

God in the Jukebox

“Hallelujah” by Leonard Cohen

Now I've heard there was a secret chord
That David played, and it pleased the Lord
But you don't really care for music, do you?
It goes like this, the fourth, the fifth
The minor falls, the major lifts
The baffled king composing Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Your faith was strong, but you needed proof
You saw her bathing on the roof
Her beauty and the moonlight overthrew you
She tied you to a kitchen chair
She broke your throne, and she cut your hair
And from your lips she drew the Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Well, maybe there's a God above?
As for me all I've ever learned from love
Is how to shoot someone who outdrew you
But it's not a crime that you're hear tonight
It's not some pilgrim who claims to have seen the Light
No, it's a cold and it's a very broken Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Instrumental

Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Well people I've been here before
I know this room and I've walked this floor
You see I used to live alone before I knew you
And I've seen your flag on the marble arch
But listen love, love is not some kind of victory march, no
It's a cold and it's a lonely Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah

There was a time you let me know
What's really going on below
But now you never show it to me, do you?
And I remember when I moved in you
And the holy dove she was moving too
And every single breath that we drew was Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Now I've done my best, I know it wasn't much
I couldn't feel, so I learned to touch
I've told the truth, I didn't come here to London just to
fool you
And even though it all went wrong
I'll stand right here before the Lord of song
With nothing, nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah

Charts: “Hallelujah” peaked on the US Billboard Hot 100 at number 59 in 2016.

Background: “Hallelujah” was originally released in December of 1984 by Leonard Cohen on his album *Various Positions*. The song was initially rejected by Columbia Records and was largely ignored until John Cale sang a cover for the song in 1991. The song achieved widespread popularity after Cale's version was featured in the 2001 film *Shrek*. However, it was Jeff Buckley's cover of Cale's cover that achieved the most success in 2004, as it was ranked as one of “The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time,” according to Rolling Stone magazine. The original version of the song by Cohen regained interest in November 2016 following Cohen's death and entered US Billboard Hot 100 for the first time.

Cohen's Meaning of “Hallelujah”

“The world is full of conflicts and full of things that cannot be reconciled. But there are moments when we can reconcile and embrace the whole mess, and that's what I mean by ‘Hallelujah.’”

Journalist Larry Sloman, who knew Cohen well, describes the song as one part Biblical and one part the woman that Cohen slept with last night, since Cohen was most interested in “holiness and horniness.”

Since 1991, “Hallelujah” has been performed by more than 300 singers and groups, including Bon Jovi, Justin Timberlake, Pentatonix and k.d. lang. Lang also sang it at the opening ceremony of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Cohen was born into an Orthodox Jewish family in Quebec. He never married but he became the father of two children. One of his girlfriend’s said of him, it was cowardice and fear that prevented him from marrying her. As for his religious views, he described himself as a Sabbath-observant Jew, but he was also involved in Buddhism (becoming a Buddhist monk in 1996). Cohen also showed interest in Jesus Christ saying, “I’m very fond of Jesus Christ. He may be the most beautiful guy who walked the face of this earth. Any guy who says ‘blessed are the poor and blessed are the meek’ has got to be a figure of unparalleled generosity and insight and madness. A man who declared himself to stand among the thieves, the prostitutes, and the homeless. His position cannot be comprehended. It is an inhuman generosity. ... But, I’m not going to alter the Jewish view of Jesus Christ.”

Defining “Hallelujah”

Hallelujah [Hebrew], **Alleluia** [Greek]— literally: “praise the Lord.” A word of joy and gladness. From ancient custom, alleluias are not said from Transfiguration until Easter, denoting the penitential character of Lent in contrast to Easter.

Analyzing the Lyrics

Now I've heard there was a secret chord
That David played, and it pleased the Lord (1 Samuel 16:14-23)

Your faith was strong, but you needed proof
You saw her bathing on the roof
Her beauty and the moonlight overthrew you (2 Samuel 11:1-12:13; Psalm 51)

She tied you to a kitchen chair
She broke your throne, and she cut your hair
And from your lips she drew the Hallelujah (Judges 16)

Discussion Questions

What is Cohen’s meaning of “hallelujah” and how is it different than the true meaning?

What is Cohen’s song praising?

What is Cohen’s song ultimately about?

“A Hallelujah Christmas” by Cloverton

In 2014, Cohen and Sony Columbia Records gave permission to contemporary Christian band Cloverton to change the lyrics. The song “A Hallelujah Christmas” peaked at number 29 on the Billboard Christian Songs Chart in 2014. The lyrics of this song are all about what Christ’s incarnation mean for mankind.