

Handel's Messiah - God's Plan of Salvation in Musical Form

1) "All We Like Sheep ..." (4:08)

2) Prayer

Father in heaven, we acknowledge that our sin caused your suffering. You have carried our sins; you were wounded, bruised, and chastised for us. You were punished so that we might have peace and so that we might be healed. We pray this morning that you will be with us as you have promised to be where your people are gathered around your Word. Strengthen our conviction that you are our Savior from sin while we meditate on your Word as expressed through the music of Handel's "Messiah." Comfort us with the sweet message of your forgiveness, the assurance of your triumphant victory over sin and death, and give us hope in your promise of the resurrection. Instill in our hearts an urgency to help spread that message to the ends of the earth. May our study of the Word today bring glory to You, your Son, and to the Holy Spirit. We pray in the name of Jesus the Messiah. Amen.

3) Part Two (continued)

Psalm 22:7-8 (3:00)

All they that see Him laugh Him to scorn; they shoot out their lips, they shake their heads, saying, "He trusted in God that He would deliver Him; let Him deliver Him, if He delight in Him."

There is no other psalm that points so clearly to the crucifixion than Psalm 22. No psalm is more frequently quoted in the New Testament. Psalm 22 is the anguished prayer of David, who was victimized by vicious and prolonged attacks from King Saul, whom David had not provoked and from whom (at the time when he wrote the psalm) the Lord had not yet delivered him.

While on the cross Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

The mockery of Psalm 22:7-8 is heartbreaking. Early in the music we hear the jeering tone of the tenor soloist. This is followed by the chorus, which previously in the oratorio has represented the people of God. In previous choruses they praised God ("And the Glory of the Lord"), expressed faith in God's promise of forgiveness ("And He Shall Purify"), sang joyfully about the birth of God's Son ("For Unto Us a Child Is Born"), and confessed their sin ("Behold, the Lamb of God" and "All We Like Sheep"). But now the chorus is a mob; they are the wicked who cry out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" While the Messiah suffers **for them**, what is their response? They taunt the Messiah from all directions, surrounding him with insults and blasphemy. At the end of this piece the chorus unites for one final stabbing insult: "...let Him deliver Him, if He delight in Him."

Think about the irony of all of this in light of the words of Jesus when he was arrested in Gethsemane: "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" (Matthew 26:53-54)

Psalm 69:20, Lamentations 1:12, and Isaiah 53:8 (3:39)

Thy rebuke hath broken His heart; He is full of heaviness: He looked for some to have pity on Him, but there was no man; neither found He any to comfort Him.

The sad, plaintive, solo voice laments the way that the Messiah was abandoned to suffer without mercy or pity. Psalm 69:20 is another time when the librettist, Charles Jennins, changed the text to the third person. This follows the pattern used in the "Messiah" during which Jesus never speaks directly about himself. Rather, the Scriptures testify of him.

Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow.

The Lamentations text is sung simply. The soloist sings of grief too profound for sympathy. We cannot fathom its depth. We can only stand in awe of the Messiah, who "... *humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!*" (Philippians 2:8)

He was cut off from the land of the living: for the transgression of Thy people was He stricken.

Isaiah 53:8 brings us the moment of death. It may seem strange that this momentous event is dealt with so briefly. But Scripture does the same. John 19:30 simply says, "*Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*"

Notice that the music picks up a bit in tempo and mood at the end of this piece, as if to prepare us for the miracle that is about to happen.

Comment:

By this time are you eager for some happier, lighter music? Perhaps it was Handel's intention to make the audience yearn for the happy message of the Gospel. The music of Part Two is designed to help us reflect on the horrible reality of sin, which sent the Messiah to the cross and the grave. But, do not despair! Good news is coming!

Psalm 16:10 (2:22)

But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell; nor didst thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption.

We go to Psalm 16, another psalm of David. Though the Messiah must die, death will not have the final word. Satan will not win. The words "... *nor didst Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption*" foreshadow the glorious resurrection.

The Messiah is exalted

Psalm 24:7-10 (3:15)

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye

gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The LORD of hosts; He is the King of Glory.

Psalm 24 celebrates the end of Christ's state of humiliation and the beginning of his exaltation. It is the chorus - the redeemed people of God - that heralds the return of the glorious King.

