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GEORGE FREDERICK HANDEL
AS
AN INTERPRETER OF SCRIPTURE

By
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A Thesis

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. Some to Church repair,
Not for the doctrine, but the music there.
Alexander Pope

To my fiance and typist,
Midge

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INTRODUCTION

GEORGE FREDERICK HANDEL
AS
AN INTERPRETER OF SCRIPTURE

INTRODUCTION

A. The Problem Stated and the Present Study Justified

The problem of this study is to investigate the life and music of George Frederick Handel in order to discover his contribution to the field of the interpretation of Scriptures through music.

Long considered one of the world's greatest composers, Handel is best known for his oratorio, the Messiah. But unknown to the average person, he also composed many other oratorios, which, while not as majestic and masterful as the Messiah, are in their own way masterpieces of sacred music and stand high on the list of oratorios.

At a certain period in his life Handel ceased to write operas and devoted the rest of his life to composing oratorios. It is in his oratorios that the true Handel is seen.

While many men have attempted to write a biography of this great composer, yet few if any emphasize his religious experience and the effect it had upon his music. This together with the above mentioned facts presents the basis for the justification of this present study.

B. The Subject Delimited

It is outside the scope of this study to present a biography of George Frederick Handel. Only those biographical facts which reveal

the influences upon him as an interpreter of Scriptures will be presented. Nor could all of his oratorios be studied to determine his methods and techniques of setting Biblical passages to music. Thus four of his most representative oratorios have been chosen, namely:

1. Esther, his first English oratorio
2. Israel in Egypt, next to the Messiah in majesty
3. Messiah, his masterpiece
4. Samson, one of his last oratorios

C. The Plan For the Study

It is the writer's plan to present in the first chapter those biographical facts which reveal the influences upon Handel's interpretation of Scriptures through his music.

The next two chapters will be a study of the four above mentioned oratorios in an attempt to discover the source of the Scriptures that he used, and the methods and techniques in presenting them. Chapter Two will deal with an analysis and comparison of Israel in Egypt and the Messiah while Esther and Samson will be analyzed and compared in Chapter Three.

A summary of the facts presented in the first three chapters and the conclusions drawn from this study will be presented in Chapter Four in order to discover the contribution of George Frederick Handel's oratorios to the interpretation of Scripture.

D. The Sources For This Study

The sources for this study will be Handel's oratorios, as

mentioned above, and various biographies of George Frederick Handel, particularly Newman Flower's George Frederick Handel: His Personality and His Times.

CHAPTER I

THE INFLUENCES OF THE LIFE OF GEORGE FREDERICK HANDEL

AS AN INTERPRETER OF SCRIPTURE THROUGH HIS MUSIC

CHAPTER I

THE INFLUENCES OF THE LIFE OF GEORGE FREDERICK HANDEL AS AN INTERPRETER OF SCRIPTURE THROUGH HIS MUSIC

A. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is not so much to present a biography of George Frederick Handel as to study his life and times in order to discover the influences which led him to interpret the Scriptures through music. Only such biographical data which reveal these influences will be presented.

B. The Influences of His Early Years

1. His Times

George Frederick Handel was born on February 23, 1683. According to Newman Flower, an important biographer of Handel, an important characteristic of the period in which he was born was as Flower describes:

Music in those days had failed to find respectability. It was a sort of peddler's calling, cheap huckstering when all else failed. The family blacklegs turned to music; people sang in the streets, wrote and sang ephemeral melodies in the taverns, and counted themselves well paid when the equivalent of a few pence rewarded them. A few escaped to higher spheres, and were included in the select and exclusive choirs that earned for them some shadow of respectability. ¹

These choirs sang in the streets in front of the houses, and

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1. Newman Flower, George Frederick Handel, His Personality and Times, p. 37.

thrived on the coins that were cast from the windows. So someone was always singing in public those days, and to be musical was to become "associated with a species of street vagrants and to descend in public esteem."¹

Also during this period Middle Europe was in a state of mediocrity. It more or less had its own patterns which it habitually followed. It abhorred new methods and always did things in the old, accepted ways. For anyone to strike out and be a pioneer was strictly unheard of and frowned upon. "Very bound with Lutheranism, relieved with eruptive patches of Judaism, and occasional upheavals of Catholicism, and free thought, its business was about as respectable as its religion."²

2. His Home

The home into which George Frederick was born was highly religious. Although most of the biographers overlook this fact, yet they relate that his mother's father "like most of his ancestors was a clergyman."³ They also tell us that Handel's father was often seen in the church upon his knees giving thanks to his Maker.

a. His Father

George Handel, father of George Frederick, was a strange man. Yet he revealed a strength of character uncommon in most men. Both of these traits he passed on to his son.

George was born in 1622, a period that was even more steeped in tradition than was the period into which his son was born sixty years

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1. Flower, op. cit., pp. 40-41.
2. Ibid., p. 21.
3. Edward J. Dent, Handel, p. 11.

later. Suddenly he rebelled against his unproductive times, moved away from his home town and settled down in the town of Halle. Here he became a barber-surgeon, something which no other Handel had ever done before. This spirit of restlessness and adventure he transferred to his son, who became a pioneer in the field of oratorio and sacred music.

The elder George Handel never expected his sons to do anything else except to grow up and live normal, respected lives. If he had thought that his youngest son had had any musical genius in him at all, he would have been greatly shocked. All that he demanded of this son was that he should become as Flower says:

a good citizen and pay his way in some respectable craft; be God-fearing, if not God-chosen; ultimately marry and rear children and, in the fulness of time, pass to an honored corner in the Halle churchyard, to be remembered with respect.¹

Although throughout his lifetime he seemed to give George Frederick very little attention, yet he left behind implanted within his son a strength of character and a deep religious sense common with the Handels.

b. His Mother

Dorothea Taust, "quiet, subdued, and a daughter of a minister,"² was the second wife of George Handel. She being occupied with two small daughters left young George Frederick to the care of her sister, Anna.

Flower says:

Of some things concerning that boy she (his mother) remained unaware, even though Anna Taust clearly understood them. She did not know of his interest in church music, she did not see him fascinated by the

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1. Flower, op. cit., p. 20.
2. C.F. Abdy Williams, Handel, p. 6.

first dawning understanding of the notes of the organ. He went to the Liebfrauenkirche regularly. To Frau Handel his object in doing so was to serve his Maker as he had been taught to do. That the organ music stood in the place of his Maker to the boy who groped his way to understanding never occurred to her. And, if it had, she was doubtless so shaped in her mental outlook by the creed of her husband that probably she would have sent young George Frederick to one of the lesser places of worship of simple faith which existed at Halle at the time, and at which music was unknown.¹

Despite the fact that she never quite understood her son's music, yet Frau Handel had more influence upon him throughout his life than did any other woman. She was always quietly in the background directing his steps. She passed on to her son her strong Lutheran faith, the great religious sense that inspired him in later years to write such music that would stir the souls of untold numbers of people.

c. His Aunt

The only other woman who had much influence upon George Frederick's life at all was his mother's sister, Anna. In addition to her responsibility of caring for the boy, unknown to her sister and her sister's husband, she aided the child in his pursuit of music. She saw that within this child melodies were beginning to be born, and so considered it her duty to help him. She took him to the Liebfrauenkirche every Sunday that he might listen to the wonderful organ. If this had become known to the Handel household, it is certain that Anna would not have been entrusted with oversight of the boy any longer. But as it was, through her concern for the boy, his musical interest was heightened, and a great composer was inspired and instructed very early in life.

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1. Flower, op.cit., pp. 39-40.

3. His Education

When Handel became seven years of age, the problem of educating him arose. There were various schools which he could attend-- schools run by the Catholics, by Hebrew rabbis, and in particular, a Lutheran Grammar School which a boy could enter by charity.

a. The Lutheran Grammar School

It was of great fortune for the young boy that his parents decided to send him to the Lutheran Grammar School, for the head of the school was a music-loving rector, who believed "in the power of music to develop religious thought."¹ In this school Handel also learned Latin and a deeper sense of God.

b. Weissenfles Court

A few years later, somewhere between 1690 and 1694 the question of music was decided for George Frederick once and for all. The father often traveled to the Weissenfles Court because his fame as a surgeon was well known. One day young George persuaded his father to take him along with him. "This journey was either a divine accident or a premeditated act of equal inspiration",² for during this visit it was decided that the boy should live with a cousin who was a valet at the palace. This cousin often took him to the chapel where George would listen to the organist rehearse. Seeing that this boy had a great interest in music, the organist decided to let him play. To his amazement, young George showed great instinctive knowledge of music.

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1. Dent, op. cit., p. 12.

2. Flower, op. cit., p. 47.

The attention of the Duke of Weissenfels Court was brought to Handel and he immediately decided to pay for the training of this musical genius. Thus George Frederick, with the reluctant consent of his father, started upon his life career in music.

c. University of Halle

Soon after his father's death in 1697, Handel entered the University of Halle as a law student. At the university Handel refused to take part in drunken parties and the immoralities of the other students. This seems to imply that he had not lost sight of his religious training. Handel soon lost all interest in law, and secured a position as an organist in a cathedral in Halle. After spending only a year at the University, he left and headed for Hamburg.

C. The Influences Upon His Productive Years

1. His Friends

Throughout his life George Frederick Handel had very few friends, for he had inherited his father's strangeness and his love of solitude. While many people liked his music and honored him as a great man, few of them could ever form a close friendship with him. There were a few, however, who can be counted as his friends and who had some influence upon him.

a. Johann Mattheson

After Handel left the University of Halle in 1703, he headed for Hamburg. There he formed a friendship with Johann Mattheson, a friendship which started around the organ in the Maria Magdalena Church. For months they were inseparable, going everywhere together. They discovered that they had many things in common, youth, ambition, and the

desire to compose great music. They helped to spur each other on to greater heights; and while Mattheson was not the composer that Handel was, yet this friendship meant much to Handel's life. They worked together composing and producing operas and oratorios.

Mattheson was a versatile and attractive young man. He formed many friendships with the members of the opera companies and with the members of high society. At this time these people were engaged in various kinds of vice and immoralities, the opera being a reflection of the times. But Handel avoided such people as much as possible, having nothing to do with their vices or pleasures.

b. John Jacob Heidegger

John Jacob Heidegger was a very wealthy and influential man. As was true of many men in this period, he was a lover of music and was a musician in his own right. His favorite pastime was the producing of masquerades which were mysterious affairs in which people could come and indulge in any kind of vice or pleasure that they desired. These masquerades were a great source of income for him. Despite Heidegger's low character, Handel saw in him a man who could help him and be of great service to him because of his influence and musical talents. Thus Heidegger and Handel formed a partnership which proved to be of great profit to both of them; to Heidegger because of Handel's high character and to Handel because of Heidegger's influence and money which helped Handel through many laborious years.

c. Charles Jennens

Although Charles Jennens was really not a close friend of Handel's, at the time he exerted great influence over him. He was

much like Handel in that he was a big and heavy man and a bachelor. But there the resemblance ended. Jennens loved pomp, display and money, while Handel cared nothing for these things, but rather liked the simple life.

Jennens supplied Handel with many of the librettos for his oratorios, among which were Saul, Belshazzar, and notably Messiah. He went so far as to criticize Handel's setting of some of the words of the Messiah and suggested that Handel alter the music. No one else would ever have considered doing such a thing.

2. His Travels

Although Handel was born in Germany, he spent most of his life in other countries. He went to Italy in 1707 and to England in 1710.

a. In Italy

His trip to Italy proved of great consequence, for according to Dent:

The three years which Handel spent in Italy at the most impressionable period of his life fixed the characteristics of his style as a composer, and we may well suppose that they exercised a decisive influence on his personality and character. His youth had been spent in the respectable middle class environment of his home at Halle; then came the three years at Hamburg, fantastic and exciting, yet, despite all the artistic stimulus of Keiser's opera-house, inevitably sordid and provincial. Italy introduced him to an entirely different atmosphere--to a life of dignity and serenity in which a classical culture both literary and artistic, was the matured fruit of wealth, leisure, and good breeding.¹

Rome was the home of religious music. The wealthy Roman families gave most of their time and energy to good music. Under a Papal

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1. Dent, op. cit., p.35.

