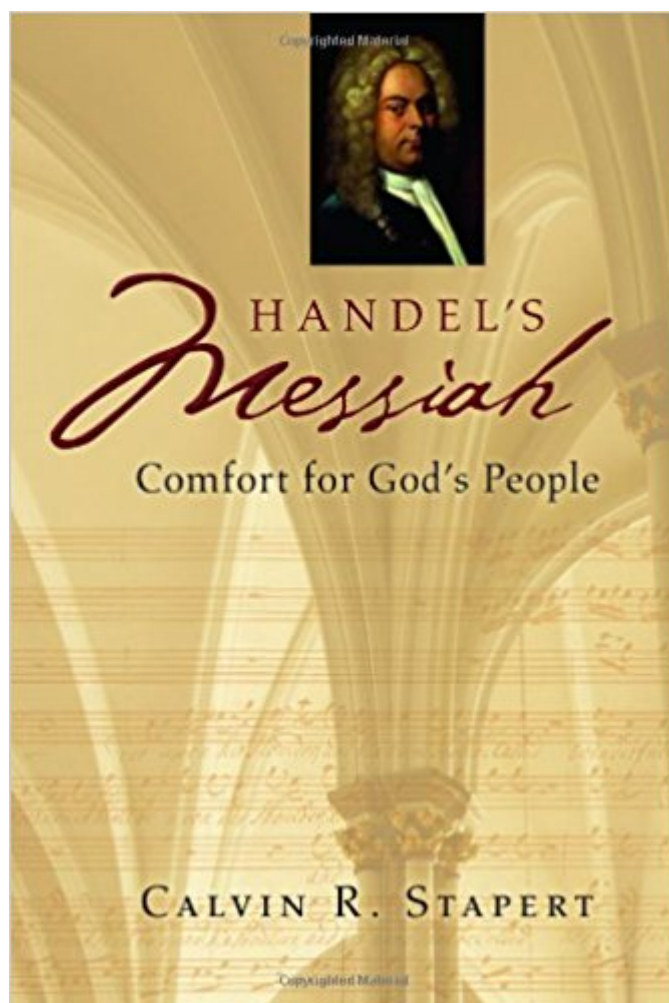


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# Handel's Messiah: Comfort For God's People (Calvin Institute Of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies)



## Synopsis

Handel's oratorio *Messiah* is a phenomenon with no parallel in music history. No other work of music has been so popular for so long. Yet familiarity can sometimes breed contempt and also misunderstanding. This book by music expert Calvin Stapert will greatly increase understanding and appreciation of Handel's majestic *Messiah*, whether readers are old friends of this remarkable work or have only just discovered its magnificence. Stapert provides fascinating historical background, tracing not only *Messiah*'s unlikely inception but also its amazing reception throughout history. The bulk of the book offers scene-by-scene musical and theological commentary on the whole work, focusing on the way Handel's music beautifully interprets and illuminates the biblical text. For anyone seeking to appreciate Handel's *Messiah* more, this informed yet accessible guide is the book to have and read. (*Handel's Messiah: Comfort for God's People* is the newest volume in the flourishing Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies Series, edited by John D. Witvliet.)

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"*Messiah* is the classic, not only in the West but even in Japan. I have been performing this magnificent work with Bach Collegium Japan every year in the past decade, but it still makes us exuberant each and every time we perform it. . . . In this book my friend Calvin Stapert helps us understand this masterwork from manifold points of view, pouring deeper

appreciation for the work into our hearts through the funnel of his words. Thank you very much,  
Cal!Ã¢â¬âÃ¢â¬ââ ¢ Masaaki Suzuki founder and director of Bach Collegium Japan Ã¢â¬âÃ¢â¬â“A  
superb study of one of the most widely performed pieces of Western music. As we have come to  
expect from this author, the writing is profound and scholarly as well as lucid and accessible. This is  
destined to be a classic guide to a classic work.Ã¢â¬âÃ¢â¬ââ ¢ Jeremy Begbie Duke University  
Ã¢â¬âÃ¢â¬â“Calvin Stapert observes that oratorio, like opera, was written to entertain. Messiah certainly  
does that. But it does more. It proclaims good news. This fascinating, informative book will enrich  
the hearing of one of the worldÃ¢â¬âÃ¢â¬âs musical masterpieces. It will also deepen and enhance  
appreciation of one of ChristianityÃ¢â¬âÃ¢â¬âs true treasures.Ã¢â¬âÃ¢â¬ââ ¢ John Buchanan  
Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago

Calvin R. Stapert is professor emeritus of music at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan. His  
previous books include *My Only Comfort: Death, Deliverance, and Discipleship in the Music of  
Bach*; *Handel’s Messiah: Comfort for God’s People*; and *A New Song for an Old World:  
Musical Thought in the Early Church*.

