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# Rejoicing Against Judaism In Handel's 'Messiah' (George Frideric Handel)

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Michael Marissen. (2007). "Rejoicing Against Judaism In Handel's 'Messiah' (George Frideric Handel)". *Journal Of Musicology*. Volume 24, Issue 2. 167-194.  
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Source: *The Journal of Musicology*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Spring 2007), pp. 167-194

Published by: [University of California Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jm.2007.24.2.167>

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# Rejoicing against Judaism in Handel's *Messiah*

MICHAEL MARISSSEN

And if some of the branches [Israel] be broken off, and thou [gentile follower of Jesus], being a wild olive-tree, wert grafted in amongst them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive-tree; boast [literally: rejoice] not against the branches . . . all Israel shall be saved.

Romans 11:17–18,26

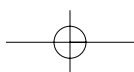
What classical music lover does not have etched in sonic memory the glorious setting of Isaiah 40:9 in Handel's *Messiah*, "O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain: O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength"? Listeners may be startled to discover that the main source text for Handel's libretto, the King James Version of the Bible ("KJV"), transposes the recipient and agent: "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain: O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength." Were they to consult early editions of the KJV, however, they would find that its translators provide an alternative reading in the margins, the one adopted in *Messiah*. Charles Jennens, Handel's librettist, no doubt chose the marginal reading because it fits much better with one of the central messages of his oratorio text: that Jesus of Nazareth, the subject of the

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For criticism and encouragement, I am most grateful to Philip Bohlman, Tassilo Erhardt, Martha Hodes, David Hunter, Daniel Melamed, Barbara Milewski, and, above all, Lauren Belfer.

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*The Journal of Musicology*, Vol. 24, Issue 2, pp. 167–194, ISSN 0277-9269, electronic ISSN 1533-8347. © 2007 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintInfo.asp>. DOI: 10.1525/jm.2007.24.2.167.



“good tidings to Zion,” is the Messiah who was foretold in what Christians call the Old Testament (“OT”).

Jennens did not, strictly speaking, write the libretto Handel set to music; rather, he joined together a series of texts from the Old and New (“NT”) Testaments. For the most part Jennens gave the KJV renderings verbatim, but for the Psalms he nearly always used the earlier translations by Miles Coverdale printed in the Book of Common Prayer (“BCP”).<sup>1</sup> So although many apparent biblical variants in *Messiah* simply stem from the BCP or from the KJV margins, scholarship has not identified the sources for a host of smaller yet still significant variants. Modern editions and studies of *Messiah* have dutifully noted the KJV or BCP sources for each number in the libretto, and where appropriate they have simply added “[text] adapted.”<sup>2</sup>

It is possible to make interpretive sense of variant readings in *Messiah*. Jennens relied on various now-obscure source texts meant to supplement or supplant the KJV and BCP, and his choices have the cumulative effect of heightening the rejoicing against Judaism implicitly expressed in his libretto, a feature nowadays almost wholly overlooked. This is not a matter of so-called racial antisemitism but rather of exulting over misfortunes of the religion of Judaism and of its practitioners; for the purposes of this study I will be agnostic on the question of whether theological disdain for Judaism can or must lead to “racial” antisemitism. Rejoicing against Judaism is an already sufficiently troubling and attention-worthy phenomenon.

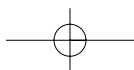
That any 18th-century Christian work should project sentiment against Judaism is of course altogether unremarkable. That *Messiah*, “the world’s favorite Christmas piece,”<sup>3</sup> should do so, however, does come as a surprise to many. Although rejoicing against Judaism is certainly not the whole story of the piece, it is a significant and generally unrecognized aspect of the narrative.<sup>4</sup> Handel’s music too, even if to a

<sup>1</sup> Cherished and too well known to replace, the Coverdale Psalter was retained when the Church of England switched over to the readings of the KJV in 1662 for all other biblical passages in the BCP.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, George Frideric Handel, *Messiah: Full Score*, ed. Clifford Bartlett (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), Critical Commentary, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> *The New Yorker* (25 December 2006), 32.

<sup>4</sup> Tassilo Erhardt, “‘A Most Excellent Subject’: Händels *Messiah* im Licht von Charles Jennens’ theologischer Bibliothek” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Utrecht, 2005), is a ground-breaking study; publication in English is planned. Erhardt is excellent in broadly identifying and contextualizing the theological disdain for Judaism in *Messiah*. My more modest contribution lies in having discovered Jennens’s source texts, drawing on important additional contextual material, and noting further musical evidence. I discuss only selected parts of *Messiah* because only parts of the work rejoice against Judaism. Erhardt’s study explores as well the important question of 18th-century Deism, a topic outside the scope of the present study, though Deists represent the most obvious group in Jennens



much lesser extent than Jennens's libretto, has its own contributions to make to this reading. I do not condemn, excuse, or laud Jennens and Handel for having followed the social and religious spirit of their times. Instead I hope to raise consciousness about the many ideas, insufficiently understood and often disquieting, reflected in Handel's ubiquitous work. A choral masterpiece much celebrated for bringing together people of diverse backgrounds—witness the currently widespread American social phenomenon of the “*Messiah* Sing”—was designed to teach contempt for Jews and Judaism.

*Jennens, His Library and His Methods*

Jennens was an extremely wealthy man who amassed a huge personal library including hundreds of sermon collections and biblical commentaries.<sup>5</sup> We can get a reasonably good idea of the contents of his library from the sale catalogue printed for the disposition of his successors' estate in 1918.<sup>6</sup> The principal inspiration for Jennens's *Messiah* libretto is a long (and tiresome) book by Richard Kidder on christological expectation in the OT and its fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth as attested in the NT. Kidder is a major source for Jennens in the matter of Bible-verse selection. Its title page reads:

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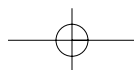
A  
Demonstration  
of the  
MESSIAS.

In which  
the Truth of the *Christian Religion*  
is proved, against all the Enemies thereof;  
but especially against the  
JEWS.

and Handel's world who denied the central message of the oratorio, the redemptive Messiahship of Jesus. The massive secondary literature on Handel seldom deals with issues of Judaism postdating the advent of Jesus. Excellent work has been published on the Jews and what they represent in Handel's Israelite oratorios, particularly Ruth Smith's magisterial *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995). Those studies concern not what were considered the “bad Jews” of Rabbinic Judaism but the “good (Messiah-expecting, proto-Christian) Jews” of pre-Jesus Israel. On this crucial point, see also n73, below.

<sup>5</sup> For details of Jennens's life and general information about his library, see Ruth Smith, “The Achievements of Charles Jennens (1700–1773),” *Music & Letters* 70 (1989): 161–89.

<sup>6</sup> George Trollope & Sons, *Gopsall, Leicestershire, Catalogue of . . . the Extensive Library* (London, 1918), 113–50. (“Gopsall” was the name of Jennens's estate.) Erhardt, “*Händels Messiah*,” 191–237, has reconstructed the list of theological books.



In Three Parts.

By the Right Reverend Father in GOD,  
RICHARD [KIDDER] late Lord Bishop of *Bath* and *Wells* . . .

London . . . 1726.

Of all known contemporary English sources on the subject of Jesus' Messiahship, this book discusses the largest number of biblical passages employed in Jennens's libretto.<sup>7</sup> As we shall see shortly, Jennens turns to other sources for his specific wordings of the verses discussed in Kidder.

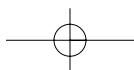
Central to Kidder, Jennens, and their like-minded (conservative) contemporaries' reading of the NT is a long-standing mode of interpretation called "typology": Events in the OT are said to point to events in the NT, not only through explicit prophecy and its fulfillment but also through the more mysterious, implied anticipation of NT "antitypes" in OT "types."<sup>8</sup> In typology one does not lose sight of the original historical event itself, and in this regard typology is often distinguished from "allegory." The type (the event depicted in the OT) is accepted literally but at the same time is believed spiritually to prefigure its antitype. Indeed, antitypes are considered better than their types, and so the relationship is sometimes alternatively labeled one of "shadow" versus "substance."<sup>9</sup> This typological thinking is the driving force behind Kidder's treatise and Jennens's choices as well as the juxtaposition of OT and NT passages in his *Messiah* libretto. In the libretto of *Messiah*, Old- and

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<sup>7</sup> See Smith, *Handel's Oratorios*, 149–52 (Smith does not take note of Kidder's full subtitle). Many of the passages used in *Messiah* are also discussed in John Kettlewell, *A Compleat Collection of the Works of the Reverend and Learned John Kettlewell* (London, 1719), 1:519–37; this edition is listed in *Gopsall Catalogue*, 118. Erhardt gives an additional reason to suspect Jennens's dependence on Kidder: neither writer draws on time-honored Messianic passages from the book of Daniel (Erhardt, "Händels *Messiah*," 38).