Edict, opera as such was forbidden but religious music in its various forms was at its height. To this kind of music Handel at once devoted himself, setting some of the Psalms to music and composing a vast amount of music for the voice and different instruments. Italy gave him "experience in religious musical expression, which was to shape itself with the years."¹

Despite the fact that he would not become a Roman Catholic, even after many tried to convert him, the people still accepted him and honored him as a great musician. A well-known and well-loved man, he remained in Italy for about two years.

b. In England

At the age of twenty-five he decided to go to England for the first time. This, too, was a happy choice for while in England he decided to make his home there. If he had not made this choice, the world might never have heard some of the great music which he composed there.

In London opera was failing. No one was interested in that form of entertainment anymore. Handel, on the other hand, decided to make the most of the situation and wrote an opera which proved a great success and made him famous over night. All through his life Handel made the most of difficult situations, working against great odds and generally coming out the victor. After a brief journey to Germany, he returned to England to set up permanent residence there.

Other phases of his life in England will be discussed in other parts of this chapter.

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1. Flower, op. cit., p. 82.

3. His Opposition

From the very first, Handel faced great opposition on all sides. His fellow-musicians, the English people, the King and even nature seemed to be contriving against him.

a. Fellow-musicians

Johann Mattheson, who at one time was Handel's closest friend, left his side to join his enemies. He even went so far as to take some of Handel's librettos and set them to his own music, but these attempts proved unsuccessful.

Many of his fellow-musicians looked upon Handel as a threat to their positions in the world of music. They knew that Handel's genius, if given the opportunity, would soon outshine their talent. Thus they did everything in their power to drown out the voice of Handel. They composed music in direct competition to Handel's, the Beggar's Opera being an example. This opera poked fun at Handel and his music. Its efforts were highly successful in that the attendance at his performances dropped off abruptly.

b. The English People

Although the English people and the King himself accepted him at first, they later turned their backs upon Handel. Planning concerts or balls for the same evening on which Handel scheduled one of his performances was one of their favorite weapons. Slandering his name, writing ugly poems about him were others. Many reasons could be given for their attitude but perhaps the main one was that Handel was a German, and he was fast becoming one of the greatest musicians in England. That hurt their national pride.

c. The Church

Because of his production of oratorios Handel received opposition even from the Church. Flower pictures this opposition in the following way:

To put a Bible story on the stage, played by common mummers, was the text for Church sermons up and down the town. 'What are we coming to,' wrote one prelate, 'when the will of Satan is to be imposed upon us in this fashion?' 'Handel always mixed with the lost; now he has become their slave,' declared another. But Handel, who found in the beauties of Church music, rather than in sermons, his approach to the God of his creed, went quietly on with his preparations, and the impious Heidegger, if he thought the project a little mad, at least was a party to it.¹

d. Nature

The elements of nature were even against him. At one time great floods prevented his performances for several weeks. At another a cold wave kept people at home, and at still another time, an earthquake frightened people away from his concerts.

4. The Result of the Opposition

It was during this period that Handel suddenly stopped writing operas, and began concentrating on oratorios alone. Various reasons are given for this change by his biographers, some of which are credible while others are not. None of them consider it to be a spiritual change, but could it not well be?² These biographers agree that this period of opposition gave rise to the greatest music that Handel ever composed. For out of this period came the Messiah, Israel in Egypt, Saul, and most of his other oratorios. The story of the composing of the Messiah is well

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1. Flower, op. cit., p. 214.

2. Percy Young, Handel, pp. 129-130.

known. Within a period of twenty-four days Handel completed the oratorio. After finishing the "Hallelujah Chorus", Handel remarked, "I did think I did see all Heaven before me and the great God Himself!"¹ Could this experience be had by a man, who had little if any religious knowledge as so many of his biographers would have their readers believe?

The world's greatest art, its greatest poetry, and its greatest music have been born out of deep suffering. How true this is of Handel's music. If Handel had not suffered, if he had not been opposed, the world would not be able to thrill to the great strains of "The Hallelujah Chorus", "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth", and "Surely He Hath Born Our Sorrows".

D. The Influences of His Later Years

1. His Opposition

This period of opposition is discussed separately because of the change of attitude on Handel's part. The period during his Productive Years was marked with violent bursts of temper, and with a spirit of fighting against his enemies. But suddenly he became mellow and changed. To quote Flower:

He no longer broke into oaths and violent fits of anger at each and every provocation. The certainty, the superiority of Youth had gone. Suffering had driven it out. He mellowed to a greater kindness. He was one of the founders of the Society of Decayed Musicians at a time when he was enduring the torment of poverty and indignity. As the world passed him and hurt him so he grew to love it more; to bend down to the midgets beneath, and to know anxiety for their stressful little lives. His simple living became more simple as his demands upon life decreased. Friends left him and he sealed his lips. The

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1. Flower, op. cit., p. 289.

pains of an unhealthy body tore him, tortured him, but the beauty of all things never faltered in his notes.¹

Could this be a mark of his religious training? But, even to the end, Fate tried her best to stop Handel's efforts. She afflicted him with various diseases, some of which seemed to affect his mind. Then as her last blow, she made him blind.²

Circumstance did its utmost to prevent the genius of George Frederick Handel from fruition. It pegged him about from his early years with absurd obstacles. It fought him with all the strength of precedent in its favor. Nor did it yield him even the favor of happy chance. It tried to stifle a voice that ultimately turned a world to melody.³

But Handel let nothing stop him. Even death itself could not quiet the voice of George Frederick Handel, for his music lives on.

2. His Contribution

At the time of his death, the Scots Magazine had this to say about him:

He was perhaps as great a genius in music as Mr. Pope was in poetry; the musical composition of the one being as expressive of the passions, as the happy versification of the other excelled in harmony.⁴

The musicians who came after him acknowledged the influence which he had upon their music.⁵

Beethoven, dying, pointed to the Arnold edition of Handel's works, which were piled up in a corner of the room, and exclaimed: 'There lies the truth!' Haydn worshipped his memory. And a greater judge than all- the musical world of two hundred years, has acknowledged the genius of Handel. To many, he remains as the greatest dreamer in music the world has ever known. His whole life was a dream. And his every effort was votive offering to his temple of dreams- that

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1. Ibid., p. 285.
2. R.A. Streatfield, Handel, p. 214.
3. Flower, op. cit., p. 19.
4. Ibid., p. 354.
5. Williams, op. cit., pp. 233-238.

temple which he sought to make beautiful.¹

E. Summary

It has been seen that many of the events and circumstances in George Frederick Handel's life had a great influence upon his music and upon his interpretation of the Scriptures through his music.

His early home training was of a religious nature and seemingly had great effect upon his entire life. From his parents he inherited a deep religious nature and a strength of character. His aunt encouraged him in his pursuits of music.

The years he spent at the Lutheran Grammar School were important ones in that his love of music and his sense of God were deepened. During his visit to the Weissenfles Court, the question of music was settled once and for all.

The few close friendships that he formed bore great influence upon him and his music, for these men with their talent and wealth, encouraged him and lifted him to high planes of musical expression.

In Italy and in England the character of his music and his own moral character were formed. While in England he decided to make it his home.

From the very beginning, Handel faced great opposition. The English people would not accept him because he was a German. His fellow-musicians were jealous of him and considered him a threat to their positions in the field of music. His efforts to produce oratorios were at

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1. Flower, op. cit., p. 356.

first thwarted by the Church, for they believed it wrong to place Bible stories on a stage. But despite this opposition Handel arose the victor.

The first period of opposition was marked with violent fits of anger while the second period was notable for his change of attitude.

Now, he ignored the opposition and revealed a great love for them.

Since his death he has exerted great influence upon composers and has been called the master of them all.

CHAPTER II

AN ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON OF HANDEL'S ORATORIOS

ISRAEL IN EGYPT AND THE MESSIAH

CHAPTER II

AN ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON OF HANDEL'S ORATORIOS

ISRAEL IN EGYPT AND THE MESSIAH

A. Introduction

No study of George Frederick Handel and his music would be complete without a study of his two most well-known and well loved oratorios, Israel in Egypt and the Messiah. Both of these oratorios came from the same period of Handel's life, having been written within three years of each other. While Israel in Egypt is a narration and is concerned with a group of people, the Messiah does not tell a story but is built around an individual, Jesus, the Messiah. Because of both similar and contrasting characteristics, these two oratorios will be analyzed and compared in this chapter. First Israel in Egypt will be studied, then the Messiah, followed by a comparison of the two in the summary.

B. Israel in Egypt

1. History of the Oratorio

This oratorio was written in October, 1739, within a period of twenty-seven days. As Young states:

It is tempting to link the emergence of ... Israel in Egypt with Handel's catastrophic illness of 1737. For in 1738 Handel appears to have changed from extraversion to introspection. The opera writer, conscious of the seen pattern of life changes into the oratorio composer.

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1. Percy M. Young, *The Oratorios of Handel*, p. 83.

This change marked a new period in Handel's life and music. From that time on he no longer wrote operas but concentrated solely upon oratorios.

As was true of most of his oratorios, Israel in Egypt was not well received by the people of that day. To quote Marshall:

This great work, now so often performed and so much admired, was then received so coldly that the third of the three performances advertised was withdrawn from the bills, and the announcement of the second qualified by the words, 'The Oratorio will be shortened and intermixed with songs!'¹

A third performance did, however, take place after an anonymous letter was received by the Daily Post expressing great disappointment on the part of several people that the work was being withdrawn so quickly. Its failure must be ascribed to "the absence of any personal interest in the story, and the small scope given in the music for the display of the brilliant solo-singers of the time".²

The oratorio originally consisted of three parts, the third part having been written before the second. Handel seems to have begun with the intention of setting the "Song of Miriam" only, but, his imagination being aroused by this theme, conceived the idea of preceding it by the history of Israel's Bondage and the Plagues of Egypt. Part One as it stands today was Part Two. The present beginning was not known then, but rather the oratorio began with an instrumental prelude. Later Handel rewrote it until it stood in its present form.

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1. Mrs. Julian Marshall, Handel, p.105.
2. Ibid.

2. Synopsis of the Oratorio

Israel in Egypt does not begin with an overture as do many of Handel's oratorios. Rather it begins with the recitative, "Now there arose a new King over Egypt which knew not Joseph". This sets the stage giving the background for the whole oratorio. Immediately following this recitative is a chorus "And the Children of Israel sigh'd by reason of their bondage" which reveals that the Egyptians made slaves of the Israelites and oppressed them. This is succeeded by a recitative telling that God sent Moses and Aaron to Pharoah, to ask him to let the people go.

Because Pharoah would not let the people go, God sent the ten plagues, which Handel proceeds to describe: the water made blood, the frogs, boils, flies and locusts, hail and fire, thick darkness, and finally the slaying of the first-born of the Egyptians. These plagues are followed by a chorus, "But as for His people, He led them forth like sheep", which shows how God delivered His people from the land of Egypt. A chorus portraying the relief of the Egyptians to see the people depart follows. Part One ends with the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of Israel's enemies.

Part Two is based upon the Song of Moses and the Song of Miriam which were sung after the deliverance and portray the gratitude and thanksgiving of the Hebrew people for their deliverance. Each chorus, recitative, and air is based upon some phrase from Moses' and Miriam's songs. Part Two is filled with praise to God and ends upon a grand note of triumph with the chorus "Sing ye to the Lord".

3. Analysis of the Oratorio

An analysis of the oratorio is necessary to discover the methods

and techniques that Handel used in his interpretation of Scripture. This analysis consists of a study of Handel's use of Scripture, the atmosphere of the music, his use of solo, chorus and instrumental parts, the theological implications, and the message.

a. Use of Scripture

Although Handel did not write most of the librettos for his oratorios, he edited them as he saw fit discarding what displeased him and rewriting the rest to fit his purpose. The libretto for Israel in Egypt is believed to have been written by Charles Jennens.¹

The words for this oratorio are taken directly from the Scriptures, much of Part One coming from the story of the Deliverance from Egypt as found in Exodus 1 to Exodus 15. These passages are: Exodus 1:8, 11,13, which describes the enslavement of the Israelites; Exodus 2:23, the cry of the Children of Israel to God; Exodus 7:18,19, the first of the plagues, the waters turned to blood; Exodus 9:9,10,23,24, the plagues of boils and hail mixed with fire; Exodus 10:21, the plague of thick darkness and Exodus 14:31, the rejoicing of the Israelites for their deliverance.

