

The Bible—Ready for Prime Time? By Bob Waldrep

On Sunday, 3-3-13, the *Bible* will be featured on the History Channel as a "prime time" 10-part mini-series simply titled, "*The Bible*". Though not the first time the History Channel has aired programming related to the *Bible*, the producers promise this one will be different.

For, unlike past programs, they have said *The Bible* is not intended to approach the *Bible* as an "investigation" or "mystery" as the network has done in past documentaries; but, rather to be a more straightforward interpretation. Hopefully, by straightforward they mean accurate.

After watching the previews, I am actually looking forward to watching this series. However, the viewer should keep in mind it is a docudrama, which means that "artistic" liberties will surely be taken in the telling of the story. In fairness, that is not unusual in historical documentaries and should not be a reason for Christians to become overly alarmed. Unfortunately, how far they go with these liberties cannot be determined until after we have had a chance to view the broadcast.

So, should we be wary? Perhaps, but there are also some, seemingly, positive assurances being given that it is not only done well, but is also fairly accurate - at least by Hollywood standards. Producer, Mark Burnett - a very successful television producer of such shows as *Survivor*, *The Voice*, *Celebrity Apprentice*, and *Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader*, to name a few - is saying all the right things on the front end.

He points out their primary reference is the *New International Version of the Bible*, which he goes on to say is the version preferred by Evangelical leaders. In addition, they established a Board of Advisors made up of Biblical Scholars who provided their insight and helped to assure accuracy. A point Burnett also includes is the project is intended to provide updated versions of classic older films, such as *The Ten Commandments*, which dealt with Bible stories, but can no longer match the special effects generated in film today. ¹



He and his wife and co-producer, Roma Downey (who starred in *Touched By An Angel* and plays Mary in the series) have been consistent in mentioning these details when interviewed, driving home the point that they want to get it right, while insisting it must also have dramatic appeal and include the special effects available today through CGI and other film advances. Both say they grew up with the scriptures and the *Bible* is important to them and they want to pass that along.

Recognizing current data indicates fewer people are reading the *Bible* and hold it in high regard (see *Culture Tracks* in this issue), they maintain it is their goal to make it more appealing and meaningful to a new generation of readers. To help accomplish this, a companion website (outreach.com) was developed to help Pastors and Churches utilize "*The Bible*" series in their ministry. Included on the site's front page is information about the producers and a brief video of the couple discussing their motivation and hopes for the film.

Burnett and Downey also claim to have become deeply religious and this has, in part, led to their interest in doing this miniseries. They also profess to be interested in and attend Church. The February 24, 2013 issue of *Parade Magazine* had an interview with the couple in its "Sunday With..." feature, which asks celebrities to share information about their personal lives, including what they do on Sundays. Unlike many of the celebrities who have been interviewed, Burnett and Downey affirmed that going to Church is part of their Sunday activities. ²

Everything sounds good thus far. The producers claim to be committed to the Scriptures, deeply religious and active Church attenders, and to be motivated by a desire to renew interest in the *Bible*. They further claim, the script is adapted from a translation of the *Bible* that is widely accepted in the Church and they have enlisted the assistance of a panel of Biblical scholars to serve as Advisors and to ensure accuracy.

Continued, p. 2

Inside this issue:

"The Bible—Ready for Prime Time?" by Bob Waldrep	1
The Bible—Ready for Prime Time Update	2
Culture Tracks:	3
Are You Blind? By Jeff Sutherland	4



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Christian, New Age, Word Faith?

Even with all these assurances, there are several factors we should consider and keep in mind as we view *"The Bible"*. Let's begin with the producers being deeply religious and committed to the Scriptures. Burnett grew up in England, the son of a Roman Catholic father and Presbyterian mother. Downey, from Ireland, was raised, and claims to still be, a devout Roman Catholic, attending Mass at Our Lady of Malibu.

However, when discussing her Catholic faith in a video interview with the Washington Post, she made some interesting comments about her view of God, stating, "I see God in everyone and in everything [I have heard there are] two points of view - there is no God, or there is only God; and for me there is only God."³ Such a view is much more in line with New Age theology than with a biblical view of God.