<sup>8</sup> The classic study is Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982; German orig. 1939). Dedicated readers may also consult the ferociously learned essay, Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature: Six Essays* (New York: Meridian, 1959), 11–76. For important work on typology in Handel's *Israel in Egypt*, see Minji Kim, "Handel's 'Israel in Egypt': A Three-Anthem Oratorio; An Analytical and Interpretive Study of the Original 1739 Version" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis Univ., 2005); and in Handel's oratorios generally, Smith, *Handel's Oratorios*.

<sup>9</sup> The Greek word *typos* is used in this sense at Romans 5:14, where Adam is described as "a pattern [i.e. type, or shadow] of the one to come [i.e. Jesus, the antitype, or substance]"; and the Greek word *antitypos* is so used at 1 Peter 3:21, where Noah's Flood is related to Christian baptism: "the Ark in which . . . a few were saved by water, which now as an antitype saves you too in [the Christian sacrament of] baptism." Goppelt, *Typos*, 156.



New-Testament selections stand fundamentally in this relationship. Inasmuch as the classical method of Christian typology structures *Messiah*, typology is not simply one way among many of reading the oratorio; it is Jennens's way.

Jennens's library also reminds us that he was a formidable Shakespeare scholar, the most accurate and thorough collator of the plays among early editors.<sup>10</sup> Editors of his day did not so much seek to uncover the earliest readings as use their judgment and taste to select from their source texts the readings they found most suitable.<sup>11</sup> There survives a marvelous description of Jennens at work on his Shakespeare editions:

An eminent surgeon called at [Jennens's] house one evening, and found him, before a long table, on which all the various editions of his Author [i.e. Shakespeare] were kept open by the weight of wooden bars. He himself was hobbling from one book to another with as much labour as Gulliver moved to and fro before the keys of the Brobdingnagian harpsichord sixty feet in length. The obstinacy of Mr. Jennens was equal to his vanity.<sup>12</sup>

We can imagine that Jennens moved about in this same manner when he collated biblical materials from his various library tomes to compile the *Messiah* libretto.<sup>13</sup>

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### *Jennens's Epigraph for Messiah*

The central message of *Messiah* is spelled out in Jennens's epigraph for the oratorio, printed (with his emphasis) in the wordbook for a performance in 1743, evidently the only one whose publication he oversaw before Handel's death.<sup>14</sup> The epigraph combines two sentences taken from 1 Timothy 3:16 and Colossians 2:3.

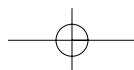
<sup>10</sup> Margreta de Grazia, *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 57–60.

<sup>11</sup> Jennens defends his editorial methods in his *The Tragedy of King Lear, as Lately Published, Vindicated from the Abuse of the Critical Reviewers* (London, 1772).

<sup>12</sup> John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1812–16), 3:121–22; quoted in Erhardt, "Händels *Messiah*," 35.

<sup>13</sup> William C. Smith, in "The Text of 'Messiah,'" *Music & Letters* 31 (1950): 386–87, quotes a letter of 16 March 1859 by a Rev. A. Bloxam of Leicestershire describing a visit in which descendants permitted him to see the library. "I dined at Gopsall last night . . . [Jennens] himself wrote or rather selected the verses for the *Messiah* . . . [He] was a great student of Theology and there are many manuscript notes in Greek of his annotations of passages in Scripture at Gopsall. He was probably a superior scholar to most of the neighbouring clergy of his time, and the valuable library at Gopsall principally collected by him evinces his classical and theological pursuits."

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Donald Burrows, *Handel: Messiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 83. I have also used a 1776 wordbook, printed by E. Johnson, who says it was



And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified by the Spirit, seen of angels, preached among the *Gentiles*, believed on in the world, received up in glory. In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

This corresponds closely—but not exactly—to the readings in the KJV:

[1 Tim 3] And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. [Col 2] In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Jennens's epigraph does correspond word for word with the text emended from the KJV in the pioneering biblical commentary by the great 17th-century Anglican scholar Henry Hammond, *A Paraphrase and Annotations upon all the Books of the New Testament*, originally published in 1653.<sup>15</sup>

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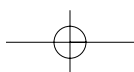
Jennens was probably aware from the biblical commentaries in his library that the then standard reading "God" in 1 Timothy 3:16 was controversial. Some ancient Greek NT manuscripts (the best ones, it turns out) read "who" at this spot, not "God,"<sup>16</sup> making the passage speak not of God made manifest in the flesh as Jesus Christ but theologically more unexceptionally of "the mystery of godliness" made manifest. From among the available readings, Jennens thus chose one that emphasized Jesus as God made flesh. Further, he placed Colossians 2:3 (its reading

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published (also in reprints, like this one from after Jennens's death) "by the Authority of the Compiler" and that "[Jennens] corrected the sheets from the Press." On the 1743 and Johnson wordbooks, see Burrows and Watkins Shaw, "Handel's 'Messiah': Supplementary Notes on Sources," *Music & Letters* 76 (1995): 366–68.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Hammond, *A Paraphrase and Annotations upon all the Books of the New Testament, Briefly Explaining all the Difficult Places Thereof* (London, 1675), 691. This was said by Dr. Johnson to be the best commentary on the NT, according to James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson* (London, 1791), 3:52; cited in Bruce Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2001), 176. I cite Hammond's glosses frequently because Jennens appears to have depended on him heavily for the *Messiah* libretto; Erhardt, "Händels *Messiah*," concerned with Jennens's library as partly documented in the *Gopsall Catalogue*, does not take into account Hammond's biblical commentaries.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Whitby, *A Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament* (London, 1718), 2:516–17 (listed in Trollope, *Gopsall Catalogue*), argued in excruciating detail from various ancient Greek sources for the reading "God"; likewise John Pearson, *An Exposition of the Creed* (London, 1710), 127–28 (listed in Trollope, *Gopsall Catalogue*). The alteration from "who" to "God" probably happened in the 3rd century, according to Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 77–78; this happened, or was facilitated, no doubt because the abbreviation for "God" in Greek (theta-sigma) looks much like the word for "who" (an omnicon and a sigma).





also contested)<sup>17</sup> next to Hammond's emended reading of 1 Timothy 3:16, heightening a Trinitarian reading of the passage.<sup>18</sup> In his pick of translations and juxtaposition of passages, Jennens clearly connects Jesus with the triune God.

Thus even in the epigraph Jennens's choices point strongly in a particular theological direction: Jesus is the divine Messiah, God's own self, who came chiefly for the gentiles. Although the implied theological disdain for Judaism here is muted, it prefigures other choices Jennens made in the libretto proper.

### *Typology, Psalm 2, and the Core of Rejoicing in Messiah*

Jennens turns to Hammond's *Paraphrase* of Psalm 2 in Part 2 of *Messiah* leading up to the Hallelujah chorus,<sup>19</sup> and his specific choices of certain words—"nations" and "yoke," for instance—have the effect of disparaging Judaism. Handel's musical settings can likewise be heard to reinforce and even add to this perspective. Contrary to what many listeners assume, the Hallelujah chorus was not in any way designed to celebrate the joy of Christ's birth or resurrection. Understood in context, the chorus apparently praises God, in large part (though not solely) for the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple by the Romans in the year 70. The destruction of the Temple was still widely believed in 18th-century Christianity to mark God's rejection of Judaism for its failing to accept Jesus as Messiah.<sup>20</sup> Understanding this purpose of the Hallelujah chorus involves recognizing the significance of the appearance of the ferocious aria "Thou shalt break them" (Psalm 2:9) right before the jubilant chorus "Hallelujah!, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Revelation 19:6).

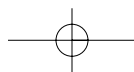
Immediately preceding the Hallelujah chorus in Part 2 of *Messiah* are four movements in Scene 6 whose texts come from Psalm 2: Scene 6,

<sup>17</sup> The KJV of Colossians 2:2b–3 reads, "to acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom [KJV margin: "or, wherein"] are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." At 2:3, the reading "in whom" would refer to "Christ" ("wherein," however, would refer to "mystery").

<sup>18</sup> Kidder, *Messias*, 1:47–49, is influenced by Hammond's readings of 1 Timothy 3:16 and mentions him (and Pearson and Whitby) at p. 48.

<sup>19</sup> Hammond, *A Paraphrase and Annotations upon the Books of the Psalms, Briefly Explaining the Difficulties Thereof* (London, 1659), 5–12.