The First Part also contains verses from the three Psalms, 105,106, and 78, which are well known for their retelling the history of Israel. These verses are: Psalm 105:26,27,29-32,34-37, which tell of God's sending Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh and of the plagues of frogs, flies and locusts, hail and the slaying of the first-born; Psalm 78:53,

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1. Ante, pp.7,8.

the exodus from Egypt; and Psalm 106:9,11, the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of their enemies. The boyhood of Moses and his call are omitted for these portions are not necessary to the story since Handel is interested in the nation of Israel rather than Moses and Aaron.

At the end of the First Part there are several airs and recitatives which are not based upon Scripture, one being in the form of a poem. These songs are rarely sung as part of the oratorio. In the Novello Edition, these songs appear in the Appendix with the note, "The recitatives and airs most usually introduced into Israel in Egypt".

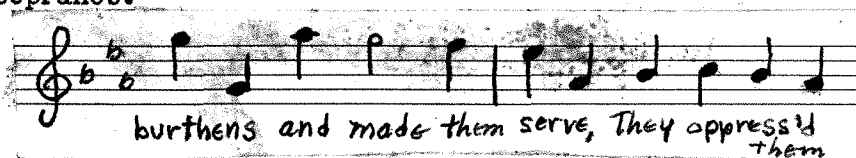
There are also other notes which tell that these songs were not in the original score of the oratorio but have been introduced into it by various people for various reasons. Since these insertions are not a part of the original, they should not be included for they add nothing but more or less detract.

Moses' Song as found in Exodus 15:1-19 and Miriam's Song in Exodus 15:20,21 is the basis for Part Two. All the verses in these Scripture passages are used in the choruses, duets, airs, and recitatives with several repetitions. These verses enumerate various attributes of God which are intermingled with the praises of the people to God for their deliverance from Egypt. These will be discussed later in the chapter under Theological Implications.

b. Atmosphere of the Music

To study the entire atmosphere of this oratorio would be impossible within the limits of this thesis. Therefore this study must be limited to some of the more important and noteworthy songs.

The first recitative which sets the stage is a simple statement of the situation. This is followed by the plaintive double chorus, "And the Children of Israel sigh'd by reason of their bondage, and their cry came unto God". The music of this chorus is written in the key of C Minor which is often chosen by composers to portray sadness, depression and hopelessness. Jeremy Taylor was once moved to write, "What an infinite number of slaves and beggars, of persecuted and oppressed people, fill all the corners of the earth with groans, and heaven itself with weeping prayers and sad remembrances"¹. Handel's first chorus is a transcription of this observation and is thrilling in its construction. By using the double choir, Handel portrays the vast assembly of the Children of Israel. First the contraltos of the second choir take up the plea of the people, then the women of both choirs, then the tenors join in and finally the basses, adding up to a great dramatic climax. In the music of this chorus Handel has imposed burdens upon some of the singers, perhaps in an effort to put them more in the mood of the song. He has given high notes and awkward syllables especially to the sopranos.

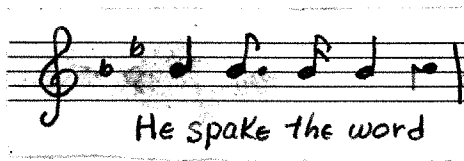


The plagues which follow are famously interpreted in a variety of realistic impressions. After the water is turned into blood, come frogs which can be seen literally hopping around. The effect is produced by the accompaniment. As should be stated before progressing any

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1. Young, op. cit., p.93.

further, much of the overall impression is lost if the oratorio is not accompanied by an orchestra and if it is not sung by a large choir since it requires many voices to bring out the full effects and the orchestra to furnish the "sound effects". After the frogs and the boils, the flies take over the land in droves. The men's voices announce the coming of the flies and lice with the words, "He spake the word", which are sung on the same note and with power. Repeated throughout the cho-



rus, they produce the effect of the power and finality of God's words. The women of the double choruses sing the words, "And there came all manner of flies" which are followed by thirty second notes in the accompaniment reproducing the sound of the buzzing of flies. The flies and



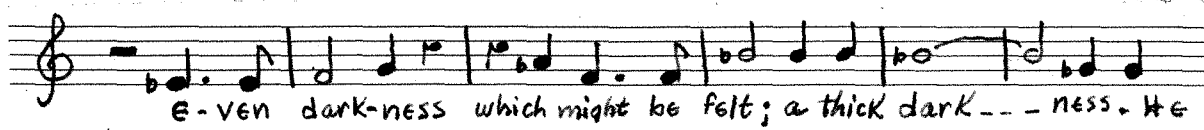
lice are succeeded by the hail which is mingled with fire. Again the accompaniment produces the desired sound effects with the short quick notes to indicate the hail and the rapid eighth notes to indicate the



fire which runs along the ground. The result is an overpowering picture of the fearfulness of these plagues.

The following plague, that of thick darkness is reproduced in the chorus for single choir, "He sent a thick darkness over all the

land, which might be felt". This song which is piano in expression throughout presents the thick darkness very effectively by modulation.



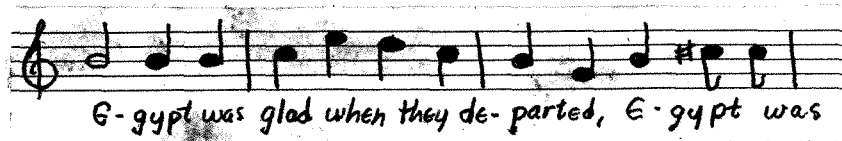
It begins in the key of C Major and ends in the key of E Major. The chorus telling of the last plague is "He smote the first-born of Egypt". This is the last stage in an emotional crescendo of which the first plague, "They loathed to drink" was the first stage. The melody line is repeated throughout this chorus by the different voices to form a finely woven pattern.

Then the attention is turned from the Egyptians to the Israelites in the chorus, "But as for His People". This is a tender song, that of a shepherd gently leading his sheep and delivering them from harm. The line is repeated in various combinations throughout the song by the



various voices.

"Egypt was glad when they departed" calls to mind a rondo, for first one voice, then the other takes up the phrase. It reproduces the



deep relief on the part of the Egyptians when they discovered the Israelites had finally left their country.

The powerful double chorus, "He rebuked the Red Sea," describes

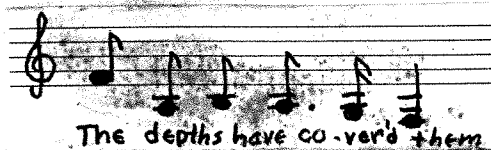
the drying up of the Red Sea. The contrast between the dynamics in this short song is very striking in vividly portraying the power of God and the carrying out of His will. Then the people are led through the Sea as pictured in a lovely song, and as their enemies pursue, they are destroyed and not one of them is left. Israel sees the great work of God, their adoration shown through the final chorus, "And believed the Lord". Thus ends the First Part.

Part Two begins with the brief double chorus announcing the Song of Moses. The entire Second Part is composed of praises to God for His deliverance of the Israelites from their enemies. These praises begin with "I will sing unto the Lord," a magnificent song emphasizing God's victory by using this figure or similar figures throughout the



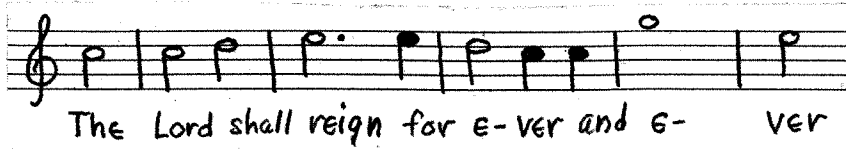
song. This is succeeded by the beautiful soprano duet, "The Lord is my strength," The slow and reverent "And I will exalt Him" soon follows. In great contrast to this double chorus is the powerful and well known bass duet, "The Lord is a man of war". The great contrasts between these songs stress the different attributes of God and the different ways of praising Him.

In "The depths have cover'd them" Handel has given the altos of the second choir the task of producing the impression of the depths.



Among the succeeding songs are found the short but powerful "Who is like unto Thee?" and "The Lord shall reign forever and ever."

The theme of the latter is used in three double choruses, including



the final one. The whole oratorio has a dramatic ending with the Israelites recalling how God had triumphed.

c. Use of Solo, Chorus and Instrumental Parts

The use of solo and duet in this work is not as dramatic or important as in other of Handel's oratorios. In this oratorio the solos are used merely as variety and as relief and not to create any desired effect. Only in the last chorus is the solo used to represent a particular person, and then it is used only briefly to represent Miriam as compared with the whole group of people. However, this oratorio is noted for its double choruses which in themselves stand out to make this work one of great dramatic impact. Handel employs the double chorus very effectively throughout to represent the vast group of Israelites and also to reproduce the force of power and strength in the choruses which tell of the might of God.

d. Theological Implications

The person and characteristics of God are emphasized throughout this oratorio. Although the story is centered around the Children of Israel, the central figure is God.

In the first chorus and the recitative, "Then sent He Moses," God is presented as one who is not deaf to the cries of His children, but provides a way for their salvation. In this case it is His sending Moses to Pharaoh. Throughout the plagues His power and sovereignty are

displayed. When He speaks the whole universe obeys His commands. Through His power water can be turned into blood. Merely through a word from Him flies and locusts come to fulfill His purposes. Handel's music, through its force, stresses this might of God.

God's love and compassion for His people is dramatically pictured in "But as for His people," and "He led them through the deep." Here God is pictured as a Shepherd leading His sheep, caring for them, and protecting them from harm. He not only cares for them, but He provides them with good gifts as illustrated in the words, "He brought them out with silver and gold."

Handel pictures God as a God worthy of trust and praise. This trust is an outgrowth of what He does for His children. This is illustrated in "And Israel saw that great work."

The power of God is emphasized constantly throughout Part Two of the oratorio. In the following songs is this especially true: "I will sing unto the Lord," "The lord is my strength and my song", and "Thy right hand, O Lord." "The Lord is a man of war," reveals God as always fighting on the behalf of His people, to deliver them from their enemies.

The brief chorus, "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord," presents God as unique among all gods and holier than any other being. God is eternal. He was their father's God and He will reign forever more. This characteristic is repeated in the various choruses which use "The Lord shall reign forever and ever" as their theme.

The attributes of God that are stressed over and over again are God's power and His victory. Thus the message of the oratorio may be stated, "God, who cares for His people, leads them forth from their bondage, delivers them from their oppressors and restores them."

C. The Messiah

1. History of the Oratorio

The best known and best loved oratorio in the world, the Messiah, is also perhaps the most unique. It is vastly different both in invention and execution from anything that had been previously achieved.

Although Handel always composed rapidly, he wrote his greatest oratorio with more haste than usual. It was composed between August 22 and September 14, 1741, a period of twenty-four days, which fact in itself makes the Messiah stand out as an accomplishment. The original score comprised some 250 pages of manuscript. This means that Handel wrote on the average of a little more than ten pages a day. It should be remembered, however, that Handel had some of the music already written before this time. "All we like sheep", "For unto us", "His yoke is easy" and a few other of the songs are modeled after some of his Italian duets. Also his orchestral score was light, many of the arias carrying above the bass and the solo part only a single violin line. But these facts still do not detract from the unusualness of the accomplishment of so great a feat in so short a time.

The admirable Jennens, "admirable if only because he in some way or other provoked genius to expression on more than one occasion,"¹ collaborated in the selection and arrangement of the words.

It is said that during the composing of this great work, a servant would bring Handel food on a tray, set it down and leave. When

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1. Young, op.cit., p. 102.

the servant would return hours later, the food would still be untouched, a proof of Handel's great earnestness and zeal while writing the Messiah. And in Handel's own words those twenty-four days were a spiritual uplift. Many times he felt carried up into Paradise itself as had been John's experience when he wrote his Apocalypse. Many legends have grown up concerning the actual writing of the work, but they must all be discarded. The oratorio was not composed in Ireland as some would have us believe, although the first performance was given there. Nor were the words brought to Handel by a woman whom no one else saw enter the house.

