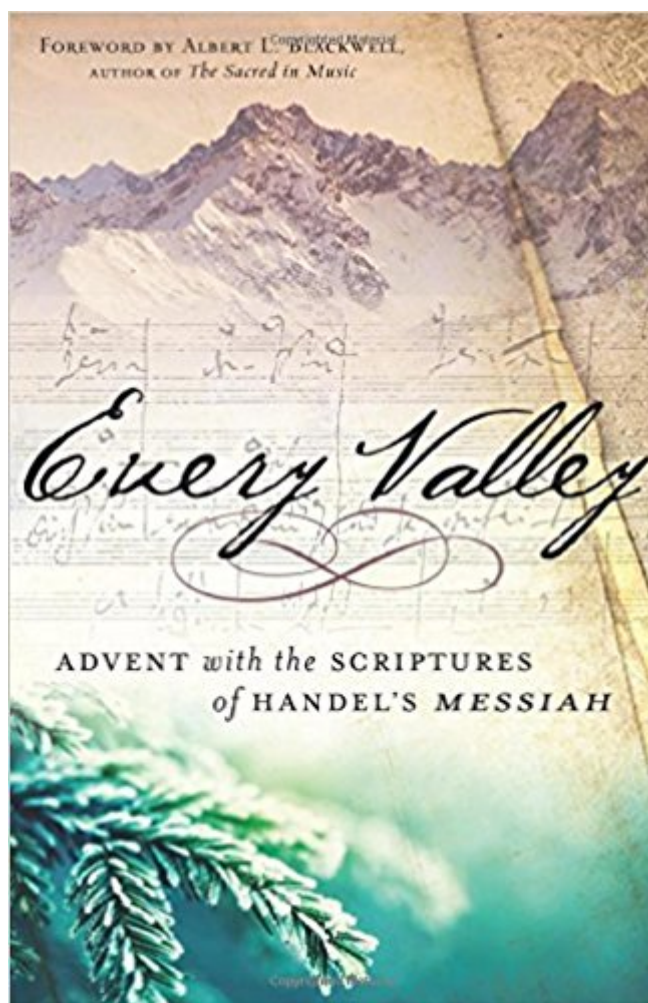


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# Every Valley: Advent With The Scriptures Of Handel's Messiah



## Synopsis

Handel's Messiah is one of the most beloved musical works of the western world, playing an especially sentimental role in many people's Christmas traditions. The libretto of the work, taken directly from the King James text of fourteen books of the Bible, has turned many otherwise forgettable phrases into memorable, singable, cherished lines of Scripture. This gift-worthy book will delight and inspire classical music fans and those for whom Messiah is a beloved Christmas tradition with essays exploring the theological, historical, and pastoral implications of the Scriptures that make up Handel's Messiah. Forty reflections journey in order through the oratorio, taking the reader deeper into less-often studied texts like Malachi 3:3 and bringing new light to oft-recited passages like Luke 2:9-14. Each reflection offers the libretto from Messiah, the same passage in NRSV, and a brief commentary on the text, written by a respected scholar or pastor. Readers can peruse the book at leisure or examine one reflection per day throughout the Advent and Christmas seasons.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Handel's Messiah is one of the most beloved musical works of the western world, playing an especially sentimental role in many people's Christmas traditions. The text of the work has turned many otherwise forgettable phrases into memorable, singable, cherished lines of Scripture. This lovely gift book will delight and inspire classical music fans and those for whom

Messiah is a beloved Christmas tradition with devotions exploring the Scriptures that make up Handel's Messiah. Forty reflections journey in order through Messiah, taking the reader deeper into less-often studied texts like Malachi 3:3 and bringing new light to popular passages like Luke 2:9-14. Each reflection offers the text from Messiah, the same passage in NRSV, and a brief devotion on the text. Readers can peruse the book at leisure or examine one reflection per day throughout the Advent and Christmas seasons.

Ev'ry valley shall be exalted, and ev'ry mountain and hill made low . . . For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given . . . All we like sheep have gone astray . . . Hallelujah! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. . . . These memorable words can easily be heard in a kind of sentimental haze, familiar from countless church choir concerts and Christmas Eve services. But the scriptures Handel set to music in his most beloved oratorio also tell a powerful story of God's promised one, from prophetic foretelling to birth, death, resurrection, and ultimate victory. Find inspiration for your holiday season and year-round faith with these forty insightful meditations.