<sup>20</sup> For example, Kidder, *Messias*, 1:62–63, writes that Jerusalem was destroyed by Vespasian and his Roman army, to "execute God's displeasure against the *Jews*, for rejecting and crucifying JESUS. And no wonder that GOD should honour him with an extraordinary power, whom he employed in so great a work." Later on, at 1:110, Kidder adds, "Their forefathers wandered forty years in the wilderness for their rebellion [against God when they were led out of slavery in Egypt]; GOD allowed the *Jews* the same time for repentance [after Jesus' death, before destroying Jerusalem]."



movement 1, the aria “Why do the nations so furiously rage together”; movement 2, the chorus “Let us break their bonds asunder”; movement 3, the recitative “He that dwelleth in heaven”; and movement 4, the tenor aria “Thou shalt break them.” These movements from Part 2, Scene 6 of *Messiah* concern not Christmas or Easter but depict the disciples preaching the gospel after Jesus’ ascension. Part 2, Scene 5 closes with the BCP text of Psalm 19:4, “Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world.”<sup>21</sup> Listeners were presumably expected to bring to mind here Romans 10:18, “But I [Paul] say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their [the gospel preachers’] sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world” (KJV). In this there may have been some ambiguity, however, about which people “have . . . not heard.”

Arguably the passage means that all nations have not heard, but Jennens’s critical source—Hammond’s 1653 *Paraphrase*—construes the verse specifically against Jews:

[T]he Jews through all their cities have certainly had the Gospel preached to them by the Apostles, according to Christ’s command, that they should go over all the cities of Jewry, Acts 1.8, before they went to the Gentiles. . . . [And concerning Romans 10:18], the Apostle may (as he doth) appeal to their own consciences (*but I say, Have they not heard?*) whether they [Jews] did not believe that the Jews had universally heard of it [the Gospel]; and consequently did out of obstinacy reject, and not remain ignorant of it.<sup>22</sup>

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Following the Psalm 19:4 text, Scene 6 starts with the thunderous aria “Why do the nations so furiously rage together.” These are the opening words of Psalm 2, given here with underlining that marks the differences among Jennens, the BCP, and Jennens’s other apparent source, Hammond.<sup>23</sup>

*Messiah*

Why do the nations so furiously rage together, and why do the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his Anointed.

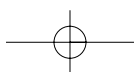
BCP Psalm 2:1–2

Why do the heathen so furiously rage together: and why do the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together: against the Lord, and against his Anointed.

<sup>21</sup> With the word “unto” replacing the BCP’s “into,” likely on the basis of the passage’s quotation in the NT, at Romans 10.

<sup>22</sup> Hammond, *New Testament*, 489–91.

<sup>23</sup> Hammond, *Psalms*, 10.



Hammond Psalm 2:1–2

Why do the heathen (*margin*, “nations”) rage (*margin*, “conspire, assemble”), and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves (*margin*, “rise up”), and the rulers take counsel (*margin*, “assemble”) together against the LORD and against his anointed, saying.

Jennens’s adoption of two key emendations from Hammond opens up several interpretive possibilities. In his commentary, Hammond gives the following reason for changing the KJV’s “set themselves” to “rise up”:

[The rendering] refers most fitly in the historical sense to the warlike assaults of the Philistines & c ordinarily expressed, in the sacred style, by *rising up against*; and so, in the prophetic also, to the *rebellious* of the *enemies* of *Christ* [in their] *insurrections* against his *spiritual* Kingdom.<sup>24</sup>

Hammond’s reading highlights the Psalm’s presumed typological foreshadowing of the (Jewish) uprising against Jesus as told in the NT.

Especially significant for *Messiah* is the change from “heathen” to “nations.” Of this, Hammond writes:

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[A] *conspiration* and *complotting* of wicked men is most agreeable to the *mystical* and *prophetic* notion, that which is fulfilled in the *Jews* and *Romans*’ conjunction against *Christ*, those being the *goyim nations* (so the word literally must be rendered. . .) and in the same sense *lehummim populi*, in the latter part of this verse (as *nations* and *people* are all one) which conspired to put him to *death*.<sup>25</sup>

The advantage of the word “nations” is that it can readily include the Jews, as Hammond indeed expressly notes; no one would have uncritically used the KJV and BCP’s word “heathen” literally of Jews or Judaism.<sup>26</sup> In fact, in the original context of Psalm 2, the word at this point refers decidedly to non-Jews. For the libretto of *Messiah*, Jennens chose a reading (“nations”) that pointedly includes Jews among those who furiously rage.

<sup>24</sup> Hammond, *Psalms*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>26</sup> In 18th-century England even children would know this, for example, from the famous hymn writer Isaac Watts’s wildly popular *Divine Songs for the Use of Children*. The first stanza of song no. 6, “Praise for the Gospel,” reads: “Lord, I ascribe it to thy Grace, / And not to Chance, as others do, / That I was born of *Christian* race, / And not a *Heathen* or a *Jew*.” Isaac Watts, *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (London, 1735), 9. The same holds true for the word “gentiles,” which could have been employed as an emendation to the KJV and BCP at Psalm 2:1.



Other standard sources take a different tack from Hammond and Jennens in accommodating the Psalm toward disdain for Jews, but they do so all the same and thus confirm a contemporary tendency to read Psalm 2 in a way hostile to Judaism. Consider, for example, that in editions from the 1560s to the early 1690s the well-known Sternhold & Hopkins metrical psalms read Psalm 2's first stanza as follows:

Why did the Gentiles tumults raise,  
 What rage was in their brain?  
 Why did the Jewish people muse,  
 Seeing all is but vain?

Jennens may have been familiar with this earlier reading of the text. The Gopsall library contained a book of rhymed biblical paraphrases by Sir Richard Blackmore who renders Psalm 2 much in the same vein as the unrevised Sternhold & Hopkins:

What does the heathen fire with so much rage?  
 What Jacob's sons in such designs engage  
 As they can ne'er effect, or if they do,  
 They'll miss the end they furiously pursue?<sup>27</sup>

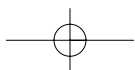
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The text of Psalm 2:1–2 is set in *Messiah* as an aria drawing on the tradition of Monteverdi's *stile concitato*, using continually repeated sixteenth notes as a convention for violent affects.<sup>28</sup> In Handel's setting the nations and the people indeed rise up against Jesus in the warlike sense suggested by Hammond. When they "imagine a vain thing," "the people" (meaning the Jews<sup>29</sup>) are associated with a striking melodic shape in the first violin line that features oscillating pitches. (The alternating of adjoining tones for a beat or two is a commonplace, but at mm. 12–13 and parallels the extension of the figure for eight beats will have been rare in the absence of a specific textual motivation. With their strangely extended oscillating harmonies, too, mm. 12–13 can hardly be taken as a conventional written-out cadential ornament.) A similar melodic idea, likewise in the violins and identically articulated,

<sup>27</sup> Sir Richard Blackmore, *A Paraphrase on the Book of Job as Likewise on the Songs of Moses, Deborah, David, on Four Select Psalms, Some Chapters of Isaiah, and the Third Chapter of Habakkuk* (London, 1700), 217. This book also contains a noxious version of Isaiah 53, a chapter that figures heavily in *Messiah*.

<sup>28</sup> Such repeated 16th-note writing for string instruments is commonly employed in baroque music depicting battle violence; see, for example, the violin parts in Monteverdi's "Hor che'l ciel e la terra" from his 8th book of madrigals, and J. S. Bach's Cantatas 60, 67, and 80.

<sup>29</sup> In the Bible, "the people" is a technical term for Israel (the Jews). The original text of Psalm 2, however, here reads "the peoples," referring to gentiles, not Jews.



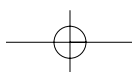
depicts the Jews in the accompanied recitative, “All they that see him laugh him to scorn; they shoot out their lips, and shake their heads.” This striking line pre-echoes the oscillating violin line in “Why do the nations.” The recitative sets Psalm 22:7, adapted from the BCP, a passage that prefigures Matthew 27:39–40, “they [Jewish pilgrims attending Passover<sup>30</sup>] that passed by, reviled him [Jesus, on the cross], wagging their heads.” Thus the oscillating figure and its scornful affect are associated with the Jews and captures their rejection of Jesus as the presumed Messiah.

Another possible example of this oscillating melodic gesture is met at the phrase “the crooked straight” in the aria “Ev’ry valley shall be exalted, and ev’ry mountain and hill made low, the crooked straight, and the rough places plain.” (Handel originally set this at m. 6 and parallel passages with an oscillation lasting not four but eight beats.) This is Isaiah 40:4, a passage that prefigures Luke 3:5, “Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth.” Of the passage in Luke, the 18th-century biblical scholar Edward Wells writes: “[This] may be understood . . . ultimately of God’s restoring once more the Jews to their country on their conversion to Christianity, and removing all obstacles thereto.”<sup>31</sup> Thus Handel’s music for the aria “Every valley” could be understood to express the notion that the crooked Jews shall be made straight Christians.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps here—and

<sup>30</sup> First-century Jews, not Romans, would say, “Thou that destroyest the temple . . . save thyself” (Matthew 27:40). In private correspondence a renowned Handel scholar has insisted that with “All they that see [as opposed to saw] him” Jennens is generalizing to include all humanity, Jews and gentiles. But this cannot be right, as Jennens’s fuller text reads “all they that see him laugh him to scorn,” and the Christians among all humanity would under no circumstances “laugh [Jesus] to scorn.”