After the many disappointments and heartaches which he suffered in England where he had composed the Messiah, Handel decided to journey to Ireland. There on April 13, 1742, the first performance of the Messiah was given in Dublin. On that day the following notice appeared in Faulkner's Journal:

This day will be performed Mr Handell's new Grand Sacred Oratorio, the Messiah. The doors will be open at eleven, and the performance begin at twelve.

The Stewards of the Charitable Musical Society request the Favour of the ladies not to come with hoops this day to the Musick Hall in Fishamble Street. The gentlemen are desired to come without their swords.¹

The impression made by the first performance of the Messiah can best be described by quoting the article from Faulkner's Journal:

On Tuesday last, Mr Handel's Sacred Grand Oratorio, the Messiah, was perform'd in the New Musick Hall in Fishamble Street; the best Judges allowed it to be the most finished piece of Musick. Words are wanting to express the exquisite Delight it afforded to the admiring crowded Audience. The Sublime, the Grand, and the Tender, adapted to the most elevated, majestick and moving Words, conspired to transport and charm the ravished Heart and Ear.²

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1. Marshall, op.cit., p. 112.

2. Ibid.

However, this work was almost ignored for the next few years. According to Dent:

There were many reasons why it (Messiah) should have fallen flat. Jennens himself was extremely dissatisfied with it. ISraël had been a failure, too, and it is extremely probable that musical people, accustomed to the Italian opera, were estranged by a setting of Bible words in prose instead of a libretto in verse laid out on more or less dramatic lines.

William Law's Serious Call had been published in 1729; the book makes frequent allusions to the frivolity of Italian opera and opera-going is picked out as one of the chief characteristics of irreligious persons. In 1739 John Wesley first began to preach in the open air; in 1742 Edward Young's Night Thoughts achieved its extraordinary popularity. These three events were all significant of the religious movement that was taking place among the more cultured classes in England, and this movement undoubtedly affected Handel's oratorio concerts. The ultra-religious were shocked at the association of sacred subjects with the theatre; those who could combine religion with culture ... were Handel's most earnest supporters.¹

But before long opposition was broken down and the oratorio was widely accepted.

During his lifetime Handel conducted many performances of this oratorio, usually for the benefit of some charity. During one of the early performances of it, the King of England was present. He was so moved by the "Hallelujah Chorus" that he rose to his feet. This custom took root and is still followed today. Handel himself never knew which he preferred, the Messiah or Samson, but today the Messiah is considered by many to contain the greatest and the most inspiring music ever written.

2. Synopsis of the Oratorio

The Messiah is divided into three parts. Part One tells of

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1. Dent, op.cit., p.108.

the coming of the Messiah; Part Two tells of His Passion, and Part Three describes His Glorification.

As is true of Handel's oratorios, this work begins with an overture. The stage is set by a tenor recitative, "Comfort ye my people", and air, "Every valley shall be exalted", which reveal that a way of salvation is being provided by God despite the people's sinfulness. The next few songs, "And the Glory of the Lord", "Thus saith the Lord", and "But who may abide the day of His coming", reveal that God Himself will come down and visit His people. But this God is pictured as a God of wrath, the Old Testament conception. He will shake the nations and purify them. But immediately it is disclosed that He is also a God of love. For He is going to send the Messiah, the Promised One, who will be the Saviour of the world. The coming of this Christ is described in the next songs, "O Thou that tellest good tidings to Zion", "The people that walked in darkness", and "For unto us a Child is born". There is great joy at the news of His coming. The preceding has all been concerned with the prophesy of the Messiah's birth. Following the prophesy comes a Pastoral Symphony. This symphony sets the stage for the final section of the First Part, which tells of Christ's birth. His birth is pictured in the following songs, "There were shepherds abiding in the field", "Glory to God", and "Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion". Here the appearance of the angels to the shepherds is described. The last two songs of the First Part picture the new Messiah as a shepherd who cares for His sheep.

Part Two is concerned with the Messiah's death and begins with the chorus, "Behold the Lamb of God". His death is described in the succeeding songs, among which are: "He was despised", "Surely He hath borne

our griefs", and "And with His stripes we are healed". After being rejected and scorned by His people, He is put to death. His death is the means of salvation which was promised in the First Part. But even though the Messiah was put to death, still He is triumphant, for He arose again. And this news is to be told abroad. On this note the Second Part ends with the magnificent "Hallelujah Chorus", which is filled with praise to the living Messiah.

Part Three begins with the affirmation, "I know that my Redeemer liveth". This note of assurance and praise is continued throughout the last section. "O Death, where is thy sting?", "But thanks be to God", and "If God be for us, who can be against us?" all echo this same theme. Ending with the "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain" the oratorio reveals the Messiah as victorious over death and reigning forever more as the King of Kings.

3. Analysis of the Oratorio

The analysis of this oratorio will be similar to the one of Israel in Egypt with a study of Handel's use of Scripture, the atmosphere of the music, his use of solo, chorus and instrumental parts, and theological implications and message.

a. Use of Scripture

"The words of the Messiah are...selected, and very happily selected, from the Bible."¹ Although Charles Jennens was responsible for their selection, it must again be noted that Handel edited them to meet his purpose.

To study the use of Scripture in this oratorio is a much broader and more difficult task than with Israel in Egypt. Whereas the libret-

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1. Marshall, op. cit., p. 113.

to for the latter is taken from only two books of the Bible, the words for the Messiah are taken from fourteen different books, from both the Old and New Testaments.

In Part One the words are derived from the following books, Isaiah, Haggai, Malachi, Zechariah, Matthew and Luke. This reveals that Part One is derived largely from the Prophets of the Old Testament, using most of the portions from the prophecies that are considered to be Messianic. The passages from Isaiah that are used are: Isaiah 40:1-3,4,5,9, which contains a comforting promise of salvation to an afflicted people; Isaiah 7:14, a virgin shall conceive; Isaiah 60:2,3, the Light that shines in darkness; Isaiah 9:2,6, the promised Prince of Peace; and Isaiah 35:5,6, the healing power of the Messiah. The passages from Malachi is: Malachi 3:1-3, fearfulness of God's coming; from Zechariah 9:9,10, the joy at the Messiah's coming; and from Haggai 2:6,7, the wrath of God upon the nations.

The New Testament passages are from Matthew 1:23, Emmanuel, God with us; Matthew 11:28-30, His yoke is easy; and Luke 2:8-11,13,14, angels appear to the shepherds.

The first three songs from Part One are from Isaiah 40 while the following song, "Thus saith the Lord" is from Haggai and Malachi. The next two are from Malachi too. Isaiah is again the source for the next five songs with one being partly based upon a passage from Matthew. After the Pastoral Symphony there are five songs from Luke. These are followed by one from Zechariah, one from Isaiah, one from both Isaiah and Matthew and the last one from Matthew.

Part Two has even a wider variety of Scripture, with passages from both the Old and the New Testaments. Isaiah is used again along

with Psalms and Lamentations. All the songs based upon Isaiah are from Chapter 53, verses 3-6, which tell of Christ's sufferings. The Psalms used are Psalm 22:7,8, the scorn of the people; Psalm 69:20, the lack of pity for Him; Psalm 16:10, God's rescue of Him from death; Psalm 24:7-10, the King of Glory; Psalm 68:11,18, the great company of preachers; and Psalm 2:1-4,9, the raging of the nations. The passage from Lamentations is found in Chapter 1, verse 12, the uniqueness of His sorrow.

Four books from the New Testament are the sources for some of the songs. These books are John, Hebrews, Romans and Revelation. The first song in Part Two is from John 1:29, the Lamb of God; with others from Hebrews 1:5,6, the worship of the angels; Romans 10:15,18, the Gospel of Peace; and Revelation 19:6,16; 11:15, the King of Kings.

While the first song in Part Two is from John, the next four are from Isaiah, followed by three from Psalms. The succeeding song comes from Lamentations and the next one is from Isaiah. Two more are from Psalms followed by two from Hebrews. Then two more from Psalms are succeeded by two from Romans. Psalms again is the source for the next four songs with the last one, the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Revelation.

Part Three, which is the shortest part of the three, is the easiest to analyze as far as the use of Scripture is concerned, for the greatest part of it comes from one Book of the Bible, First Corinthians. With only one reference from the Old Testament, all the others in this part are from the New Testament. The first song, "I know that my Redeemer liveth" is from Job 19:25,26 and First Corinthians 15:20. The next six songs are also from the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, using verses 21, 51-57, which describes His Second Coming. Following

these six songs is one based upon Romans 8:31,33,34, God's justification of man. Part Three as well as the oratorio ends with "Worthy is the Lamb" which contains the "Amen Chorus". This final chorus is based upon Revelation 5:12,13.

b. Atmosphere of the Music

Since this oratorio contains fifty-three different airs, recitatives, choruses, and duets, a thorough study of the music cannot be made. Again only the most well known and important songs will be chosen to study.

Before particular songs will be studied, an examination of the music in general will be made. The music of the Messiah is a vehicle for the words. Therefore, it is responsible for the general import of the words. But the music exists in its own right. As Young says, "The first consideration is, perhaps the architecture of the music, in which the key word is homogeneity".¹ The Messiah is the most unified whole of any of Handel's larger works. The secret of its unity lies in the interrelation of airs and recitatives and the logical arrangement of key centers. Regarding the recitatives it will be noted that they have more tunefulness than is often the case while the airs are comparatively without adornment, but for a few exceptions. Handel could have been more demonstrative throughout the whole work, but he seemed to feel that it would be out of place. The sobriety of the work is seen throughout for even the orchestration is restrained.

The overture begins in E Minor, and ends in the same pathetic

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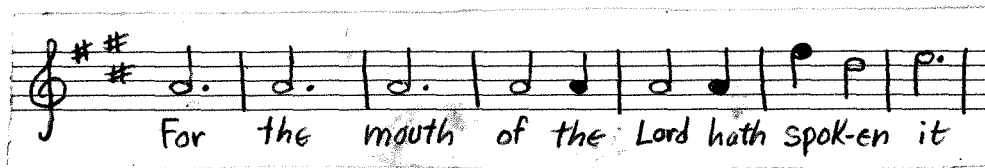
1. Young, op.cit., p.108.

key. Since the subject of the whole work is a very serious one, this is an appropriate beginning. However, it must be noted that not all songs written in a minor key are sombre, while on the other hand, not all songs written in a major key are joyous as will be shown later.

The first recitative and air which are for a tenor are both written in the key of E Major. The recitative, "Comfort ye my people" is a message of good tidings to the people and the music is comforting and comparatively simple. The air, "Every valley shall be exalted" gives the feeling of grand exaltation and uplift by using the long runs which are so common in Handel's music.



From the E Minor of the overture, to the E Major of the next two songs, Handel leads to the key of A Major which arrives at the first climax when the chorus enters with the joyous "And the Glory of the Lord." This contains an odd but interesting figure which helps to add to the overpowering whole. The dotted half notes used for the words "For the



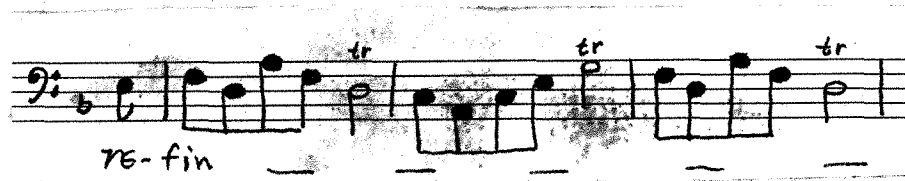
mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" gives them force and strength.

Next is a respectful and awesome minor section, which is the preparation for the power, wrath, and purification of God. The power and finality of God's words are displayed in the bass recitative, "Thus saith the Lord". This recitative is an example of one with a little more tunefulness than usual. In fact, it is more a combination of an air and a recitative in that the words and music contain repetitions

which an ordinary recitative does not have. The forceful runs sung on the word "shake" gives the desired effect of an earthquake.



"But who may abide the day of His coming" with its section concerning "the refiner's fire" is quite notable. Each time the word "refiner" is sung in a different musical pattern. One time is with a run of eighth notes; another with trills; another time it is sung on quarter notes while the accompaniment makes the runs with thirty second notes; and still another time there is a combination of these.