The words of Psalm 24 are used as the lyrics for the wonderful Advent hymn 4, "Lift Up Your Heads, You Mighty Gates."

Note the words that proclaim the Messiah's victory over sin and death: "*The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.*" There is reason for the chorus to celebrate. The King is returning to Zion! So why don't we hear the "Hallelujah Chorus" here? Because Handel is saving it. He knows that there is another celebration still to come.

Jesus spent very little time on earth basking in glory. Solomon said, "*But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens ... cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!*" (1 Kings 8:27) The Messiah ascends to heaven and reigns there until the Last Day.

God reveals his Son's identity in heaven

Hebrews 1:5-6 (1:43)

Unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee? Let all the angels of God worship him.

The book of Hebrews is a defense of the divinity of Christ. Hebrews 1:1-4 says that in the past God spoke through the prophets, but now he speaks through his Son, whom he claims as his own.

The chorus responds in worship and praise. It represents the voices of angels, the hosts of heaven, worshipping the Messiah.

God gives gifts to men for the work of evangelism.

Psalm 68:18 (2:54)

Thou art gone on high, Thou hast led captivity captive and received gifts for men; yea, even for thine enemies, that the LORD God might dwell among them.

The Messiah ascends ("*Thou art gone on high ...*"). Listen to the ascent portrayed musically as the pitch climbs higher and higher. When Jesus ascended, he went to prepare a place for us. He said in John 14:23, "*I am going ... to prepare a place for you. And if I go ... I will come back and take you to be with me ...*"

The Messiah's ascension was a continuation of God's plan for the establishment of his Kingdom. He wants this to happen through the proclamation of the Gospel on earth. Therefore, the ultimate meaning of Psalm 68:18 is that Christ, the ascended Lord, will give **gifts** to apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers on earth. (See Ephesians 4:7-13)

Psalm 68:12 (1:13)

The LORD gave the Word: great was the company of the preachers.

The chorus sings about the people taking action. In the early centuries after the ascension the Gospel spread like wildfire. Jeremiah 20:9 says, "His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot."

Note how the chorus sings "The LORD gave the Word ..." as one voice. Then we hear the great company of the preachers who preach the Word. Listen to the happiness of the chorus. Oh, that we could be so joyful toward those that God uses to bring us the Good News! Oh, that we could as joyfully spread the Good News!

Romans 10:15 (2:04)

How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

This familiar message was first spoken in the Old Testament (Nahum 1:15). The writer of hymn 570, "O Christians Haste," uses similar words:

"Publish glad tidings, Tidings of peace,
Tidings of Jesus, Redemption and release."

This musical selection meditates on the welcome nature of the message brought by the "company of preachers."

Romans 10:18 (1:21)

Their sound is gone out into all the lands, and their words unto the ends of the world.

All four voices - soprano, alto, tenor, and bass - pick up the line "Their sound has gone out ..." Then they come together as a united chorus to sing of the final goal of the message brought by the company of preachers: that it may reach "the ends of the world."

Handel facts, anecdotes, & quotes

- "Bach invaded the *himmelreich*; Handel founded *lebensraum* on earth." (Percy M. Young)
- "Handel's oratorios thrive abundantly - for my part, they give me an idea of heaven, where everyone is to sing whether they have voices or not." (Horace Wadpole, 1743)
- Dr. Maurice Greene, a Master of the King's Music from 1735-1755, once asked for Handel's opinion about an anthem he had written.

Greene: Sir, my anthem, what did you think of it?
Handel: Oh, your antum. Why, I did tink it wanted air, Dr. Greene.
Greene: Air, sir?
Handel: Yah, air, und so I did throw it out of de vindow.

- When jaundice, jealousy, and carking care,
Or tyrant pride, or human despair,
The soul as on a rock in torture keep,
These monsters Handel's music lulls to sleep.
(Anonymous poet, 1740)

- A young singer from the choir of Worcester came to London highly recommended as a prodigy. Handel asked him to sing. He did so.

Handel: This is the way you praise God at Worcester?

Young man: Yes, sir.

Handel: God is gracious. He will no doubt hear your praises at Worcester, but no one will hear them in London.