<sup>31</sup> Edward Wells, *An Help for the more Easy and Clear Understanding of the Holy Scriptures: Being the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Lamentations* (Oxford, 1728), 1:98. Jennens presumably owned Wells’s biblical commentaries (Wells is listed in *Gopsall Catalogue*, 121).

<sup>32</sup> In his book of 50 sermons on Handel’s *Messiah* the preacher John Newton, best known today as the author of the hymn “Amazing Grace,” writes similarly but even more harshly of this aria text, along with the chorus that follows it: “The Jewish teachers, by their traditions and will-worship, had given an apparent obliquity to the straight and perfect rule of the law of God, and deformed the beauties of holiness, binding heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne upon the conscience; but he vindicated the law from their corrupt glosses, and made the path of obedience plain, practicable and pleasant. / Thus the glory of the Lord was revealed. Not to every eye; many, prejudiced by [Jesus’] outward appearance, and by the low mistaken views the Jews indulged of the office and kingdom of MESSIAH, whom they expected, could see no form or excellence in him, that they should desire him.” John Newton, *Messiah: Fifty Expository Discourses, On the Series of Scriptural Passages, which form the Subject of the Celebrated Oratorio of Handel* (London, 1786), 1:42–43. Newton of course postdates the composition of Handel’s *Messiah*, but I considered him interesting and relevant where other sources in the later 18th-century English



more clearly in the passages from Psalm 2—the musical oscillating gesture is meant to throw a sharp light on the loathsome characteristics ascribed in the NT to the Jews.

Another significant word Jennens chose from Hammond's version of Psalm 2 is "yoke." The second movement in Scene 6 of Part 2 sets Psalm 2:3 as a chorus with old-fashioned North German counterpoint reminiscent of the *turba* ("crowd") choruses in baroque settings of the passion narrative.<sup>33</sup>

*Messiah*

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

BCP Psalm 2:3

Let us break their bonds asunder: and cast away their cords from us.

Hammond Psalm 2:3

Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords (marginal note: "or yokes") from us.

The choice of "yoke" here is significant. Hammond comments:

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And proportionable to these [enemies of King David in Psalm 2] were the Jews and heathens in the prophetic sense [in the NT], which would not endure Christ's . . . *yoke* of purity and sincere obedience (no slavish bands or chains, but) an easy, nay gracious *yoke*, which alone he now imposed on them, but would not be endured by those hypocrites.<sup>34</sup>

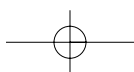
"Yoke" appears earlier in *Messiah*, linked specifically and affirmingly with Jesus. At the close of Part 1, a soloist and chorus had magnificently declared, in light and gentle music that expresses the blessings Christ is believed to bring:

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Christian exegetical tradition might not be, generally because he was theologically conservative (and thus represents earlier views as well) and specifically because he sermonized on the oratorio itself; indeed, it was probably owing to his conservatism that Newton saw it fitting to preach on the *Messiah* libretto in the 1780s. Newton's sermons may reasonably be taken to show how many early listeners will have understood *Messiah*. His sermons have also long affected the oratorio's reception, as they were reprinted often in London, Edinburgh, and Philadelphia (at least five times by 1812, the year an abbreviated version appeared, this one too later reprinted); the sermons were also incorporated into Newton's collected works, first issued in 1831 and reprinted many times in the 19th and 20th centuries.

<sup>33</sup> Jens Peter Larsen, *Handel's Messiah: Origins, Composition, Sources*, rev. ed. (New York: Norton, 1972), 84, says that the musical character of this chorus, and others like it in *Messiah*, "derive from the traditions not of opera but of the Passion"; he also suggests, at p. 166, that this movement is "the most definite crowd chorus in *Messiah*."

<sup>34</sup> Hammond, *Psalms*, 8.



Come unto him [i.e. Jesus], all ye that labour, come unto him all ye that are heavy laden, and he will give you rest. *Take his yoke upon you, and learn of him; for he is meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

*His yoke is easy, and his burden is light.*

These are Jennens's adaptations of Matthew 11:28–30 from the KJV (with biblical first-person expressions changed to the third person). In a typological reading, that passage is prefigured in Jeremiah 6:16 from the OT:

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls: but they said, We will not walk therein.

This connection between passages in Jeremiah and Matthew, and thus between the Old and New Testaments, was understood by biblical commentators represented in the Gopsall library as a condemnation of Old Israel. Daniel Whitby, for example, writes of Matthew 11:28, "Come (*therefore*) unto me all ye that labour (*under the bondage and condemnation of the Law,*) and are heavy laden (*with the burdens of Pharisaical impositions,*) and I will give you rest, (*ease, and deliverance from these burdens*)." <sup>35</sup> Similarly Edward Wells: "either with the burden or under the yoke of your own sins, or of the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaical law, *and I will give you rest* from both these."<sup>36</sup> Of Matthew 11:29 Whitby goes on to say:

Take my yoke upon you, (*become my disciples,*) and learn (*not of these blind guides* [i.e. the Jewish scribes and Pharisees; see Matthew 23], *but*) of me, for I am (*not like those severe and supercilious [Jewish] doctors, which despise you as people of the earth, and will not vouchsafe even to converse with publicans and sinners, for their reformation, but I am*) meek and lowly in heart, (*and full of pity to every burdened soul,*) and (*so by coming to me*) ye shall find rest (*peace, quiet, satisfaction, and refreshment*) to your souls.<sup>37</sup>

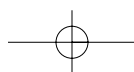
Concerning the next verse, Matthew 11:30, Kidder comments:

Indeed the law of *Moses* might be justly called weak, as compared with the doctrine of the gospel; [the law] *gave not life*. . . . It was a yoke, but

<sup>35</sup> Whitby, *Commentary*, 1:104–5.

<sup>36</sup> Wells, *An Help for the more Easy and Clear Understanding of the Holy Scriptures: Being the Two Gospels of St Matthew and St Mark* (Oxford, 1717), 119.

<sup>37</sup> Whitby, *Commentary*, 1:105.



not an easy one, or like that which JESUS puts upon us, but such as the *Jews* knew neither how to *bear* (Gal.iv.3,24) or to *break*.<sup>38</sup>

And on this passage Whitby writes, “For my yoke is (*not as theirs [i.e., the Jews’] is, burdensome, and galling, but it is*) easy, and my burden is light.”<sup>39</sup> These commentaries point in a clear direction: Jennens and his sources are not content simply to *disagree* with Judaism and to prefer Christianity. They continually register contempt for what Judaism postdating the advent of Jesus continues to represent, and the “easy burden” and “light yoke” of the *Messiah* text reflect this.

The third movement from Scene 6 is a recitative that sets Psalm 2:4, with text unchanged from the BCP.

*Messiah*

He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn: The Lord shall have them in derision.

BCP Psalm 2:4

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

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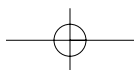
Earlier in *Messiah*, with Jennens’s emendation of Psalm 22 in the accompanied recitative mentioned above, “they [the Jews] . . . laugh him [Jesus] to scorn.” But now with Psalm 2:4 “*He* [the Lord]. . . shall laugh *them* [the Jewish rulers, whose Temple will be destroyed] to scorn.”<sup>40</sup> The choice and placement of typologically understood Psalm texts creates a striking turnaround, from Jews’ contempt for Jesus to Jesus’ contempt for Jews.

In the fourth movement from Scene 6, the aria “Thou shalt break them,” Jennens skips to Psalm 2:9 and—for nearly the only time in

<sup>38</sup> Kidder, *Messias*, 1:155.

<sup>39</sup> Whitby, *Commentary*, 1:105.

<sup>40</sup> Jennens’s use of Psalm 2 suggests no scorning whatever of gentiles. The language of Psalm 2:4 is used of Jews in 18th-century England as well, deriving I would guess from *Messiah* itself. Henry Francis Offley, *Richard Brothers, Neither a Madman nor an Impostor* (London, 1795), 8–9, writes (emphases original): “certainly the Jews almost ever since the destruction of their kingdom by Titus Vespasian [in the year 70], have been without a fix’d abode, and have been scattered all over the earth, neglecting the Lord their God . . . and truly it may be said that their “*feet find no rest*,” for every where these unfortunate people are derided, insulted and abused. Even to England . . . a country professing the greatest humanity to strangers and foreigners — we see them wandering about the streets . . . in the most menial occupation, . . . the objects of universal ridicule and contempt . . . — nay, so much are they held in derision in this Christian country, that even children deride them and *laugh them to scorn*”; quoted in Frank Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture, 1660–1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1995), 65.