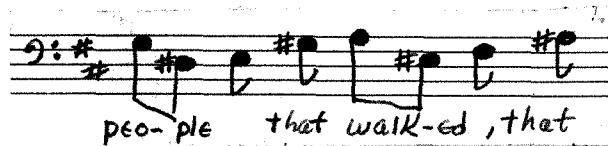


The brief recitative, "Behold! a virgin shall conceive" is also an example of Handel's ability to make even a brief passage melodious. The simple melody well reflects the beauty and simplicity of the words.

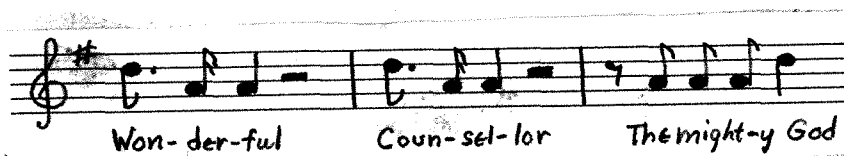
The succeeding air for alto, "O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion," begins a major section which comes as a relief from the preceding minor section. After the alto has finished, the choir takes up the theme.

The darkness so beautifully reproduced in Israel in Egypt by modulation is also reproduced in the Messiah in the next two songs: a bass recitative, "For behold, darkness shall cover the earth" and a

bass air, "The people that walked in darkness." Handel again has used modulation though not as pronounced as in Israel in Egypt, and while he uses the double chorus in the former, he uses only a solo bass in the latter to produce the effect. Especially in the bass air is there a feeling of the uncertain footsteps of persons exploring their way in obscurity.



Well known for its association with Christmas is the beautiful chorus, "For unto us a Child is born." It brings to a close the section of the prophesy of the coming of the Messiah. Not only do the words of this chorus express a deep feeling, but so does the music. Not only is it expressive, but melodic as well. First the sopranos enter with the theme. Then the tenors repeat the theme, while the sopranos go through a long run. Next the altos take up the theme, followed by the basses who enter into a long run. The section which repeats the names of this Child that is to be born is forceful and strong.



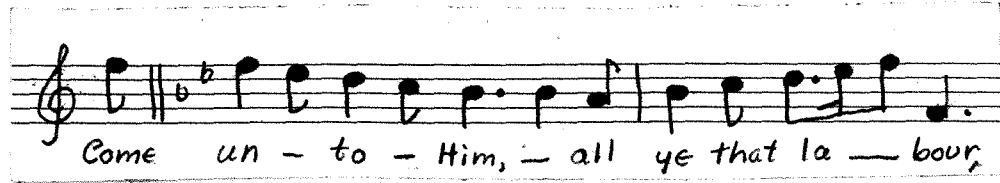
For a change of relief but also to set the stage for the coming section, Handel has inserted the Pastoral Symphony. Young quotes Dr. Burney, an expert on Handel as saying about this symphony that:

played without wind instruments by violins only, in the most subdued manner, (it) was balmy and delicious! The pianos or whispers of such multiplied sounds produced a sweetness of so new and exquisite a kind

that the musical technica furnishes no terms adequate to their effects.¹ Some might even go far as to say that one can see in this symphony, a cool, balmy night with millions of stars shining in the darkened sky and with shepherds on the hillside.

With this picture painted, Handel proceeds to describe the birth of the Messiah beginning with the angels appearing to the shepherds. Here again he very aptly employs the recitative to tell the story. "And lo! the angel of the Lord came upon them" is angelic with the accompaniment producing the desired impression. The same is true





to the key of B flat and adds the words, "Come unto Him, all ye that labor." His idea seems to be to give the singer burdens so that she can sing it with more feeling. The same appears to be true of the chorus which follows and which ends the First Part. In "His yoke is easy and His burden is light", Handel has again imposed great burdens upon the singers by way of runs and slurs. Despite this, the song accomplishes its purpose.



"Behold the Lamb of God" begins Part Two. Written in a minor key, some of its characteristics are the octave jump on the first word and its marking "largo", very slow and stately. An illustration of a song with a pathetic theme and yet written in a major key is "He was despised". It, too, is marked largo. Its slow pace and simple melody is aptly wedded to the words. One of the choruses most often sung apart from its original setting is "Surely He hath borne our griefs". The slow minor key portays the tone of the words and is marked by the staccato notes in the accompaniment.

The section of the Second Part that has just been discussed has the "single stamp of solemnity" and the "highest idea of excellence in pathetic expression."¹ In the same vein is "And with His stripes" of

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1. Ibid, p.111.

ing with His suffering and dying, the tone also changes. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates" begins with a women's chorus of three parts. Then the men enter asking the question, "Who is this King of Glory?", to which the women answer, "The Lord strong and mighty." Then the order is reversed with the women asking the question and the men answering. The overall impression is a glorious and victorious one, presenting a great contrast to the preceding section.

Although the following chorus "Let all the angels of God worship Him" is usually omitted from the performance, it should not be for the construction of the song is very interesting. The reply given by each part that enters, although in similar intervals, is made in notes of different value. It is the diminishing of the subject that gives the chorus its sense of aspiration.

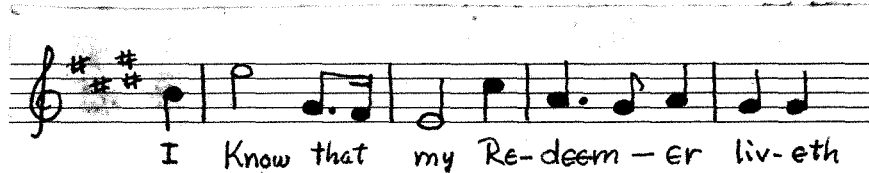
The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'SOPRANO' and the bottom staff is labeled 'ALTO'. Both staves are in the key of D major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The Soprano part begins with a half note 'Let', followed by quarter notes 'all', 'the', 'an - gels of God, let'. The Alto part begins with a quarter note 'Let', followed by eighth notes 'all the an - gels of God'.

Turning now to the famous bass air, "Why do the nations so furiously rage together", it is discovered why it is so popular. It presents a great challenge to a singer with its many and prolonged runs. These runs in the hands of a skilful singer can very effectively portray the fightings and ragings of the nations.

To try to analyze the "Hallelujah Chorus" is almost a sacrilege because it seems to reach into heaven itself and because it is known and loved by more people than perhaps any other ever written.

Dr. Burney stated that it is "the triumph of Handel...and of the musical art." He adds that "the words — 'King of Kings, and Lord of Lords' (are) always set to simple sound, which seems to stand at bay, while the other parts attack it in every possible way".¹ This is his way of showing the impregnability of the Rock which is God. While Dr. Burney claimed this song to be a chorus sung by angels, Fitzgerald says it is "a chorus, not of angels, but of well-fed earthly scharisters, ranged tier above tier in a Gothic cathedral, with princes for audience".² Whatever the opinion, it still stands as a masterpiece of praise and adoration to the King of Kings, and is a great climax in the oratorio.

Part Three, the shortest of the three, begins with the beautiful "I know that my Redeemer liveth." It follows the "Hallelujah Chorus" and proves to be a worthy follower. After the strains of the mighty chorus have ceased, the lovely theme of this air adds its voice. While the



mighty choir has just finished singing their praises to the King of Kings, here is a single voice, an individual, adding her praise. It is the song of every Christian. Handel with his great insight caught the spirit of the words with his music and the result is one of the most lovely songs in the whole work. It is the simple affirmation of faith in the living Messiah.

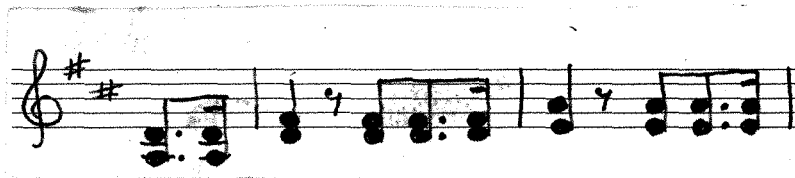
The next chorus is marked with very noticeable contrasts in

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1. Ibid., p.112.
2. Ibid.

tempo and key changes. Here again Handel has used this method effectively. The first line, "Since by man came death," is marked "grave" and is in a minor key. But suddenly the key becomes major and the marking is *allegre*, fast, and so it should be since the words are, "by man came also the resurrection of the dead". Throughout the song there are these marked contrasts in the music which fit the words, for the words contrast the "two Adams."

"The trumpet shall sound," an air for bass, depends largely upon the accompaniment for the impression of trumpets. In fact, when-



ever possible, this song should be accompanied by trumpets. It is a joyous song which looks forward to the resurrection of the dead.

To end his oratorio, Handel chose words from the last book of the Bible. Here again, as in the "Hallelujah Chorus" he catches a glimpse of the King sitting upon the throne. Although not as widely known as the "Hallelujah Chorus", "Worthy is the Lamb" has much of the same power and majesty. It begins in a slow and stately manner. Suddenly the tempo is changed and is marked with rests between eighth notes. Then as suddenly, the tempo is changed again to the original slow and stately one, then back again to the faster one. Again the eighth notes and eighth rests emphasize the glory and might of God. Then the men enter singing "Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto Him." The sopranos then take up the theme, followed by the altos. The tenors

join in and the basses take up the theme. The result is a magnificent blending of praise. Attached to this chorus is an "Amen Chorus" which ends the oratorio. During it the Amens are sung in almost every conceivable musical combination, with quarter notes, runs, slurs, half notes, and with a great dramatic pause just before the last two Amens. This striking chorus brings the oratorio to a moving finish.

c. Use of Solo, Chorus and Instrumental Parts

The solo is used extensively throughout the Messiah. While it is used much more extensively than in Israel in Egypt, yet the solo does not have the same function as it does in Samson and Esther which will be discussed in the next chapter. In this oratorio it is used for variety and relief. But it is also used in an effort to emphasize the meaning of the words. Many of the solos would lose their impact and meaning if they were to be given to the choir to sing. They are the messages of an individual, not of a group. This is especially true of "Comfort ye my people", "Thus saith the Lord", and "I know that my Redeemer liveth".

The same principle holds true for the choruses. No one could imagine a solo voice singing, "And the Glory of the Lord", or "For unto us a Child is born". Nor would "All we like sheep" hold the same impact if sung by a lone voice. To bring out the force of the "Hallelujah Chorus" and "Worthy is the Lamb", many voices are needed.

Handel has used the chorus to represent angels, sheep going astray, people weeping at the Messiah's passion and rejoicing in His victory.

Although the Messiah can be presented without the support of

an orchestra and not lose too much of its power, its full force cannot be felt unless accompanied by an ensemble of instruments. The overture and the pastoral symphony depend for their beauty and impression upon the various instruments, with the strings playing an important part. In the final part of the oratorio, the trumpets are used widely to emphasize the might and victory of the Messiah.

d. Theological Implications

Although the work is primarily concerned with God, the Son, God, the Father is also in evidence. In the first section of Part One the God of the Old Testament is presented. First He is presented as a God of comfort, a God who has not forgotten the men He created, but who is ready to have mercy upon them. He is a forgiving God, and will forgive their sins. These attributes are stressed in "Comfort ye my people" and in the songs that follow. The power of the word of God is stressed in "And the Glory of the Lord," and "Thus saith the Lord." His word is to be obeyed. "O thou that tellest good tidings", "And the Glory of the Lord", "For behold darkness shall cover the earth", "Glory to God", and "Lift up your head, O ye gates", are just a few of the songs which stress the glory and majesty of God. The idea is further developed in the "Hallelujah Chorus". God reigns as King of all in great majesty and even the angels worship Him. Although God is pictured as a God of wrath, a God who punishes sin, one of His attributes that is stressed is His love and compassion. He loved His people enough to send His Son to die for them.

It is difficult to separate the attributes of the Father and the Son. But the Son is the central figure. He is presented as One

who came to save His people from their sins. He went so far as to die for them. He still loved them even though they rejected Him. These characteristics are stressed throughout the Second Part. That He came to bring peace to the world is stressed in "For unto us a Child is born", "Glory to God" and "Rejoice greatly" and "Daughter of Zion". That He came to bring light is emphasized in "For behold darkness shall cover the earth" and "The people that walked in darkness". The Prince of Peace, Mighty God, Counselor, and Everlasting Father are just a few of the names ascribed to Him. His eternal Kingship is stressed throughout the work, as well as the universality of His Kingdom. Above all, He is the Saviour of the world, the Conqueror over Death and the King over all.