Perhaps this view of God came from her association with, *Touched By an Angel* costar, Della Reese, who pastors a New Age Church. (Read more about Reese in our "Just the Facts On..."⁴) Reese's influence is evident in Burnett and Downey having selected her as the minister to officiate their wedding.

While it is not out of the question that Reese has influenced Downey's view of God, and possibly Burnett's, as well; even if she hasn't, Downey has clearly been exposed to New Age teachings having earned a degree in spiritual psychology from the University of Santa Monica (USM).⁵

Lest one think USM is a fully accredited four-year university with degrees in several schools; it is not. It only offers an advance degree in "Spiritual Psychology". And, if there is any question whether this is tied into New Age thought one only has to look to the founder of USM, Roger Delano Hinkins, who goes by the name, John-Roger. Hinkins, or John-Roger, is a prominent and long-time New Age author and teacher.

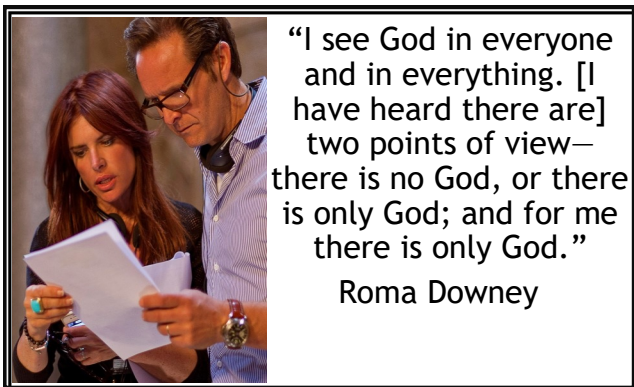
Compounding the problem is Downey's and Burnett's close relationship with Joel Osteen, a Word-Faith teacher. Osteen is part of a new breed of televange-

lists, that preach a less recognizable "lite" version of the "Prosperity Message". However, though not as overt in his preaching, Osteen's message is firmly rooted in the Word-Faith teaching that he learned at his daddy's knee.

Perhaps, it is Osteen's influence that has led to some of Burnett's recent claims regarding the Holy Spirit and Jesus literally hugging him. Such claims are better suited to Osteen's theology than that of Burnett's Catholic father or Presbyterian mother.⁶

Burnett's and Downey's friendship with Osteen is such that they have attended his Church and have been guests in his home. Burnett even signed on to do a reality television show with Osteen in 2012.⁷

This friendship also led to Osteen being one of the Advisors on *The Bible* series. This indicates another problem; the closest representative this Board has to an evangelical and a Bible scholar is Rick Warren, pas-



"I see God in everyone and in everything. [I have heard there are] two points of view—there is no God, or there is only God; and for me there is only God."

Roma Downey

tor of Saddleback Church in California.⁸

Bottom line, even if Burnett and Downey are Christians, they have been influenced by the New Age Movement and, on some level, exposed to Word-Faith teaching. For this reason Christians should watch this series with discernment and hope that - whatever the producers actually believe - they truly do seek to tell the Bible story without imposing any theological interpretations or bias. If they do, this could be a wonderful tool for helping to raise a new interest in the Bible.

However, no matter which way it goes, rather than complaining about it, let's use it as an opportunity to start a conversation about the Bible and about Christ. If people watch it, they'll be open to talk about it. Let's be ready to seize the moment to connect in culture and share with those around us, our hope in Christ.

1. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/05/24/the-bible-history-channel-mark-burnett-miniseries_n_866030.html
2. <http://www.parade.com/celebrity/sunday-with/2013/02/24-mark-burnett-roma-downey-bible.html>
3. http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/actress-roma-downey-on-religion-faith-219/2012/02/09/gIQTJNTIQ_video.html
4. <http://crosswindsfoundation.org/articles/Just%20the%20facts%20Della%20Reese.pdf>
5. <http://www.charismanews.com/culture/38440-the-bible-miniseries-is-labor-of-love-for-hollywood-couple>
6. <http://www.outreachmagazine.com/people/5139-tv-producer-mark-burnett-jesus-was-physically-hugging-me.html>
7. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/30/joel-osteen-reality-show_n_1120522.html
8. <http://bibleseriesresources.com/board-of-advisors>