*Messiah*—uses the KJV entirely as his source rather than the BCP. Psalm 2:9 reads as follows in Jennens and his sources:

*Messiah*

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

BCP Psalm 2:9

Thou shalt bruise them with a rod of iron: and break them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

KJV Psalm 2:9

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

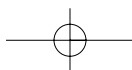
Jennens presumably found the KJV reading more dramatic and effective than the BCP.<sup>41</sup> “Break them / dash them in pieces” sounds even more violent than “bruise them / break them in pieces.” But more significant is his skipping over verses 5–8. This allows the word “them” of Psalm 2:9, in the tenor aria, to take as its antecedent “the nations” and more specifically “the people” (Israel, the Jews) or their rulers from his altered version of Psalm 2:1–4, in the bass aria. Had he included verses 5–8 for Handel to set, Jennens would have been forced to contend with the biblically proper antecedent for the word “them” at verse 9, namely the BCP and KJV’s “heathen” (meaning gentiles) of verse 8, there depicted as a group that will be inherited by the Anointed One. The excision of Psalm 2:5–8 makes the violent language he chose in “Thou shalt break them” refer to the Jews.

But who is “thou” in the aria “Thou shalt break them” if typologically Jews most prominently make up “them”? (Note that unlike the Sanhedrin and Jewish people, Pilate and his fellow gentile characters of Acts 4, where Psalm 2 is extensively quoted, are not broken or dashed to pieces.) In his preaching on *Messiah*, Newton understood “thou” to be “the Lord,” and “them” the Jewish nation:

The Romans were the iron rod in his [i.e. the Lord's] hand, where-with he dashed the Jewish nation to pieces [in the year 70]. Their fragments are scattered far and wide to this day [i.e. the 1780s], and who can gather them up? . . . I have been informed that the music to which this passage is set [by Handel], is so well adapted to the idea that it expresses, as, in a manner, to startle those who hear it.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> So argues Ruth apRoberts, *The Biblical Web* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1994), chap. 5, “Handel’s English Masterwork,” 96.

<sup>42</sup> Newton, *Messiah*, 2:170.



In standard earlier English sources, Psalm 2:9 (the *type*) was conventionally understood to prefigure the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 (Psalm 2:9's *antitype*).<sup>43</sup> This is Hammond's understanding. He writes of verse 9, "[The typological reading is:] . . . so shall Christ deal with his enemies, Jews and heathens, subdue some, and destroy the impregnable, and obdurate"<sup>44</sup>; he goes on to comment and sum up, at the end of the Psalm, by focusing on God's exemplary rebuke of practitioners of Judaism.

[Those who] shall stand out, and not acknowledge his divine power, now [that] he [i.e. Jesus] is risen from the dead, but continue to provoke him still, they will certainly have their portion with his enemies, be destroyed with the Jews, or after the like manner, that the Jews were, when the Romans came in, and wrought a horrid desolation among them, and only the believing Christian Jews, by obeying Christ's directions, were delivered out of it.<sup>45</sup>

(God was believed to have rescued the Jerusalem followers of Jesus by having them flee to Pella before the Jewish war broke out in the years 66–70.)<sup>46</sup>

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God's violent antipathy first of all toward Jews is further reflected in the well-known contemporary commentary by Matthew Henry (a source still widely used by evangelical Christians today), who juxtaposes Psalm 2 and Revelation 11:

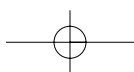
'Tis here [at Psalm 2:7–9] promis'd [to the Son], (1.) That his Government shall be *universal*, he shall have *the Heathen for his Inheritance*; not the *Jews* only . . . GOD the Father *gives them* [baptized Christians] *to him* [Jesus] when by his Spirit and Grace he works upon them to submit their Necks to the Yoke of the Lord JESUS. This is in part fulfill'd; a great part of the Gentile World receiv'd the Gospel when it was first preach'd, and CHRIST's throne was set up there where Satan's Seat had long been: But it is to be yet further accomplish'd, when *the Kingdoms of this World shall become the Kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ*, Rev. xi. 15. *Who shall live when God doth this!* (2.) That it [Christ's government] shall be victorious, *Thou shalt break them, i.e.,*

<sup>43</sup> Haggai 2:6–7 and Malachi 3:1–3 (set as nos. 5–7 in *Messiah*), were likewise generally taken in our various sources to prefigure the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple in the year 70. Here too, as with Psalm 2, Handel's music draws on the *stile concitato*.

<sup>44</sup> Hammond, *Psalms*, 11.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>46</sup> This presumably was derived from the now-controversial notion in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Historia ecclesiastica*; see Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, trans. G. A. Williamson (Baltimore: Penguin, 1965), 111. Eusebius is found in anthologies listed in the *Gopsall Catalogue*, as reconstructed in Erhardt, "Händels *Messiah*," 213, 219.



those of them that oppose thy Kingdom, *with a rod of iron*, v. 9. This was in part fulfill'd when the Nation of the *Jews*, those that persisted in Unbelief and Enmity to CHRIST's Gospel, were destroy'd by the *Roman Power*, which was represented, *Dan. ii. 40*, by *Feet of Iron*, as here by *a Rod of Iron*. It had a further accomplishment in the Destruction of the *Pagan Powers*, when the Christian Religion came to be establish'd; but it will not be completely fulfill'd till all opposing Rule, Principality and Power, shall be finally put down, *1 Cor. xv. 24*. See *Psal. cx. 5, 6*.<sup>47</sup>

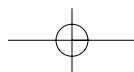
This is the same juxtaposition found at the end of Part 2 in *Messiah*, where the setting of Psalm 2 in four movements of Scene 6 leads to the rejoicing of the Hallelujah chorus, a setting of Revelation 11.

In the later 18th century—indeed, in preaching on Part 2 of *Messiah*—Newton likewise understood Psalm 2 as a typological prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem:

Opposition to MESSIAH and his kingdom, is . . . ruinous to those who engage in it. What did the Jews build, when they rejected the foundation stone which God had laid in Zion [i.e. see Psalm 118:22]? They acted, as they thought, with precaution and foresight. They said, *If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and our nation*, John xi.<sup>48</sup> Foolish politicians! Did they preserve their city by crucifying the Son of God! The very evil they feared came upon them. Or rather, being abandoned of God to their own counsels, they brought it upon themselves. In a few years, the Romans, with whom they appeared so desirous to keep upon good terms, destroyed their city with an unheard of destruction, and exterminated them from the land. This was an emblem of the inevitable, total, irreparable ruin, which awaits all those who persist in rejecting the rule of MESSIAH. The nation, the individual, that will not serve him must surely perish. / Ah! if sinners did but know what the bonds and cords are, which they are so determined to break; . . . if they were aware what more dreadful bonds . . . they are rivetting upon themselves, by refusing his easy yoke, they would throw down their arms and submit.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Matthew Henry, *An Exposition of the Five Poetical Books of the Old Testament . . . Wherein the Chapters and Psalms are summ'd up in Contents . . . With Practical Remarks and Observations* (London, 1725), 143; modern repr. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in 6 Volumes* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 3:245.

<sup>48</sup> Newton, *Messiah*, 2:137–39. This understanding of Psalm 2 has a long history. After *Messiah* and before Newton, the anonymous *A Paraphrase and Exposition of the Book of Psalms; Designed Principally for the Use of the Unlearned Reader* (London, 1768), 4, reports concerning Psalm 2:8, “*Theodoret* [Bishop of Cyrrhus, 5th century] doth well observe, that this is plainly a prophecy of the call of the Gentiles to Christianity . . . He observes too, that [Psalm 2:9] doth plainly allude to the final destruction of *Jerusalem*. And I must add, that so may the following words, ‘thou shalt break them in pieces,’ & c. to the dispersion of the *Jews*, which at this day is manifest to all.”



These interpretations form the background for the choice and placement of the text “Thou shalt break them.” And Handel’s aria setting contains striking musical gestures that may be understood to emphasize exactly this interpretation. The strings continually switch from low, *marcato* eighth notes (presumably symbolizing the “dashing/breaking”) to high alternating sixteenths—the sort of oscillating procedure we noted earlier is associated elsewhere in *Messiah* with Jews. Here, as indeed all through *Messiah*, there will be no weeping over Jerusalem or lamenting humankind’s sin.<sup>49</sup> Newton expresses it well:

[“Thou shalt break them”] prepares for the close of the second part of the Oratorio. [Christ’s] enemies shall perish, his kingdom shall be established and consumated. And then all holy intelligent beings shall join in a song of triumph, *Hallelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.*<sup>50</sup>

### *The Rejoicing of the Hallelujah Chorus*

What is *Messiah*’s response to the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, widely understood as signaling the downfall of Judaism? “*Hallelujah!* for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” Here, as before, Jennens does not simply render the KJV verbatim; rather, he turns to biblical commentator Edward Wells:

#### *Messiah*

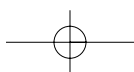
Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever, King of kings, and Lord of lords. Hallelujah!