Thus the message of the Messiah might be stated in the following way: God who sent His Son, the Messiah, to save the world just as He had promised, gave Him victory over sin and death. Now He reigns as King of Kings.

D. Summary

It has been seen that Israel in Egypt, written in 1739, was not accepted at first. Today, however, it is placed next to the Messiah in importance. It marked the beginning of a new period in Handel's life, for after its appearance he concentrated on oratorios. After many changes it stands divided into two parts. It has been noted that the First Part is concerned with the deliverance from Egypt, while Part Two is based entirely upon the Song of Moses and the Song of Miriam, which were composed upon the occasion of the deliverance.

It has been discovered that through an analysis of Israel in

Egypt that the two Scriptural sources for the libretto are Exodus 1-11 and Psalms 78, 105, and 106. The passage from Exodus contains the story of the deliverance and the historical Psalms retell the story. It was further noted in studying the atmosphere of the music that the suffering of the Children of Israel under the hands of the Egyptians, the plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea are all very vividly portrayed. In Part Two the thanksgiving of the people for their deliverance is very aptly described by the music. The double chorus is used almost exclusively in this oratorio to emphasize the vast number of the Children of Israel and also the great power of God. It has been seen that the characteristics of God stressed in Israel in Egypt are His love, His sovereignty, His power and His victory over His enemies. Therefore, it has been concluded that the message is briefly, "God delivers His people and restores them.

It has been noted that in studying the Messiah, it was written within a period of twenty-four days in the year of 1741. Its composition, a great feat in itself, was a source of spiritual uplift for the composer. First performed in Ireland it was practically forgotten for the next few years. But before long it became widely accepted. Today it is acclaimed as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, oratorio ever written. It has been noted further that the work is divided into three parts. The First Part tells of the promise of the Messiah's coming and of His birth; Part Two tells of His suffering and death; and the final part tells of His victory over death.

It has been discovered through an analysis of the oratorio that the Books of the Prophets, Psalms, Lamentations, Matthew, Luke,

John, Romans, First Corinthians and Revelation. In studying the atmosphere of the music it has been seen that the joy at the coming of the Messiah, the sorrow at His sufferings, and death, and the great joy at His resurrection and eternal Kingship are vividly portrayed. An important role is played by the solo in this oratorio and by the chorus as well. The solo gives voice to the cries and praise of the individual while the chorus adds strength to the cries and praise of the group. It has also been noted that love, glory, power and victory are the attributes of God and the Messiah stressed in this work. From these theological implications, it has been concluded that the message of this oratorio is: "The promised Messiah, who came to save His people, was victorious over Death and reigns forever more."

It has been discovered that the two oratorios studied in this chapter can be compared for similarities and contrasts. They were written within a short time of each other and reveal the same maturity of style. As compared with Handel's earlier oratorios, these two are more elaborate and advanced in craftsmanship. In both the music is aptly wedded to the words and carries the meaning of the words. In both, the music runs the gamut of emotions, from deep sorrow and oppression to great joy and thanksgiving. Handel used many of the same devices in both to portray the same emotions and to give the same impressions. This is illustrated by the use of modulation to describe darkness. Both are based directly upon Scripture. Many of the same attributes of God are stressed in both works, notably His love, His power, and His victory.

The greatest contrast between these two oratorios is that while Israel in Egypt is concerned with a group of people, the Messiah

is centered around an individual, Christ. And while the former is a narrative describing an event, the latter is more of a biography, relating the various phases of Christ's life. They are both masterpieces in their own right.

CHAPTER III

AN ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON OF HANDEL'S ORATORIOS

ESTHER AND SAMSON

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ESTHER AND SAMSON

A. Introduction

Two of Handel's lesser known oratorios have been chosen as the basis of study for this chapter. It was deemed necessary to take one of his earliest oratorios and one of his later ones in order to obtain a representative view of his work. This study will aid in discovering Handel's contribution to the field of interpretation of Scripture through his music. The procedure of study will follow the pattern of the preceding chapter. First Esther and then Samson will be analyzed followed by a comparison of the two in the Summary.

B. Esther

1. History of the Oratorio

All his life Handel was impressed by the beauty of the Bible. So it is no wonder that at an early age he began studying it until he was very familiar with it. Nor is it surprising that the stories found within the Bible's pages would inspire him to set them to music. So it was in the year 1720, at the age of thirty-six, that he composed the oratorio, Haman and Mordecai, which later was to be rewritten and re-named Esther. This oratorio was the first English oratorio and led the way for other composers.

Because Handel had written many operas and was greatly influ-

enced by them, it is no wonder that Esther should bear a resemblance to an opera. On the other hand, it was the beginning of a new field of endeavor for Handel, a field in which he excelled.

Although there is little proof, it is believed that the libretto was written by Pope and was based upon a book by Racine. There is also evidence, however, that Samuel Humphreys aided in writing the words. The first performance of the work was given in Cannons. It would appear that for that age the work was very far advanced of the tastes of the people. Because of this, it never was performed very often during Handel's lifetime and even today is little known or performed.

2. Synopsis of the Oratorio

Having a kinship to an opera, this oratorio has a Dramatis Personae. The characters are:

Esther (Queen of Persia)	Soprano
Israelitish Woman	Soprano
A Young Israelite	Alto
Ahasuerus (King of Persia)	Tenor
Habdonah (an Attendant)	Tenor
Officer	Tenor
Mordecai (a Jew)	Tenor
First and Second Israelites	Tenor
Haman (Chief Favorite of the King)	Bass

Chorus of Persians, Israelites, Attendants, etc.

And like an opera, Esther is divided into Parts and Scenes which may be described as follows:

Part One

- Scene I - Haman Plots to Kill the Israelites
- Scene II - Israelites Rejoice Over Esther's Crowning as Queen

Part Two

- Scene III - Esther Learns of the Plot
- Scene IV - Esther Goes Before the King

Part Three

- Scene V - Israelites Cry to God for Deliverance
- Scene VI - Esther Discloses Haman as the Villain

True to good compositional principles, the story begins at the latest possible point, which is Haman's plot to destroy the Jews. Haman, chief favorite of the King decreed that all the Israelites should be put to death. Meanwhile, the Israelites, unaware of the plot against them, are rejoicing that Esther has been made Queen. They raise their voices to God in praise.

At the beginning of Part Two, Mordecai tells Esther about the scheme against the Jews and reminds her that because she is a Jew, she also will be killed. He suggests that she go to the King and plead for her people. Esther decides to go despite the fact that anyone who goes before the King without being summoned will be put to death. When the King sees the Queen, his great love for her compels him to listen to her request. She asks him and Haman to come to a feast that she will prepare.

The beginning of Part Three finds the Israelites crying to God to deliver them from Haman. The last scene of Part Three pictures the feast, during which Esther pleads for the Jews and discloses that Haman is the villain who had contrived the plot. Immediately Haman begs to be spared but to no avail. The oratorio ends with a magnificent and extended song sung by the Israelites and filled with praise to God for

saving them from their enemies.

3. Analysis of the Oratorio

Following the procedure of the preceding, an analysis of this oratorio will be made with a study of the use of Scripture, atmosphere of the music, use of solo, chorus, and instrumental parts, theological implications and message.

a. Use of Scripture

The oratorio, while based upon a Bible story, does not contain Scripture passages as do the Messiah and Israel in Egypt. Rather it is a poem based upon the story of Queen Esther as found in the Book of Esther. This poem which was taken from Racine's tragedy by the same name is in full accordance with the Biblical account. However, it leaves out the episode of Queen Vashti's dethronement, thus providing the need for a new Queen. Nor does it tell of the method by which Esther became Queen.

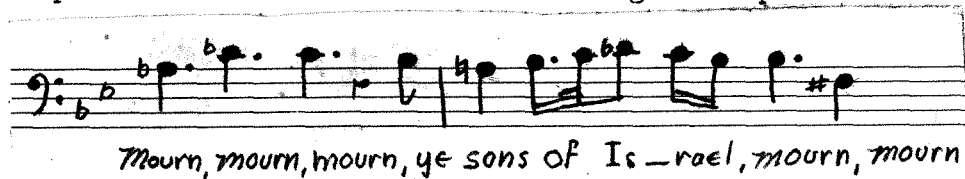
Instead the oratorio begins with the plot conceived by Haman against the Jews. Only in Part Three does it hint that the plot was motivated by Haman's hatred for Mordecai. In fact, Mordecai is a very minor character in this work. Another episode which is merely mentioned is the time that Mordecai saved the King's life by discovering a plot against him.

Added to the story is the Israelites' joy upon Esther's becoming Queen. They feel that now they will no longer be persecuted. But at the end of Part One, one of the Israelites has a premonition of future events. Another noticeable addition is that while the name of God does not appear in the Book of Esther, it appears quite often in the oratorio.

Missing from the story are the two most familiar quotations

to destroy the hated Israelites. The music emphasizes their vengeance and their hatred, for first one part, then another takes up the theme, "Nor age nor sex we'll spare." This is followed by a long passage of cheerful praise on the part of the Jews, which includes "Praise the Lord", a pleasant song complete with harp accompaniment. In this section, first the choir sings a song of thanksgiving, then the Israelite woman adds her praise. She is followed by the Second Israelite, who in turn is followed by the choir. Throughout the oratorio, Handel uses a five part choir, with one part doubled. Usually it is the tenor part, but sometimes there are two alto parts. By doing this, he has added strength to the choir and produces an effect of a larger group.

At the end of Part One are several songs in sharp contrast to the preceding ones which were joyful. These are sorrowful and are introduced by a recitative, "Methinks I hear". This song is wistful, contemplative and foreboding, the music aptly portraying this attitude. This recitative is succeeded by a chorus "Ye Sons of Israel mourn", which is written in the key of C Minor, the favorite key of mourning. First the tenors take up the theme, while the sopranos and basses "mourn" in the background. Then the second altos take up the theme and are joined by the other parts. The use of incidentals throughout reproduce the sor-



row of the people. Thus Part One ends.

At the beginning of Part Two Esther is introduced indirectly, perhaps with the idea that she is known already to the listeners and so needs no introduction. She and Mordecai, who is also introduced in the

deliverance calls for thanksgiving, let it be long and loud. By the side of "The Lord our enemy has slain" the "Hallelujah Chorus" and "Worthy is the Lamb" look small. Yet the final song in Esther and the "Hallelujah Chorus" have similar characteristics. They are both written in the key of D Major, a favorite key for expressing joy, and they both attack God from all directions, but in both He is immovable. "The Lord our enemy has slain" contains almost every kind of note, run, slur and musical device known to man, with an effort to carry the praise of God to a brilliant and thundering climax.

c. Use of Solo, Chorus and Instrumental Parts

Differing from both the Messiah and Israel in Egypt, this oratorio uses the solo for a distinct function. That function is to represent the different characters in the story, similar to a drama or an opera. Through the solos the story is carried along with the choruses usually merely augmenting the solos.

The choir is used to heighten the drama of the story. One time the members of the choir are the Persians who are out to destroy the Israelites. At another time the chorus becomes the Israelites who are mourning their fate, and at still another place, they represent the Jews singing praise to God. As has been noted before, Handel uses the five part choir to give more strength and vitality to the choruses, and to emphasize the vast number of Persians and Israelites.

This oratorio does not need an orchestra to accompany it, yet the instruments add much. A part for a harp is an interesting addition, and Esther is believed to be the first work of its kind with a harp in its score.

d. Theological Implications

Since many of the same attributes of God are stressed in Esther as in the previous two oratorios that have been studied, it is repetitious to mention them again. Therefore they will be discussed briefly.

God's power and glory are found stressed in the songs, "Jehovah, crowned with glory", "He comes to end our woes", and "The Lord our enemy has slain". As in Israel in Egypt, the emphasis is upon God's delivering His people from their enemies, and upon His supreme reign as King. That God is a living God is found in "Now, persecution shall lay by" and "Tune your harps". That He is eternal is described especially in "Jehovah, crowned with glory" and "The Lord our enemy has slain". "Tune your harps" emphasizes the fact that God is worthy of trust because of what He did for the people in times past. That God is worthy of praise by both men and angels is mentioned in "Praise the Lord" and "The Lord our enemy has slain".

