handel, it is loved by all who appreciate all types of music the world over. Handel said of the oratorio that he did not merely want to entertain but to make his listeners better people.

He was the son of a sixty-three year old surgeon-barber when he was born in Halle in Saxony on 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 1685. His father was not at all musical and did not encourage his son's talent for music. But from the age of four George began to play the clavichord, a gentle keyboard instrument. Not until he was seven did his father discover his son's talent, so that later he learned the organ, harpsichord, violin and oboe. His father died a few days before George's twelfth birthday and left the wish that he should be trained as a lawyer.



He did study law for a short time at the University of Halle but was soon appointed as the Cathedral organist, though left both after a short time to pursue a career in music. He moved to England in 1720 and was appointed composer to the Chapel Royal in 1723.

Despite great successes, life was full of misfortune, though he had an unshakeable faith in Jesus. Writing after the death of his mother, he said, "It pleased the Almighty to whose great holy will I submit myself, with Christian submission." A tall man, he was known as a devout believer full of compassion towards others, both in his willingness to forgive, and in his generosity, even when he had nothing himself.

By 1741 he gave what he said was his farewell concert. His finances and health were in ruins as he suffered from a kind of paralysis. A few months later he was shown the text of a long choral work – a libretto written by Charles Jennens – which followed the life of Christ. It contained the prophecies concerning His birth, life, death and resurrection, the blessings He would bring for those who trust Him, as well as the punishment for those who turn their back on Him. This fanned the creative fires in Handel again, and Messiah was composed. It was first performed in Dublin in 1742.

Handel knew the Bible, and was familiar with its dominant theme, that Messiah would come.

Using the Bible, Messiah describes our human plight:

"ALL WE LIKE SHEEP HAVE GONE ASTRAY; WE HAVE TURNED EVERYONE TO OUR OWN WAY, AND THE LORD HAS LAID ON HIM THE INIQUITY OF US ALL."<sup>1</sup>

We hear too that we deserve the judgement of God:

"THOU SHALT BREAK THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON; THOU SHALT DASH THEM LIKE A POTTER'S VESSEL."<sup>2</sup>

But Handel knew that the Bible teaches that God has given Himself as the answer to our sin and guilt. He has come into our world:

"A VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE"<sup>3</sup> FOR "UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN, UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN, AND HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED WONDERFUL, COUNSELLOR, THE MIGHTY GOD, THE EVERLASTING FATHER, THE PRINCE OF PEACE ..."<sup>4</sup>

Jesus came to save us; He could only do that by bearing in His own body the sin of the world, paying the eternal penalty in His suffering on the cross:

"BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD, THAT TAKETH AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD."<sup>5</sup> "SURELY HE HATH BORN OUR GRIEFS AND CARRIED OUR SORROWS, YET WE ESTEEMED HIM STRICKEN, SMITTEN BY GOD, AND AFFLICTED. BUT HE WAS WOUNDED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS, HE WAS BRUISED FOR OUR INIQUITIES; THE CHASTISEMENT OF OUR PEACE WAS UPON HIM. AND WITH HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED. HE WAS CUT OFF FROM THE LAND OF THE LIVING: FOR THE TRANSGRESSION OF THY PEOPLE HE WAS STRICKEN."<sup>6</sup>

Then, describing Jesus rising from the dead:

"BUT THOU DIDST NOT LEAVE HIS SOUL IN HELL, NOR DIDST THOU SUFFER THY HOLY ONE TO SEE CORRUPTION."<sup>7</sup>

Before giving us glimpses of heaven, Handel has Jesus' invitation to us all:

"COME UNTO HIM, ALL YE THAT LABOUR, COME UNTO HIM ALL THAT ARE HEAVY LADEN, AND HE WILL GIVE YOU REST. TAKE HIS YOKE UPON YOU, AND LEARN OF HIM, FOR HE IS MEEK AND LOWLY OF HEART, AND YE SHALL FIND REST UNTO YOUR SOULS."<sup>8</sup>