KJV Revelation 19:6, 11:15, 19:16

Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. . . . The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever. . . . KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

<sup>49</sup> On the topic of lamenting humankind’s sin, for example in the choral works of Bach, see Michael Marissen, “Blood, People, and Crowds in Matthew, Luther, and Bach,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 19 (2005): 1–22; Marissen, “The Character and Sources of the Anti-Judaism in Bach’s Cantata 46,” *Harvard Theological Review* 96 (2003): 63–99; and Marissen, *Lutheranism, Anti-Judaism, and Bach’s St. John Passion* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998).

<sup>50</sup> Newton, *Messiah*, 2:160. Wells, *Psalms*, 1:85, paraphrases Psalm 2:9, “Such as obstinately oppose the truth and growth of the gospel, shall undergo the divine vengeance in a signal manner, if not in this, yet in the other world [i.e. in hell].”



Wells<sup>51</sup> Revelation 19:6, 11:15, 19:16  
 Hallelujah; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. . . . The kingdom  
 of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ,  
 and he shall reign for ever and ever. . . . KING OF KINGS, AND  
 LORD OF LORDS.

There are several advantages for *Messiah* in adopting the emenda-  
 tions of Wells. Wells and Jennens's spelling "Hallelujah" might serve as  
 a stronger appropriation of Hebraic language than the KJV's more  
 Greek-like transliteration "alleluia." Part 2 of *Messiah* ends with the  
 Hebrew "Hallelujah" and part 3 with the Hebrew "Amen"—and indeed  
 the very title of the oratorio is the Hebraic "Messiah" as opposed to  
 Greek-like "Christ" or the Greek-derived "Messias." Indeed the "Halle-  
 lujah" chorus echoes a Hebrew prayer that circulated in English in the  
 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1738 Abraham Mears (pseud. Gamaliel ben Pedahzur)  
 published a translation of the Siddur (Jewish prayer book) so that  
 English-speaking Christians (and Jews, for that matter) could get an ex-  
 act idea of the content of Jewish worship.<sup>52</sup> There was among the Sab-  
 bath day observances in Judaism a *Messiah*-like prayer whose Hebrew  
 Mears renders:

*Read[er]*: And our eyes shall behold the kingdom . . . [as it is said] of  
*David* thy righteous anointed.

*Cong[regation]*: He shall reign king, the Lord, forever, the God of *Sion*;  
 throughout all generations praise ye the Lord. *Hallelujah*.<sup>53</sup>

The spelling "Hallelujah" draws *Messiah*'s text closer to its Hebrew  
 origins.

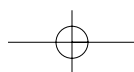
As for the change from "kingdoms" in the KJV to "kingdom" in the  
 chorus, there are many possible explanations. The use of the singular  
 would update the KJV, because the Greek NT is actually singular here,  
 not plural. There might be also a good theological explanation. Ruth  
 apRoberts puts it well: "*kingdoms* suggests political entities, while *king-  
 dom of this world* suggests rather the dispensation of our worldly fallen  
 nature."<sup>54</sup> But our historical sources suggest possibilities that are equally

<sup>51</sup> Wells, *An Help for the more Easy and Clear Understanding of the Holy Scriptures: Being the Revelation of St John the Divine* (Oxford, 1717), at Revelation 19:6, 11:15, 19:16.

<sup>52</sup> Abraham Mears [pseud. Gamaliel ben Pedahzur], *The Book of Religion, Ceremonies, and Prayers of the Jews; . . . What the Modern Jews Religiously Observe* (London, 1738). Mears was the first to make these materials available in English, according to David S. Katz, *The Jews in the History of England, 1485–1850* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), 232.

<sup>53</sup> Mears, *Book of Religion of the Jews*, 2:149 (further, 2:160 and 2:216).

<sup>54</sup> apRoberts, *Biblical Web*, 96.



—even more—likely, and certainly less blithesome. Wells explains that “the kingdom” of Revelation 11:15 concerns

the *happy state of the Church* upon the sounding of the *seventh* trumpet. . . . [T]he supreme civil power here on earth is now in the hands of the saints [i.e. the Church] or faithful servants of Christ, . . . the saints shall thus continue to have the dominion even of the earth to the end of this world.<sup>55</sup>

Commenting on this same passage, Jennens’s influential source Hammond specifically brings Psalm 2 to bear on the sense of Christian triumph in Revelation 11. This must be more than coincidence, and thus it is reasonable to suppose that Jennens got the idea of juxtaposing these passages from Hammond’s commentary:

Now [with Revelation 11:15–19] is fulfilled that prophecy of Psal[m] 2. The Jewish nation have behaved themselves most stubbornly against Christ, and cruelly against Christians, and thy [i.e. God’s] judgments are come upon them [with the wars of the year 70, and 132].<sup>56</sup>

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Offering the same rendering of Revelation 11:15 as Wells, the great 18th-century biblical scholar Daniel Mace describes “the kingdom of this world” as a Jewish realm that God turned over to the Christians:

JUDEA was frequently styled *the world* by the Jews. See [Revelation] chap. iii. 10 [and] Luke ii. 1. When the Jews were banished from Judea, the Christians were allowed to stay there unmolested.<sup>57</sup>

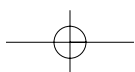
Concerning the “King of kings, and Lord of lords” of Revelation 19:16 (see also 1 Timothy 6:15), John Pearson writes:

[Jesus Christ] showeth his regal dominion in the destruction of his enemies, whether they were temporal or spiritual enemies. Temporal, as the *Jews* and *Romans*, who joined together in his crucifixion. While he was on earth he told his disciples, *There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the son of man coming in his kingdom*: and in that kingdom he was then seen to come, when [in the years 66–70] he brought utter destruction on the *Jews* by the *Roman* armies, not long

<sup>55</sup> Wells, *Revelation*, 89.

<sup>56</sup> Hammond, *New Testament*, 906.

<sup>57</sup> Daniel Mace, *The New Testament in Greek and English: Containing the Original Text Corrected from the Authority of the most Authentic Manuscripts, and a New Version Form’d Agreeably to the Illustrations of the most Learned Commentators and Critics* (London, 1729), 2:978. It is impossible to be sure which Bible is meant in *Gopsall Catalogue*, 122, by the entry “An 18th-century Bible, in 2 parts, 2 [vols.]”



after to be destroyed themselves. . . . Thus [in destroying his enemies] is our *Jesus* become the *prince of the kings of the earth*; thus is the *Lamb* acknowledged to be *Lord of lords, and King of kings*.<sup>58</sup>

The immediately preceding passage within Revelation 19 (i.e. verse 15) also draws on Psalm 2:

And out of his [i.e. the Word of God's] mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule<sup>59</sup> them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of almighty God.

Jennens's revision of Revelation 11:15 creates a stronger antagonism toward *post Christi adventum* Judaism than the standard text from the KJV does.

Handel's music makes substantial if less significant contributions. The general mood of the Hallelujah chorus is over-the-top triumph. Trumpets and drums are used together for the first time in *Messiah*, although there are several places earlier where they would have been appropriate or welcome.<sup>60</sup> In Handel's day trumpets with drums were, of course, emblems of great power and of victory.<sup>61</sup> In *Messiah* they are saved for celebrating the destruction of Christ's "enemies" prefigured in Psalm 2.

Describing the triumphal tone of the Hallelujah chorus, the 18th-century English music historian Charles Burney writes:

The opening is clear, cheerful, and bold. And the words, "*For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth,*" (Rev.xix.6.) [are] set to a fragment of canto fermo, which all the parts sing, as such, in unisons and octaves, has an effect truly ecclesiastical. It is afterwards made the subject of fugue and ground-work for the Allelujah.<sup>62</sup>

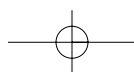
<sup>58</sup> Pearson, *Creed*, 108.

<sup>59</sup> The reason Revelation 19 reads "rule them with a rod of iron" rather than "break" is that the (Greek) Septuagint reads "rule" at Psalm 2:9; that is, the (likewise Greek) text of Revelation is quoting the Septuagint's understanding of the original Hebrew of Psalm 2. In the earliest, purely consonantal Hebrew text the word at Psalm 2:9 could yield "break" or "rule," depending on which vowels are supplied; this is mentioned in Hammond, *Psalms*, 17.