God is above idols. He is the only God. These facts are stressed in "Tune your harps". That He hears and answers prayer is the subject of "Tears, assist me" and "Virtue, truth and innocence". The idea of God as a God who punishes sin is stressed in "How have our sins?" But the emphasis throughout the oratorio is upon God's power over His enemies, and that He remembers His people and delivers them.

Although God is one of the main actors, Esther takes a place beside Him as a main character. That God uses her to save her people is the main idea of the story. Therefore, the message of the oratorio seems to be that God who never forgets His people always provides a way of salvation for them, sometimes using human beings as the instruments.

C. Samson

1. History of the Oratorio

In 1735, Newburgh Hamilton, whose career had been concerned with writing farce and comedy, assisted Handel in the preparation of Alexander's Feast. Six years later, Hamilton, pleased with what Handel had done with his libretto, again prepared a poem for Handel to set to music. This libretto which he wrote was based upon a poem by John Milton entitled, Samson Agonistes. As Young states, quoting from Hamilton's preface to Samson:

That poem, indeed, never was divided by Milton into acts or scenes, nor designed (as he hints in his preface) for the stage; but given only as the plan of a tragedy with choruses, after the manner of the ancients. But as Mr. Handel had so happily introduced here oratorios, a musical drama, whose subjects must be scriptural, and in which the solemnity of church musick is agreeably united with the most pleasing airs of the stage, it would have been an irretrievable loss to have neglected the opportunity of that great master's doing justice to this work; he having already added new life and spirit to some of the finest things in the English language, particularly that inimitable Ode of Dryden's which no age nor nation ever excelled.¹

Whereas Milton's poem had 1758 lines, Hamilton condensed it to 400 lines. Milton's poem was a drama, nominally religious and not unfamiliar. It aroused the imagination of the great musician. Despite the fact that Hamilton's poem was inferior to Milton's, Handel took it and turned it into a masterpiece.

Handel finished the oratorio on October 12, 1742 and it was first performed at Covent Garden during Lent in 1745. Remarkably well received, it seemed to be Handel's turning point back to success and acceptance after the long period of rejection and persecution by the

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1. Young, op.cit., p.119.

English people. Handel conducted many performances of it during his lifetime. After he had lost his sight the audience was often moved to tears when the air "Total eclipse" was sung, for it was the testimony of the blind Handel himself. Samson was always a great favorite of Handel. He often remarked that he did not know which he preferred, the Messiah or Samson. Although today, Samson is not as well-known as the Messiah, yet it is often performed and is said to contain some of the most lovely music ever written by the master musician.

2. Synopsis of the Oratorio

Like Esther this oratorio has a list of characters:

Samson	Tenor
Micah, his friend	Alto
Manoah, his father	Bass
Dalila, his wife	Soprano
Harapha, a giant of Gath	Bass
Israelitish Messenger	Tenor
Israelitish Woman	Soprano
Priests of Dagon	Chorus
Virgins, attendant upon Dalila	Women's Chorus
Israelites, friends of Samson	Chorus
Israelitish Virgins	Women's Chorus
Philistines	Chorus

As given in the Novello Edition, the synopsis of the oratorio is this: Part One- Samson, blind and captive to the Philistines, being relieved from his toil by a Festival in honor of Dagon, their god, comes forth into the open air. The priests of Dagon sing in praise of their

idol. Samson, bemoaning his condition, is visited by his friends and his father, Manoah, who join in bewailing his degradation. Samson acknowledging the justice of his punishment, predicts that Dagon will not be allowed to triumph over the God of Israel. Micah and his friends express a hope that Samson's prediction may be verified. However, Samson declares his hopes to be gone, his nature declining, and his life drawing to a close. Upon which, his friends recount to him the joy and peace that his spirit will realize in the eternal world.

Part Two - Micah and the Israelites call upon God to have pity on Samson. Dalila, his wife, then appears, and pretending penitence and submission, entreats him to go home with her. He refuses to listen to her entreaties; a scene of mutual recrimination ensues, and they separate. His friends assert the ordained subjection of the wife to the husband. Then Harapha, a giant of Gath, approaches, attracted by the fame of Samson's prodigious might, and boasts how he would have overcome him had he encountered him before his captivity. Samson dares him to a trial now, which he refuses, and is taunted by Samson with cowardice. Micah proposes, as a test of who is the supreme God, that Harapha should call upon Dagon, to try his power over Samson. The Israelites prostrate themselves before Jehovah, and supplicate His delivering aid. Harapha calls upon Dagon, and the worshipers of that idol appeal to him for protection and succour; after which, the Israelites and Philistines jointly, but in opposition to each other, celebrate the majesty, power, and supremacy of their respective deities.

Part Three - Harapha is sent by the Philistine lords to bid Samson attend their festival, to exhibit his strength before them, which

at first he refuses to do. Perplexed for his safety, his friends call upon God for help. Samson, persuaded inwardly that this was from God, yields to go along with Harapha, who comes again with great threatenings to fetch him. Samson departs, invoking the aid of that Spirit with which he had formerly been inspired. His friends cheer him on, and declare him to be fulfilling the call, and under the guidance of Heaven. Manoah returns to tell his friends his hopes of obtaining Samson's release. The priest of Dagon are heard to celebrate the praises of their idol for subduing their foe. Micah and Manoah hear the shouts of joy, and the latter again manifests his paternal solicitude for Samson. An appalling, loud, and confused noise is heard, succeeded by wailings and cries for help. An Israelitish messenger, arrives in breathless haste, and relates to the relations and friends of Samson the fearful news of his having pulled down the Philistine temple, and buried his enemies and himself in its ruins. Micah, and the Israelites lament his fall. A Dead March is heard, and his body approaches on its way to the tomb. Manoah and Micah and the Israelites, perform the funeral rites. Then they burst into praise to God for having delivered them from their enemies.

3. Analysis of the Oratorio

An analysis of this oratorio will be made and will follow the pattern of the previous chapters. A study will be made of the use of Scripture, the atmosphere of the music, the use of solo, chorus, and instrumental parts and the theological implications and message.

a. Use of Scripture

As has been noted before, the libretto of this oratorio is

taken from a poem by Milton. Therefore, it is similar to Esther in that it does not use Scripture passages, but rather is merely based upon a story from the Bible. The story of Samson as found in Judges 13-16 has been greatly enlarged to add more drama to it.

Beginning at the last possible event, the story starts with the imprisonment of Samson. He has just been betrayed by his wife into the hands of her countrymen who have made him a prisoner and have put his eyes out.

Although the Bible does not relate that his father came to see him, yet it is highly believable that he did. The fact that he predicted that God would give him victory over the Philistines is not related in the Bible. Other incidents have been added too. The incident between Samson and Dalila, who comes to plead with him to return home with her is new. The encounter with the giant is not found in Scripture nor is the contest between the followers of Dagon and God. Manoah's hope that Samson will be delivered is not told in the Bible.

But the story as it stands in this oratorio is true to Scripture. Milton when writing the poem simply used his imagination as to what might have happened. For the story of Samson as found in Judges is very brief and could easily be expanded.

b. Atmosphere of the Music

A long and descriptive overture begins the work. It is written in the key of G Major and has three distinct movements. Not heavy or slow, it prepares the way for the Festival of the Philistines. After a short recitative by Samson which explains the situation the chorus sings "Awake the trumpets lofty sound". The accompaniment gives the

effect of trumpets with its runs of sixteenth notes and with the steady, even eighth notes. This theme is repeated throughout the song and gives



the atmosphere of a Festival. After an air by a Philistine woman the chorus again sings this festive theme. It is again repeated after a light and joyous air by a Priest. This air has a pagan note about it in contrast to the songs later sung in praise to God.

Amid the celebrating, Samson sings "Why by an angel?" in which he bemoans the fact that he was even born. The incidentals and half-steps add to the agony of his words. In answer to him Micah sings "O mirror of our fickle state." The runs and downward movement of the melody give force to his words.

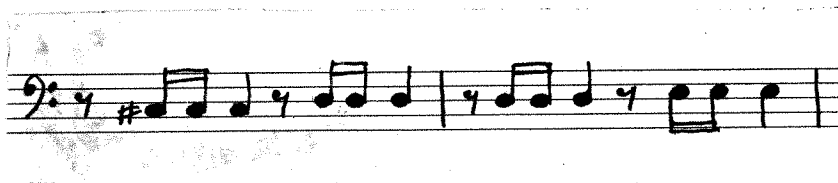


Then follows the air "Total Eclipse!" What agony and suffering is displayed in the music of this famous air! The rests, the tremendous effect of melodic climax throughout the song add to the agony of Samson's darkness. Few composers have ever portrayed suffering and hopelessness better. This air is followed by the beautiful "O first created beam." This chorus is written in the key of C Major, the same key that Haydn chose to portray the creation of light in his Creation. With its repetitions it is brilliant in natural definition, and is one of the highlights of the oratorio.

Much of the oratorio is given to conversations between indi-

viduals. Here, as in the other oratorios studied, Handel proves his ability to make even these passages interesting and meaningful. Throughout this section the music aptly portrays the hopelessness and dejection of the situation.

"God of our fathers" with its runs and the wide skips emphasizes the glory and eternity of God as compared with man's short life. This is succeeded by a recitative "The good we wish for." This song which is sung by Manoah is contemplative and resentful. Each resentful word is followed by three loud and short notes in the accompaniment which emphasizes his

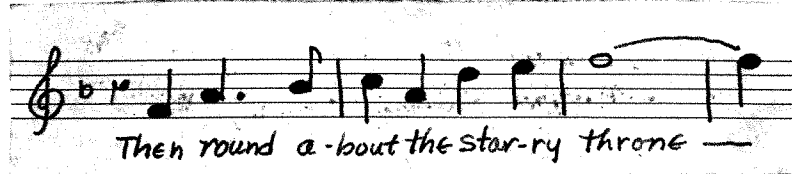


feelings. His sorrow is accented in "Thy glorious deeds inspir'd my tongue" by the minor key.

"Why does the God of Israel sleep" is full of bitter, bewildered rage. Samson wonders why God should forsake him. His bewilderment is stressed by the runs and wide jumps in the accompaniment. It is the song of a man who is lost. The chorus which succeeds is in direct contrast to Samson's feelings. "Then shall they know" in the key of B flat is a song of praise to God. First the altos take up the theme, then the tenors join them. The basses enter followed by the sopranos. They all wish to tell of the majesty of God.

The modulation of the recitative "My genial spirits droop" stresses Samson's feeling of dejection and darkness, just as Handel used modulation to portray darkness in both Israel in Egypt and the Messiah. The air that follows with its long runs on the word "long

eternity" gives accent to the length of eternity. Soon follows the grand and glorious "Then round about the starry throne". As compared to the dejection of Samson this chorus is a reach into the highest heavens. The steady and heavy rhythm pictures the strength and eterni-



ty of the God of hosts. It is the "Hallelujah Chorus" of Samson and concludes the First Part.

As Part Two opens, Manoah and Micah are trying to comfort Samson. The pleading in "Return, O God of Hosts" is emphasized by the following chorus "To dust his glory they would tread". In this chorus the choir aids Micah in making his plea to God and stresses the urgency of God's intervention. Then Dalila approaches and as she comes, Micah sings "But who is this" in which he describes Dalila as a ship with all her streamers flying. The scorn in his voice is evident. The scorn in Samson's voice is also evident, emphasized by the short, sharp notes of the accompaniment. In a light and airy song, Dalila professes her love to Samson. The cooing of the turtle dove is reproduced by the accompaniment by using trills and dotted notes, and runs. Compared to the

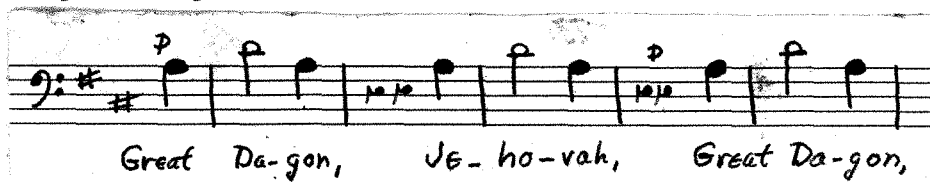


songs in which the King professed his love for Esther, this song is silly and meaningless. As she continues to plead with Samson to return home with her, her pleas sound empty and vain. Her chorus of virgins join in

her pleas but they only add to the emptiness of her words. Samson rebukes her, the rests and quarter notes in the accompaniment accenting his scorn. Then in a duet "Traitor (traitress) to love", Dalila and Samson have it out. Samson has recalled the bitter memories and Dalila is angry because her plan has not worked. So the duet is bitter, angry and vigorous. Thus Dalila leaves defeated.