- "Why, instead of wasting huge sums on multitudinous dullness, does not someone set up a thoroughly rehearsed and exhaustively studied performance of the "Messiah" ... with a chorus of twenty capable artists? Most of us would die to hear the work seriously performed." (George Bernard Shaw)

O Christians, Haste (CW 570)

O Christians, haste, your mission high fulfilling,
To tell to all the world that God is light,
That he who made all nations is not willing
One soul should perish, lost in shades of night. Refrain

Behold how many thousands still are lying
Bound in the dreary prisonhouse of sin
With none to tell them of the Savior's dying
Or of the life he died for them to win. Refrain

Proclaim to ev'ry people, tongue, and nation
That God, in whom they live and move, is love;
Tell how he stooped to save his lost creation
And died on earth that they might live above. Refrain

Send heralds forth to bear the message glorious;
Give of your wealth to speed them on their way;
Pour out your soul for them in prayer victorious;
O Christians, haste to bring the brighter day! Refrain

Refrain: Publish glad tidings, Tidings of peace,
Tidings of Jesus, Redemption and release.

Handel's Messiah - God's Plan of Salvation in Musical Form

1) "How Beautiful Are the Feet" and "Their Sound Has Gone Out" (3:25)

2) Prayer

Father in heaven, we thank and praise you for the sweet message of the Gospel, the good news that Jesus is our Savior from sin. We acknowledge and confess that at times we are careless and apathetic in our attitude towards the wonder of your grace. Send your Holy Spirit among us to fill us up with knowledge, wisdom, and faith so that we may embrace our salvation. Fill us with the desire to help spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. We also pray this morning that you would fill us with joy and hope as we anticipate the fulfillment of your ultimate promise of eternal happiness in heaven. Bring us to that day soon when we will join the multitudes of saints from all places and all ages in heaven, for it is there and then that you will bring to conclusion your wonderful plan of salvation. Finally, we pray again that you will bless our study of your Word today. Strengthen our faith and draw us ever closer to you. In the name of Jesus, the Messiah, we pray. Amen.

3) Part Two (continued)

The World rejects the Gospel

Psalm 2:1-3 (3:15)

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.

Even though "*all God's angels worship him,*" the children of men do not. Sadly, even though God provided the command, the messengers, and the gifts to get the Word out, many of the people and nations of the world have rejected it. The rebellion against the Lord parallels rejection of the Messiah. (Note: the word "Messiah" means the "anointed one" in Hebrew)

We hear the frantic activity of the musical instruments in "*Why do the nations rage so furiously together,*" but we also hear the confident voice of a bass soloist singing through it all.

Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast their yokes from us.

In ancient times the coronation of a new king often led to a revolt by the people who were unwilling to submit to new rule. The words of Psalm 2:3 show the rebellion of the World against the Messiah.

The chorus represents the voices of the rulers of the World. They openly voice their rebellion against God and his Anointed One. The chorus represents our Old Adam when it chafes under God's rule of grace. The unbeliever views a life of loving service to God as a type of imprisonment. It is compared to the yoke that a slave might bear. The rebellious world wants to

break free from enslavement to its new master. It would rather go back to serving the Old Adam and its sinful motives.

Psalm 2:4 and Psalm 2:8 (2:10)

He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn: the LORD shall have them in derision.

God's response to rebellious man is brief. It simply expresses the futility of trying to remove the Almighty from his throne. God scoffs at such plans.

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.

A strong tenor voice sings about God's righteous wrath. God's anger towards the rebellious, unrepentant sinner that rejects his grace is unquenchable. This is angry music with angry words. Rebellious people have rejected the Messiah, and by doing so they have sealed their fate. The image of an iron rod smashing pottery into pieces is used to show what will be left of the "mighty" kingdoms of the World.

God's triumph

Revelation 19:6, Revelation 11:15, and Revelation 19:16 (3:45)

Hallelujah: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

God's rule is established over and above the shattered kingdoms of man. The chorus will now sing the "Hallelujah Chorus," the glorious song of the Messiah's enthronement.

Handel uses the words from the Revelation of St. John, who wrote of his vision of heaven. John heard "*what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting ...*" (Revelation 19:6) Revelation 19 continues with imagery of a wedding celebration to express the intimate relationship between God and his faithful people.

The kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of Our Lord, and of his Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever!

The words of Revelation 11:15 are about the "seventh trumpet" that heralds the end of the world. The trumpets signal the completion of God's triumph and the establishment of the eternal Kingdom, ruled by the Messiah. This fulfills many OT prophecies, including Psalm 10:16, *The Lord is King forever and ever; the nations will perish from his land.*"

King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, Hallelujah!

In Revelation 19 John sees a rider on a white horse. The rider is the Messiah, the Warrior returning in triumph to reign as King. (See Revelation 19:11-16)

The chorus with triumphant joy the fulfillment of God's plan of grace. This concludes Part Two of the oratorio.

Part Three

A hymn of thanksgiving for the final overthrow of death

- 1) God's promise of a bodily resurrection for all believers**
- 2) Redemption from Adam's fall into sin**
- 3) The Last Day - resurrection and judgment**
- 4) The victory over sin and death**
- 5) Glory to the Lamb that was slain. Amen.**

God's resurrection promise

Job 19:25-26 and I Corinthians 15:20 (5:35)

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God..

Now that the Messiah is enthroned, we hear a different type of music. A soprano voice sings in gentle, strong tones of our flesh in the grave. This is the beautiful confession of Job, who in the midst of mortal suffering was confident of a Messiah that would come 2000 years later. This is the message of the Messiah to Martha, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"* (John 11:25-26)

For now is Christ risen from the dead, the firstfruits of them that sleep.

The music is serene, yet strong as this single voice confesses faith in the promise of the resurrection. This was the confession that Martha made to Jesus at the grave of her brother, Lazerus: *"I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."* (John 11:24)

Redemption from Adam's fall

I Corinthians 15:21 (2:02)

**Since by man came death, by Man came also the resurrection of the dead.
For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.**

The chorus, the congregation of believers, applies the confession of the previous soloist to all of God's children. Listen to them as they whisper, singing of death in hushed tones. But their faith in the resurrection cannot be contained. They explode with joy when they sing of the resurrection.

The Last Day

I Corinthians 15:51-53 (9:00)

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

This selection starts slowly as the soloist begins to tell of a mystery. He seems almost secretive, but he cannot contain this mysterious and wondrous truth any more than the chorus. He bursts forth with joy and tells about the Last 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 must put on immortality.

Handel uses St. Paul's words from I Corinthians 15, the great resurrection chapter. The vocalist sings that a trumpet that will be heard across all creation. It will announce the Last Day, when we trade mortality for immortality.

The victory over sin and death

I Corinthians 15:54-56 (1:23)

Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory."

Two voices, an alto and a tenor, sing about the Messiah's victory over sin. St. Paul refers to Isaiah 25:8, one of many OT prophecies that will be fulfilled when death is destroyed forever on the Last Day. Even those that died before will be called back to life.

Death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

Remember the mocking words of the unbeliever in Psalm 22: *"He trusted in the Lord ... let him deliver him ..."* Now death is confronted with its defeat. The victory of the Messiah brings to an end any power that death may have had.

I Corinthians 15:57 (2:17)

But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The chorus joins the celebration, a joyous and sure confession. They held back while the soloist sang about death's defeat, but now they sing a hymn of thanksgiving.

Romans 8:31 and 33-34 (4:21)

If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is at the right hand of God, who makes intercession for us.

These words from Romans are sung by a soprano soloist. They are the last words in the "Messiah" that we hear from mortal lips. Nothing can condemn the redeemed of God. They are justified! Christ has interceded for them! (Note Romans 8:35-39)

Glory to the Lamb

Revelation 5:12-13 (3:45)

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.

Blessing, and honor, glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever.

Now the thick curtain that separated sinful man from holy God has been torn down the middle. The next words we hear will be from our resurrected mouths, gathered around the throne of the Lamb with all of the masses of the redeemed. They are in the presence of the Messiah, singing praises to the Lion of Judah, the Lamb of God.

Revelation 5:14 (3:20)

Amen.

This is the final chorus. It is a chorus of confession. It savors this last word of certainty, "Amen." They remind us that while it is so, we must patiently await the great Day of the Lord.

As we await the conclusion of God's great plan of salvation, we echo the words of St. John, "He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

To God alone be the glory