<sup>60</sup> At "Glory to God in the highest" the trumpets are used (without drums), but they are instructed to play *da lontano e un poco piano* (softly and at a distance). Some performances today do include trumpets and drums earlier on in *Messiah*, but these rely on new orchestrations devised after Handel's death.

<sup>61</sup> The aria "Or la tromba" from Handel's opera *Rinaldo* is one example.

<sup>62</sup> Charles Burney, *An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster-Abbey, and the Pantheon, May 26th, 27th, 29th; and June the 3d, and 5th, 1784: In Commemoration of Handel* (London, 1785), 83.



EXAMPLE 1. Line 5 of “Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern” and “for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” from the Hallelujah chorus

Mein Kö - nig und mein Bräu - ti - gam  
for the Lord God om - ni - po - tent reign - eth

As Tassilo Erhardt has shown, the melody in question (Ex. 1) corresponds subtly to the Lutheran chorale *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern* of Philipp Nicolai.<sup>63</sup> At measure 12, at the words “For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth,” Handel’s tune corresponds to line 5 of the hymn.

At measure 34, as Erhardt has likewise pointed out, there is a striking quotation from another Nicolai chorale, *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* (Ex. 2).<sup>64</sup> Handel’s music employs a particular phrase twice, first to the words “The kingdom of this world” then instrumentally (and then actually a third time, again from the instruments while the chorus sings other material). This corresponds to the chorale melody at the words “Wohlauf, der Bräut’gam kommt, / Steht auf, die Lampen nehmt!” (lines 7–8 of the first stanza, likewise twice). (However conventional the motif might sound, its double iteration is distinctive.)

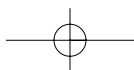
At measure 41 there is a second quotation from *Wachet auf* (Ex. 3):<sup>65</sup> Handel’s fugue subject for the words “and he shall reign for ever and ever” is loosely but recognizably based on the chorale’s lines 3, 6, and 11 (“Wach auf du Stadt Jerusalem!”, “Wo seid ihr klugen Jungfrauen?”, and “Ihr müsset ihm entgegengehen!” in the first stanza).

We may reasonably wonder why Handel quotes Lutheran chorales and why these two from among the thousands of hymns. If they were indeed conscious quotations, Handel may have had personal reasons that we do not know, or perhaps the references were Jennens’s suggestion. I doubt that many of Handel’s original listeners were clued in to the allusions, except perhaps for some members of the Hanoverian royal family and their German courtiers. But the question I wish to pursue is inter-

<sup>63</sup> Erhardt, “Händels *Messiah*,” 153.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>65</sup> Noted in Larsen, *Handel’s Messiah*, 152. This identification is accepted also by John Roberts, “German Chorales in Handel’s English Works,” *Händel-Jahrbuch* 42–43 (1996–97): 77–100, who notes that Handel similarly employs the *Wachet auf* melody in his *Ode for St. Cecilia’s Day* (1739).





EXAMPLE 2. Lines 7–8 of “Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme” and vocal and instrumental lines at “the kingdom of this world” from the Hallelujah chorus

Wohl - auf, der Bräut - gam kömmt, Steht auf, die Lam - pen nehmt

V1  
S The king - dom of this — world is be - come

EXAMPLE 3. Line 3 (= lines 6 and 11) of “Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme” and “and he shall reign for ever and ever” from the Hallelujah chorus

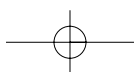
Wach auf, du Stadt Je - ru - sa - lem

and he shall reign for - e - ver and e - ver

pretive: Given these relationships, what might Handel’s music plausibly mean? Considering where they are placed in Part 2 of *Messiah*, I see the greatest explanatory power in the notion that these chorales serve to heighten the chorus’s exulting over Judaism (see Table 1).

Both Nicolai chorales are unmistakably meant to call to mind the story of the wise and foolish virgins in Matthew 25:1–13: Ten virgins are waiting for the bridegroom to come. The foolish virgins do not have enough oil in their lamps to last until midnight, when the bridegroom is to arrive. They go off in search of more oil and thus miss his arrival. When they come to the marriage feast the door is shut, and the bridegroom rejects them, saying, “Verily I say unto you, I know you not.”

Biblical interpreters generally agree that Matthew 25:1–13 is a parable about the Second Coming of Christ. Jesus, the Bridegroom, will marry his Bride, the Church, in a great Heavenly Feast, which some invited guests will be in a position to attend and others will not. It is not always clear whether the Foolish Virgins simply represent all the unsaved or a rather particular group that personifies the unsaved. One inveterate tradition, still frequently preached in certain circles today (if

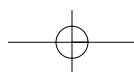


## TABLE 1

## Texts of two chorales by Philipp Nicolai, with 18th-century English translations

	<i>Lyra Davidica</i> 1708
Wie schön leuchtet der <u>Morgenstern</u> Voll Gnad und Wahrheit von dem Herrn, Die süße Wurzel Jesse! Du Sohn Davids aus Jakobs Stamm, Mein <u>König</u> und mein <u>Bräutigam</u> , Hast mir mein Herz besessen, Lieblich, freundlich, Schön und herrlich, groß und ehrlich, Reich von Gaben, Hoch und sehr prächtig erhaben!	How fairly shines ye <u>morning Star</u> , <sup>66</sup> with grace & truth beyond compare,  Great Jesse's Offspring Royal. Hail David's Son of Jacob's line, thou art my <u>King</u> & <u>Spouse divine</u> , thou hast my heart true Loyal. lovely, kind, free, in whose sweet face, Celestial grace in full glory Shines from heav'n's highest Story.
	<i>Lyra Davidica</i> 1708
190 Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme Der Wächter sehr hoch auf der Zinne,  Wach auf du Stadt Jerusalem! <u>Mitternacht</u> heißt diese Stunde! Sie rufen uns mit hellem Munde:  Wo seid ihr <u>klugen Jung-frauen</u> ?  Wohlauf, der <u>Bräut'gam</u> kommt, Steht auf, die <u>Lampen</u> nehmt! <u>Halleluja!</u> Macht euch bereit zur <u>Hochzeitsfreud</u> ;  Ihr müsset ihm entgegen geh'n!	Awake ye voice is crying o'the Watchmen from their towers espying, O wake O City of Jerusalem. 'Tis <u>midnight</u> cry surrounding While clear and shrill ye voice is sounding, Hast[e] <u>Virgins deckt with Wisdom's</u> Sacred gem. Now comes your <u>Spouse</u> & King, Love's burning <u>lamps</u> now bring. <u>Halleluja</u> ; get ready trim'd & drest for th' <u>Nuptial</u> <u>Feast</u> and hast[e] to welcome down your Lordly Guest.

<sup>66</sup> Note that Psalm 2 is adapted in Revelation 2:27–28: “And he [the disciple, who overcomes, and keeps the Son of God’s works to the end] shall rule them [the nations] with a rod of iron: as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I [the Son of God] received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star.” The “morning star” is an epithet also of Christ; see Revelation 22:16, “I Jesus . . . am the bright and morning star.” See also the Messianic “Star out of Jacob” at Numbers 24:17, and the “star” leading the Magi to the infant Jesus in Matthew 2:2,10. The juxtaposition of the morning star and the allusion to Psalm 2 at Revelation 2 may play a role in accounting for Handel’s alluding to the chorale tune *Wie schön leuchtet* in the Hallelujah chorus.



Internet-posted sermons are any indication), is that the five Wise Virgins represent *Ecclesia* (Christianity) while the Foolish Virgins represent *Synagoga* (Judaism). This is a tradition Jennens may well have known. For example, he might have read the pitiless interpretation of Matthew 25 as *Ecclesia* against *Synagoga* in the gospel paraphrases of the contemporary theologian Samuel Clarke.<sup>67</sup> Whether Jennens had any hand in Handel's compositional choices in the Hallelujah chorus is unknown.<sup>68</sup> But through Handel or Jennens or both, this interpretation of Matthew 25 appears to lie behind the composer's setting of the Hallelujah chorus.

With Old Israel supposedly rejected by God and its obsolescence long ago secured, why did 18th-century writers and composers rejoice against Judaism at all, whether explicitly or, as here in *Messiah*, implicitly? I would guess there must have been some festering Christian anxiety about the prolonged survival of Judaism: How could a "false" religion last so long?<sup>69</sup> Might Judaism somehow actually be "true"? These issues were a matter of life and death, says one of Jennens's key guides, the *Messiah* source by Bishop Richard Kidder with which we began:

If we be wrong in . . . [theological] dispute with the *Jews*, we err fundamentally, and must never hope for salvation. So that either *we*, or the *Jews* must be in a state of damnation. Of such great importance are those matters in dispute between us and them.<sup>70</sup>

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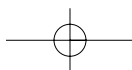
This would represent motivation indeed for the text and musical setting of *Messiah* to engage these issues.