As a musician, I’ve conducted Messiah for over 50 years. Even so, this book contains insights I had  
never really considered. The scriptural underpinnings as Jennens & Handel understood them are  
rarely spoken of. This rich resource demands a reinterpretation of one’s musical approach. For  
listeners and performers alike, this is a must have volume.

This is a very well written and helpful book. I am a lover of music but not a student of music theory,  
not a musician. I have taught courses on Handel’s Messiah using the Kerygma series Resource and  
Leader’s Guides where, as a parish priest, I lead the discussions on the biblical material and a  
minister of music leads the teachings and discussions on the music and music theory. This book  
brings not only the story and spiritual purpose for which of the Messiah to life in a fuller way than I  
have seen elsewhere but also explains what Handel is doing musically in a way that is most  
accessible to a person who is not a professional musician. I highly recommend this book and have  
heard nothing but glowing comments from all who have purchased and read it on my  
recommendation. ted

I came to Handel’s Messiah: Comfort for God’s People by Calvin Stapert as a relative musical  
illiterate. I am always listening to music, and I have even begun to enjoy listening to good classical

music. However, I knew nothing of the terms oratorio, madrigalism, recitative, the particulars of Baroque opera, or really much of anything about music. Much less did I know the setting out of which the famed Messiah was written. All that I knew was that I loved the Messiah and I was interested in learning more. Calvin Stapert does an excellent job of writing a book that is accessible for a relative newcomer. Yet, I bought the book for my grandfather, who has been quite the opera aficionado for decades, and he loved it, finishing reading it in just a couple of days. Stapert begins by setting the historical context in which Handel wrote Messiah. He gives a short introductory lesson on the state of music (oratorio in particular) at the time, then he weaves Handel's biography into it, slowing down to talk about the particular causes and effects of Messiah. The last part of the book is a scene-by-scene discussion of the actual music. This last part of the book was especially valuable to me, as it pointed out what was musically going on in the piece. This helped me appreciate much of the intricacy and genius of the piece that I otherwise would have totally missed. Stapert does a masterful job, in my opinion, of steering well clear of superficiality in the discussion (He gets quite technical at times), but never is boring. My appreciation of Handel's Messiah soared like I never imagined. I have listened to the complete oratorio five times since finishing the audiobook. I was provided a review edition of the audiobook version of the book. For me, and many I suspect, this is an optimal format. This is a book that, while full of detail, was not complex in its sentence structure nor in its reasoning. It is a writing which is easily comprehensible in a one-pass read. Naxos was kind enough to intersperse recordings from their original *Handel: Messiah (1751 version)*. I do wish that there were more; it would have been especially effective to play an excerpt from each scene after the scene's discussion. No matter, I ended up buying the *1751 version* on my own and playing it after each discussion anyway. James Adams is the narrator; he was slightly annoying at times due to the flamboyant ways in which he pronounced non-English (particularly Italian) words. Nevertheless, he is very understandable, read at a good pace with fine enunciation, and was not too big a distraction to the audiobook listening experience. Even if all you know of Handel's Messiah is the Hallelujah chorus, I recommend you pick up the audiobook and give it a listen.

This is a great book to introduce basic history surrounding Messiah and Handel's life. It is. It is nicely organized and contains a thorough section that goes through each number in the piece and helps explain the theological and musical significance. Very easy to read with fascinating detail and insights.

Stapert does an excellent job of giving the historical and musical background within which this masterpiece was created. Then he goes through the entire work and explains the connection between the music and words, line by line. I hope that readers take the time to do what I did and listen to each piece before and after they read the commentary. I came away with not only a better appreciation for Handel's work, but a deeper love for the Messiah himself. I highly recommend this book to all who want worship Jesus Christ in a deeper way.

Some might not like all the explanation of the music, but in my second reading, I really appreciated Stapert's attention to these details. It made listening to the music even more enjoyable.

Mr. Stapert's dissertation on this work of G.F. Handel is excellent. He goes into the history of Handel, an explanation of the music of that time, and how this piece came to be written. He then gives a great explanation of each part of the work. If you like the Messiah or know someone who does, this is an excellent addition to the library.

This book offers sound historical information about the creation of Handel's Messiah. I enjoyed the information about the types of music being created during that time period and how The Messiah fit into the culture of music at that time. Great book for those who are interested in gaining a deeper understanding into the writing of Handel's Messiah.

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