Prime Time Bible Update

by Bob Waldrep

[ED. Note: The article, "The Bible – Ready for Prime Time?", was published in the *CrossingCurrents* E-letter prior to the airing of *The Bible* miniseries. Since its publication, four one-hour episodes of the series have aired taking the story to the birth of Solomon. This is a supplement to the original article—taking into consideration the segments that have aired since it was written]

With four segments of *"The Bible"* having now aired, viewers have a better sense of the approach being taken. As expected, there have been several instances where artistic license has been taken with the story. In each case it does not appear the change, or insertion of additional storyline, was done in an overt attempt to change the meaning of the story; rather, it appears to have been done for one of two reasons:

1. For dramatic effect to give the film a quality more comparable with what Hollywood is currently producing.
2. To hurry the story along—to connect one segment to another where material had to be left out due to time constraints.

An example of the first reason would be the angels rescuing Lot and his family at Sodom. In this scene the angels were depicted as using swords to fight their way out of the city. One even became a Ninja-like, two-sword wielding angel. (According to Genesis 18, the angels grabbed the hands of Lot and his family and pulled them out of Sodom.) The sword fight scene was very much what one would expect to find in action movies being produced today; thus, it appears the producers included this fight scene and the many other battle scenes in the series to help make the film more relatable to the movie experiences of today's audiences—

Continued, p. 3

particularly young people.

As regards the second reason for making changes or insertions, the need to hurry the story along, it should be obvious that the story contained in the *Bible* – Old and New Testaments – cannot be told in its entirety in a ten hour film; much less a ten hour time slot that also includes commercial time. No matter who took on such a project, decisions would have to be made as to which portions to leave in and which to exclude. Keep in mind that, while those familiar with the *Bible* would readily recognize portions were being omitted; however, those unfamiliar with it would have no such idea. Therefore, content would have to be added to bridge the gap and help the story flow.

An example of this would be starting the film with the flood, rather than the creation story, and have Noah telling his daughter about the events found in the first few chapters of Genesis. Quite likely, Noah did tell his children the story of creation and the fall while on the ark; however, it is not included in the biblical narrative. It is added to the film as an insertion to hurry the story along.

Without question, there are changes or insertions in the first four segments; however, none appear to have been made to promote a theological belief or bias against that of the biblical record. Instead, they seem solely based on an attempt to enhance the “entertainment” value of the story for the modern film-goer. Certainly, there are those who would argue against the appropriateness of such; but in this instance, there does not appear any reason for arguing that the basis for changes were theological in nature.

“*The Bible*” miniseries will have its fair share of critics and if one is inclined to criticize on the basis of dramatic or artistic license being taken, there is much to criticize. However, when it comes to some of the theological doctrines that evangelicals,

in particular, adhere to there is much to commend, as well.

For example, the story of creation is right out of scripture; including man being formed from the dust of the ground. The story of Adam and Eve eating of the fruit from the forbidden tree is portrayed as bringing the dire consequence of their knowing good and evil followed by the murder of their son, Abel. The flood story shows Noah and his family being saved on the ark along with the animals and, as the camera pulls back to show the earth, we see the waters are depicted as covering the whole earth, as opposed to being limited in scope as many try to portray it.

Strongly recognized throughout the first four segments is the evidence of man’s sin. The killing of Abel, the aforementioned flood which is declared the result of man’s evil, the disobedience of Lot’s wife as she looked back at Sodom and was turned to a pillar of salt, Sampson with Delilah, the Hebrews demanding a king, David with Bathsheba, the murder of Uriah, to name a few.

Having acknowledged this, it is understandable that the warning flag must still be raised until the whole series has aired for consideration. Even though the portions of the Old Testament containing the points that might raise the greatest concern over doctrinal changes — creation, sin, the flood, the stories of Abraham and the Exodus, etc.—have aired, the segments on the New Testament have not. And, if the producers are, indeed, tied into New Age and/or Word-Faith beliefs and want to incorporate them into the series it will most likely occur in the portions that deal with the New Testament. Therefore we must continue to watch with discernment.