<sup>67</sup> Samuel Clarke, *A Paraphrase on the Four Evangelists . . . Very Useful for Families* (London, 1736), 174–77. The *Gopsall Catalogue* (at p. 116) specifically lists one work of Clarke: his *Sermons on the Following Subjects, viz. of Faith in God; of the Unity of God* (London, 1730–31); there are many entries listing simply "Theological Works, [manifold vols.]," and it is possible that Clarke's paraphrase was among these. John Tillotson, *The Works of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson* (London, 1728; listed in *Gopsall Catalogue*, 128), "Sermon XXXI: The Parable of the Ten Virgins," 1:281–90, unlike Clarke, does not argue for the Church against the Synagogue. For a history of artistic interpretations of Matthew 25, see Regine Körkel-Hinkforth, *Die Parabel von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen, Mt. 25, 1–13, in der bildenden Kunst und im geistlichen Schauspiel* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1994), including at pp. 85–88 many examples from cathedral sculptures, stained glass, and altar paintings in which *Ecclesia* is linked with the Wise Virgins and *Synagoga* with the Foolish Virgins.

<sup>68</sup> He seems to have had an influence elsewhere. For example, for a 1745 revival of *Messiah* Handel wrote a chorus for the text "Their sound is gone out" to replace the aria setting of 1743, possibly at Jennens's insistence; see Burrows, *Messiah*, 34. Jennens's attempts to revise Handel's score of the oratorio *Saul* are discussed in Anthony Hicks, "Handel, Jennens and *Saul*: Aspects of a Collaboration," in *Music & Theatre: Essays in Honour of Winton Dean*, ed. Nigel Fortune (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 203–27.

<sup>69</sup> Augustine famously believed the survival of Judaism served as a "negative witness" to the truth of Christianity. But could this still be affirmed as necessary in Jennens and Handel's day, over a thousand years later?

<sup>70</sup> Kidder, *Messiah*, 3:199.



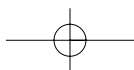
*Conclusion*

The Hallelujah chorus need not be taken to project rejoicing against Judaism in and of itself; its specific context as part of a larger musical work makes all the difference. For example, Handel reused the chorus in the late 1740s in his *Anthem for the Foundling Hospital*, where it beautifully and irenically follows upon various Psalm texts celebrating God's care for the needy. But I suggest that by its placement in *Messiah* the Hallelujah chorus gathers a significant confrontational force from its direct juxtaposition with *concitato* settings of Psalm 2, a text conventionally understood in the 18th century to prophecy God's destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple because of Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah.<sup>71</sup> I would hope that today's concert listeners will ponder exactly what it means for them to stand up at the Hallelujah chorus, whatever the origins of this venerable performance tradition.

It is often falsely claimed that significant numbers of Jews attended Handel's oratorio performances. No evidence for this has been supplied, and indeed the situation is most unlikely. There were too few Jews in London, and most were too poor to attend such concerts, as has now been amply demonstrated in recent work of David Hunter.<sup>72</sup> I would add to Hunter's argument that observant Jews would presumably have balked at the frequent public pronouncing of the sacred name of

<sup>71</sup> If the Hallelujah chorus's chorale references indeed help project a rejoicing against Judaism, they do nothing to suggest exultation over the breaking or dashing to pieces of any Roman or other gentile institutions. It could be argued that Jennens's sources and libretto cannot properly be called disdainful toward Judaism because these texts also speak explicitly or implicitly against the Romans. But being anti-Roman too would not render immaterial one's disdain for Judaism.

<sup>72</sup> David Hunter, "George Frideric Handel and the Jews: Fact, Fiction, and the Tolerances of Scholarship," in *For the Love of Music: Festschrift in Honor of Theodore Front on His 90th Birthday*, ed. Darwin F. Scott (Lucca: Lim Antiqua, 2002), 5–28. Concerning a continually trotted-out remark attributed to Handel ostensibly establishing that he received particular support from London's Jewish community, the first paragraph of Hunter's p. 9 deserves to be quoted in full (its footnote contents, however, are here omitted): "The only remark of Handel's concerning Jews that has survived comes via librettist Thomas Morell, who wrote in a letter to an unknown recipient, at least fifteen years after the event, that Handel had said that 'the Jews will not come to [hear *Theodora*] (as to *Judas [Maccabaeus]*) because it is a Christian story; and the Ladies will not come, because it [is] a virtuous one.' First published in *Biographia dramatica* in 1782, the remark makes little sense. Not only does it lay the blame for thin houses on marginalized others, it is illogical in terms of the Jews supporting only Israelite oratorios and women supporting only romantic or salacious ones. The rhetorical device omits the group to which the composer and librettist belong and that ought to be supporting Handel, namely Christian males! Had the remark any logic, then those leaders of society should have been flocking to *Theodora*. If it is an accurate record of Handel's opinion, then the remark is hardly flattering (not surprisingly, biographers have failed to unpack its prejudices). At the very least it is indicative of conventional dismissive attitudes toward Jews and women."



God in Handel's oratorios, even allowing that the word "Jehovah" was a Christian misunderstanding of the pointing of the Hebrew "YHWH."

It is also often likewise falsely claimed that Handel's practice of writing oratorios on ancient Israelite subjects is pro-Judaic. Handel and his contemporaries indeed have a high opinion of the characters populating the OT not strictly speaking as "Jews" but as proto-Christian believers in God's expected messiah: Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>73</sup> What really matters is their stance toward living Jews and Judaism after the advent of Jesus. In hundreds of 17th- and 18th-century sources I have encountered virtually nothing positive on that subject and very little that is even neutral.<sup>74</sup> Although a still timely, living masterpiece that may continue to bring spiritual and aesthetic sustenance and delight to great numbers of music lovers—Christian or otherwise—*Messiah* also appears nonetheless to be very much a work of its own era.

Swarthmore College

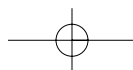
### ABSTRACT

Scholars have too little investigated questions of religious meaning in Handel's *Messiah*, particularly the work's manifest theological anti-Judaism. Previously unknown historical sources for the work's libretto compiled and arranged by Charles Jennens (1700–73) reveal the text's implicit designs against Jewish religion. Handel's musical setting powerfully underscores these tendencies of Jennens's libretto and adds to them, reaching a euphoric climax in the Hallelujah chorus.

Within its arrangement of juxtaposed Old Testament prophecies and their New Testament fulfillment and with its matching musical styles, Handel's *Messiah* could hardly have expressed more powerfully its rejoicing against Judaism than by having the ferocious tenor aria

<sup>73</sup> This is why, for example, at mm. 38–46 and 82 to the end of the chorus *And the children of Israel sighed* in his oratorio *Israel in Egypt* Handel can set the text "and [the Hebrew people's] cry came up unto God" to the melody of the first phrase of the Lutheran chorale *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, a quotation that makes perfect sense from a Christian typological perspective. Roberts, "German Chorales in Handel's English works," 85, finds Handel's coupling of this chorale with this biblical text (Exodus 2:23) interpretively puzzling.

<sup>74</sup> The 17th- and 18th-century interpretations I have reported represent a small portion of the contemporary theological literature, mostly restricted to sources evidently or plausibly known to Jennens both expressly listed in the *Gopsall Catalogue* and not represented there. They seem to me entirely typical of the conservative Christian thought of Jennens and Handel's day so assailed by the Deists. The sources listed in Sampson Letsome, *An Index to the Sermons Published since the Restoration, Pointing out the Texts in the Order they lie in the Bible . . . and Directing to the Volume and Page where they Occur* (London, 1734–38), have not altered my perception; my thanks to Ruth Smith of Cambridge University for suggesting this reference.



“THOU [Jesus] shalt break THEM [the Jews] with a rod of iron” answered by the chorus “Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” The aria is a setting of Psalm 2:9, a passage that was generally and unquestioningly believed among Christians in Handel’s day to have foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple in the year 70. This horrible event was construed as a divine punishment of Judaism for its failure to accept Jesus as God’s promised messiah. The Hallelujah chorus apparently sees cause for rejoicing in such vengeance. Further, this chorus quotes the melodies of several hymns whose texts concern the depiction in Matthew 25 of acceptance by a bridegroom of five wise virgins and his rejection of five foolish virgins. This parable was taken to symbolize the welcoming of Ecclesia, Christianity and Jesus as the messiah, and the rejection of Synagoga and Judaism.

In 18th-century England most Christians fervently believed that a choice between Judaism and Christianity was a choice between eternal damnation and eternal salvation. This would have represented motivation indeed for *Messiah* to project Christian theological contempt for its sibling religion.

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Keywords:

George Frideric Handel

Charles Jennens

Messiah

Anti-Judaism

Antisemitism