After a chorus in which the choir sings the praise of Samson for not yielding to the wiles of the woman, Harapha enters. He derides Samson. "Honour and arms", a well-known air is exuberant and boastful. Samson's reply to him, "My strength is from the living God" is in direct contrast. It is confident and strong but not the confidence in self, but in God.

Then Micah suggests that the followers of the two Gods, Dagon and Jehovah, call upon their gods to prove which is the true living God. In "Hear, Jacob's God" the Israelites call upon God. The double soprano and tenor parts add strength to their plea. Their pleas are followed by pleas made by Harapha to Dagon. His cries as found in "To song and dance we give the day" are light and foolish. There is great contrast between this and the preceding song. Then the chorus of Priests joins him in the cries to Dagon. The runs add to the frivolity of their cries. Finally to end Part Two everyone, the Priests, the Israelites, the Virgins, Dalila, Harapha, Manosh, Micah and Samson all join together to call upon their respective gods. This chorus "Fix'd in his everlasting seat" is



beautifully expresses the sorrow of the Israelites. Written in the minor key, it is a masterpiece of pathos. When the body of Samson is brought in a Dead March is played. Although in the major key it is solemn and impressive. After the Israelites pay tribute to their hero, they realize that God has saved them from their enemies and thus they burst into praise. "Let their celestial concerts all unite" is perhaps the shortest of all the endings which Handel gave to his oratorios; he seemed to like long and impressive endings. But yet this chorus carries as much of the majesty and glory of God as do many of the longer ones. With the steady rhythm Handel has stressed the eternalness of the One who, in His love, saved His people.

c. Use of Solo, Chorus and Instrumental Parts

As in Esther the solo is used to represent definite characters. The character of Micah is mythical but it gives a chance for alto solos. Several times in this work Handel uses the solo and chorus together as in the case of "Return, O Lord of Hosts", and "The Holy One of Israel". The solo is also used to characterize the different individuals in the story.

The chorus is used to represent different groups. There are the Priests of Dagon who announce the Festival. There is the group of Israelites who bemoan Samson's fate both when he is taken prisoner and when he is killed. The Israelites also pray to their God and praise Him for delivering them from their enemies. And at another time the chorus represents the Philistines who call upon their god to prove himself mighty. Thus the members of the chorus must play various roles. But besides the full chorus Handel has made use of smaller groups. One

is a group of virgins who attend Dalila and another is a group of Israel-
itish virgins. Thus the various choruses are at times dramatic, pictur-
esque, imploratory and reflective.

As far as the use of instruments is concerned, the same can be
said as has been stated about the other oratorios. An orchestra is not
necessary. This work can be accompanied by an organ and not lose much
of its beauty and strength. Yet instruments add much to it especially
in the overture, the Death March and such choruses as "Awake the trum-
pets lofty sound."

d. Theological Implications

The references to God as found in this work add little to the
picture of God painted in the oratorios already studied. God is again
pictured as a God of power and glory, a God who rules the universe. This
is especially true in "God of our fathers", and "Let but that Spirit".
That God was the God of their fathers and is eternal is stressed in "God
of our fathers", "Then shall they know", and "Hear, Jacob's God." His
justice and wisdom are accented in "Just are Thy ways" as is His holi-
ness in "The Holy One of Israel". That He is forgiving is found in "Be
for thy fate contrite", and "Hear, Jacob's God". That He is the only
God is emphasized during the contest between the followers of the two
Gods.

"This have I done" and "My strength is from the living God"
tell that God can be blasphemed by humans when they go against His will,
or betray Him. His fury is mentioned in "My griefs for this" and "Why
does the God of Israel sleep?" His victory over death and the fact of
immortality for man is mentioned in "Then round about the starry throne".

And the characteristics of God that are stressed throughout the oratorio are that God governs the world, He purposes and wills for things to happen, and He calls men to fulfill these purposes.

While God is mentioned in this oratorio and His different attributes are stressed, yet the spotlight is upon Samson and not entirely upon God as was true in the Messiah and Israel in Egypt. In Esther the honors for the leading part were fairly well divided between Esther and God. But in Samson God appears as only a minor character, working silently in the background. While not often mentioned, He still has control of the situation.

Thus the message of this oratorio might be stated: Although Samson, ordained by God to save His people, was mocked and weakened by his enemies, he gave his life to rescue his people.

D. Summary

It was noted that Esther, the first English oratorio ever written, was finished in 1720 and prepared the way for other composers. Patterned after an opera because Handel was familiar with them, it was not very successful. The libretto which was based upon a tragedy by Racine, was written by either Pope or Humphreys. When the oratorio first appeared it was called Haman and Mordecai, but was later rewritten and renamed. Even today it is little known and little performed.

It has been discovered that starting with the plot against the Jews which Haman contrived, the story relates how Esther, after discovering the plot, decides to go before the King. Even though she knows it may mean her death, she decides to try to save her people.

Because of the King's great love for her, he grants her the request that he and Haman come to a feast. During the feast she uncovers Haman as the villain and thus she saves her people.

It has been seen through the analysis of the oratorio that the libretto does not contain Scriptural passages but is based upon a poem, which was based upon the story found in the Book of Esther. It is completely true to Scripture. It has been discovered by studying the atmosphere of the music that the music, in most cases, vividly portrays the meaning of the words. It portrays the sorrow of the Jews, the love of the King for Esther, and the praise of the Jews at their deliverance. The solos, it has been noted, serve to carry the story while the choruses usually augment it. The soloists represent definite characters in the story while the chorus represents both Persians and Jews. The orchestra could be omitted but adds support. It has been seen that many of the same characteristics of God are mentioned in this oratorio as in Israel in Egypt and the Messiah. God's power, His love and His victory are emphasized. Briefly, the message is that God provides a way of salvation for His people.

While studying Samson, it has been noted that it was written in 1742 and was based upon a poem by Milton. It was remarkably well received from the beginning and proved to be the turning point in Handel's popularity with the English people. Handel placed Samson along side of the Messiah. It has been discovered that the oratorio begins with Samson in prison. His friends come to console him. Then Dalila, his wife, comes with the pretence of begging him to come back with her. A giant also comes to laugh at him. Then the Philistines invite Samson

to entertain them at their Festival. As his friends talk, they hear a great noise and a messenger comes to inform them that Samson is dead, that he killed the Philistines and himself. They mourn his death but also sing praises to God for saving them.

It has been seen in analyzing the oratorio that it does not contain Scripture passages but that it is based upon a poem by Milton which in turn was based upon the story of Samson as found in Judges 13-16. It is entirely true to the Bible despite all the additions. It has been noted in studying the atmosphere of the music that the various emotions and moods are described vividly. The dejection of Samson, the festive spirit of the Philistines, the sorrow of the Israelites and their praise to God, are all reproduced by the music. It has been further noted that the solos, as in Esther, represent definite characters in the story. The solos are again used to carry along the story. The choruses which are used to portray the Philistines, the Israelites, the Priests, etc. are very descriptive. The instruments, although not expendable, add much to the over-all effect. In studying the theological implications, it has been discovered that the majesty of God, the power of God, and the uniqueness of God are stressed. The message thus could be briefly stated that Samson, whom God had ordained to save the people, gave his life in saving them.

It has been noted that Esther and Samson are similar in that they are centered around an individual. Although God is definitely on the scene, He is not the main actor, as He is in Israel in Egypt and the Messiah. Both of these oratorios are somewhat patterned after an opera, in that they have characters and are divided into scenes. Neither of

them are based directly upon the Scriptures but are true to Scripture. Additions to the stories as found in the Bible are in both oratorios. A variety of emotions, especially those of sorrow and joy, are vividly reproduced in them. Many of the same attributes of God found in Esther are also in Samson.

It has been seen that the greatest contrast between them is their length. Esther is comparatively short, while Samson is lengthy. Esther, however, ends with an extended anthem, while Samson has a short conclusion. The former, coming from Handel's early life, shows a lack of maturity as compared with the latter, which comes from Handel's last years.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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A. Summary

To discover the contribution that George Frederick Handel made to the field of interpreting Scripture through his music was the purpose of this study. The procedure followed was to make a study in the first chapter of Handel's life and times in an effort to find those elements which influenced his life religiously, and consequently, his music. Chapters Two and Three were concerned with a study of his oratorios in order to discover just how he interpreted Scripture through his music. Four of his most representative works were selected: the Messiah, his most well-known; Israel in Egypt, next to the Messiah in importance; Esther, one of his most early ones; and Samson, one of his later ones.

The main biographies of Handel, especially the one by Newman Flower, were the sources for the first chapter, and the scores of the four oratorios were the main sources for the second and third chapters.

It was noted while studying Handel's life that his mother was the daughter of a Lutheran minister and that his father was a highly religious man. Therefore, George Frederick was brought up in a religious atmosphere. It was his aunt, who encouraged him in his pursuit of music. It was further noted that while Handel attended the University of Halle, he did not participate in the immoralities which many of the other students practiced. Neither did he engage in the licentiousness of the society in which he moved in his later years.

It was discovered that at first he was faced with great opposition in England. The people, the King and even the Church itself seemed opposed to him and his music. But despite his rejection, he con-

tinued to compose. It was also discovered that while at first he fought his persecutors, yet in later years, he took a different attitude toward them, even to the point of loving them. At one period of his life, it was seen, he suddenly stopped writing operas and concentrated on oratorios. It was during this period that he was often seen worshipping at St. George's Church. Since his death in 1759 his music has become highly known and acclaimed.

While analyzing his music it was discovered that he had a large and high picture of God. In two of his oratorios, the Messiah and Israel in Egypt, God was the main actor, while in the other two, Esther and Samson, He was one of the main characters. However, in all four God was pictured as guiding and controlling the affairs of man. Also, in all four, God's great glory and majesty, His great power, and His victory over His enemies were stressed. In all of the oratorios studied, the people were portrayed as being oppressed and needing a way of salvation, and in all four God provided the way.

It was noted that while two of the oratorios, Samson and Esther, did not contain Scripture passages as did the Messiah and Israel in Egypt, nevertheless, they were based upon Bible stories and were true to Scripture. The music, as a whole, was discovered to convey very aptly and vividly the meaning of the words, often adding strength and deeper meaning.

It was seen that Handel opened the way for other composers, because he wrote the first English oratorio. Many musicians since Handel have followed his example and have taken Bible stories and passages and have set them to music. Yet few, if any, have ever reached or excelled Handel's heights.

B. Conclusion

Therefore, it has been concluded that despite the ignoring of his religious life by most of his biographers, Handel was a highly religious man, but much more than merely "religious". Surely, the facts of his life point to this: his home, his character, his high moral standards, and his attitudes. True, he had his faults, but for his day he stood out among his fellow men. The fact that he concentrated on oratorios toward the end of his life, as well as his change of attitude toward his oppressors would seem to prove some great change or growth in his life. His music itself, stands as proof that this man was more than "religious".

From these facts it has been concluded that he was, therefore, qualified to take the Scriptures and interpret them for he was well acquainted with them. He knew their deeper meaning. His interpretations were good and very true to Scripture. It has also been concluded that Bible stories are often brought to life and given more meaning when set to descriptive and effective music. Handel was a master at this.

Therefore, in brief, it can be stated that Handel's contribution to the field of Scripture interpretation through music was three-fold: (1) he pioneered in the field, preparing the way for other composers; (2) his music gave meaning to the Scripture and was always true to the spirit; (3) he excelled in the field, never having been equaled.

It is fitting to conclude with one of Handel's own statements. When told that his Messiah was a great entertainment, he replied, "I should be sorry if I only entertained them; I wished to make them better."¹

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1. Flower, op.cit., p. 302.

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