Other reviewers have outlined or described the book's format, so I will restrict my comments to content only. I'm rather leery of the "meditate your way through a liturgical season" genre of books because so few, frankly, hold my interest enough to challenge and/or inspire me. Something about this one's description made me order not one, but two copies. I have no regrets! I should confess at the outset that, prior to my seminary education and subsequent ordination, I was a professional church musician for almost 40 years and was involved in more Messiah performances than I care to count. For me, this book struck a perfect balance between referencing the musical components of Handel's masterpiece, their biblical bases, and challenges to my daily living as a Child of God. That is, more on the latter two than on the former, which is widely available in many formats and easily heard in live performance during Advent. Some of the writers made specific reference to the musical tools which Handel employed to illuminate the texts, from discussing melody lines and leaps to rhythmic complexities, while others made scant reference. While I understand Purple Moxie's complaint in another reviewer's submission, I wasn't seeking another study or explication of the music, but of the Story it seeks to tell. In short, I got just what I wanted. There are studies of the score available that range from "music appreciation" to scholarly academic tomes. Almost all of the biblical scholarship was sound, sometimes provocative, and deeper than one might expect in a work intended for that awful consumer, "the general public." Rather than a syrupy, "Comfort Ye, My

People" approach to these texts, the authors (who yes, I wish were identified at the end of each day's reflection) chose to challenge the Reader to look around her at the needs of the world to see where that particular text called him to re-think, to work for justice, to include the marginalized. It was almost more what one expects from a Lenten book, therefore, than an Advent one, which is so often more about "Keeping Christ in Christmas," giving gifts from love, not guilt, etc. One could argue well that this book was indeed more about "Keeping Christ in Christmas" because of the biblical demands it places upon us, the Readers. I might add that I suspect it is more to be favored and appreciated by so-called Moderate and Liberal folks than Conservative ones, specifically because of the biblical scholarship and interpretation which frankly surprised and delighted me at times by its "courage." Perhaps I should relate a conversation I had with a bookshop manager in a large, thriving parish in Dallas. I told her I wanted to recommend a book to her for next year's Advent sales that she might have missed. I had barely gotten the words out when she reached under the counter, pulled out her already-worn and well-marked copy, said she was reading and re-reading, and pointed to a stack on display nearby. She's a discerning reader and seller and her reply could only be characterized as "rave reviews." She reported, too, that everyone to whom she'd sold a copy had had a similar reaction, as did the person to whom I gave my second copy as a gift. I would buy this book again in multiples to share with friends who are laity or clergy.

The expectation was that this would a 25-30 day readings book designed as an Advent devotional with short readings, author insights with one or two questions to ponder or a suggested activity . This Advent reader turned out to be much different. It is actually a compendium of commentary selections edited from the "Feasting on the Word" series from the same publisher. Each section of the Messiah is briefly listed and then referenced to the Bible passage. This is then followed by a lengthy commentary discussion of the passage. This may well appeal to some; for me it was dry reading compounded with a small serif font. The reading for day 25 was "He is the King of Glory" from the second movement, a wonderful piece, but not the anticipated "For Unto Us a Child is Born" for Christmas. Since there are a total of forty readings, this little book could easily be repackaged as a Lenten Reader with the Great Amen being the Easter reading. It would have been more helpful if this had been advertised as a Messiah reader rather than as a hasty attempt to offer it as "Advent with the Scriptures of Handel's Messiah." I had purchased two with the intention of giving the second to a friend who begins each Advent season by attending a live Messiah concert. Due to the format, it instead was gifted to a clergy friend who thoroughly enjoys the "Feasting" commentary series.

If you love The Messiah Oratorio, this is a splendid addition with advent study based on that music.

Beautiful book for advent season. A must for everyone who loves this music.

A fine way to enjoy Advent and prepare for Christmas.

Advent with the Scriptures of Handel's Messiah is the subtitle of this book. It is a compilation of the scriptures that Handel's Messiah are taken from. This devotional was written to be used during the advent season with each of forty writings taking us through the thirty or so days prior to Christmas. If you have ever heard the Hallelujah Chorus then you have heard the most listened to part of the Messiah. There is much more to the composition than the chorus, including the story of Christ through His birth, life, death and resurrection. The devotionals are made up of a section of scripture with a brief reflection on that portion and the hope it holds for us as Christians. Much of the Messiah was taken from Isaiah, but also scriptures from Zechariah, Psalms, Corinthians, Luke, Hebrews and Revelation. Each section also lists the movement at which each scripture reference can be heard in the music. It is recommended that you may enjoy listening to each movement before reading that corresponding scripture and devotional. Every Valley really is a study in what Handel was trying to accomplish when he wrote the Messiah. The separation into parts makes it easy to pick up each day where you left off the day before. Part 1 is Christ's Birth and It's Foretelling; Part 2 is Christ's Passion and Resurrection; Part 3 is Christ's Eternal Reign. I have never heard the entire Messiah performed and this book makes me think I would like to hear it all. I appreciated the quote given by Albert Blackwell in the forward of the book, in which Handel, after being congratulated on Messiah as "noble entertainment" for his listeners, replied "I should be sorry if I only entertained them, I wish to make them better." The Messiah is God's word for us, given in love, set to music. This is a book that will encourage you to reflect on God's gift to us at this Christmas season. This devotional was compiled by Jessica Miller Kelly with multiple contributors. I was given a complimentary e-book review copy by the publisher, Westminster John Knox Press, in exchange for my honest review. These words are my opinion.

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