



Setbacks

By James McAlister

George Frederick Handel's career was afflicted with setbacks. Twice bankrupt, he had fallen out of favor with audiences, and financial woes mounted. With such strains upon him, he plunged into the task of writing "Messiah". Servants reported that for the 24-day duration of the project, his food was often untouched, and his manuscript was frequently wet with tears.

Upon hearing the first London performance of "Messiah," on March 23, 1743, King George II of England rose to his feet at what we know as the "Hallelujah Chorus." The majestic and thrilling arrangement of diverse orchestral elements gave wings to the king's body and soul.

Of the "Hallelujah Chorus" Handel would later say, "I thought I saw all Heaven before me, and the great God Himself." Out of the depth of Handel's discouragement came one of the most significant compositions in musical history.

When God plucks the strings of our lives with the hand of contrary circumstances, what music will He hear? Will it be a mournful dirge of despair, or a "Hallelujah Chorus" of hope ringing through our souls?

Hope is the sunshine that dispels the shadows from the dark corners of life. With it, the future beams with promise. Without it, all seems lost. Hope is essential to joyful living, and we may find it in some unexpected places.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill once said, "We shall draw from the heart of suffering itself the means of inspiration and

survival." Surely hope is the treasure at the heart of our suffering—our trials and our hurts—that keeps us going.

Trying times are as multifaceted as life itself—and so are the treasures of hope enveloped within them. Some trials rip and tear us like tornadoes; others slowly pile up like falling autumn leaves. Trials can arise when prayers seemingly go unanswered, when children go astray, when we see time and health slipping through our fingers, when death pays an unexpected call, when we just mess up in life.

Robert E. Lee found hope in the backward glance of history. "The truth is this: The march of Providence is so slow and our desires so impatient; the work of progress so immense and our means of aiding it so feeble; the life of humanity is so long, that of the individual so brief, that we often see only the ebb of the advancing wave and are thus discouraged. It is history that teaches us to hope."

And thus we may likewise be encouraged by observing the patient endurance of those who have gone before us. If they "made it" through troubled times, so can we. And given enough years, we should thoughtfully reflect upon our own trials and hurts—and count the times when dawn broke the icy grip of our darkest nights. And there is hope.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.... (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Copyright © 2004 James McAlister. www.james-mc.com

Permission granted for not-for-sale reproduction in exact form including copyright. Other uses require written permission. For more information, see our website at:

www.WayToGod.org

www.BulletinInserts.org