No matter which way it goes—should they stay on track as they, for the most part, are doing, with the Old Testament

account; or should they make drastic theological changes—people are watching. The first Sunday’s airing was watched by over 13 million people beating out all other programs that day. That Sunday, the History Channel website also had its most visits ever. Whether you are a fan or a critic, such a large viewership translates into an opportunity to have a conversation.

Ask people if they are watching the series. Ask what they think about it. Don’t focus on the changes or insertions that were made, instead ask them what they thought about the way the creation was depicted? The flood? Eating the forbidden fruit? In other words, ask them about the important theological points that they got right and then have a discussion about these.

Instead of simply bashing the series, take advantage of the interest it is creating to have a conversation about what really matters—having a personal relationship with the God whom the *Bible* (the book) tells us is our creator, from whom we were separated by sin. Then let them know there is good news; that God has made a way for us to be restored to right relationship.

Now that is a much more important conversation to have. Let’s hope that as the “*The Bible*” gets to the New Testament, it supports such a conversation.



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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Share your thoughts/opinions on this and other topics of concern in today’s culture. Even if it’s the same as ours we appreciate knowing what you think. Email: info@crosswindsfoundation.org

Culture Tracks

American's Beliefs About the Bible

37% say they read the Bible (or other Holy Books) at least once a week

45% seldom, or never, read Scripture outside religious services

44% of those polled believe the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon are different expressions of the same spiritual truth.

21% believe the Bible is comprised of fables;

32% believe it is the actual Word of God

83% of Christian adults believe the Bible is totally accurate in all its teachings

62% of Christian teens believe the Bible is totally accurate in all its teachings

Data compiled from various polling sources from 2000 to 2012



Are You Blind

By Jeff Sutherland

Star Parker was a freedom fighter and welfare mother from the 60's. She says she was brought up to believe government and society owed her everything and should provide for her every need and desire without her having to do anything to earn them—it was her right.

In her book, *Uncle Sam's Plantation* she chronicles how over time she learned just how wrong and impoverishing these ideas were. She came to believe that government handouts were designed to keep poor people dependent—keeping them in slavery.

Many in today's society base their thoughts and actions on the good Christian principle of helping those in need. Little wonder, as we all like to see ourselves as good Samaritans. Churches were grown to help just such persons by following God's instruction that we should help the homeless, helpless, widowed, and orphaned in our communities.

However, when churches no longer do their job, when Christians abdicate that responsibility and hand it over to governments, there is a change in thinking. We begin to think that, as the government has all these programs set up to help "outcasts" of society, there is no longer need for Christians to do what God commands. Or is there?

On the other hand, what about an individual's or a group's personal responsibility which Star Parker addresses in her book. Certainly there are those who need help getting their feet on the ground or overcoming an obstacle in life and the Church should take responsibility to be there for them; however, when we try to apply such help across the board, we risk sinking in the quagmire of societal quicksand and buying into the idea of personal entitlements—that society owes us something—diminishing our own value.

Imagine if Winston Churchill or Ludwig van Beethoven had been brought up with thinking. Beethoven composed his ninth symphony deaf. He struggled with hearing the last thirty years of his life. Imagine arguably the world's greatest composer putting together masterpieces without being able to hear a single note. Churchill suffered with and sought treatment for a speech impediment; rather than being defeated by it, he proclaimed he would become a great public

speaker, and he did. As the Prime Minister of Great Britain during WWII, it was his words that calmed a nation under siege and stirred them to never give up.

These are but two examples of famous people who overcame great difficulties to go far beyond what we as a society have come to expect of those less fortunate. Many other examples could be given. You probably know of some personal stories, as well.

I am reminded of the words given by a very wise doctor to my relatives. Their son Randy was diagnosed blind right after birth. His parents could have felt sorry for him and bought into the lie that his life should be easy and everything could and would be done for him, free of charge. No problems, no worries, just sit back and let the government take care of him.

That might have happened but for two things. His grandparents brought up their son believing he could accomplish anything, despite the odds. You see, his grandpa was a tail gunner in World War II and flew many successful raids on our enemies. After the war he was indispensable in building Grand Coulee Dam on the Columbia River in Washington. He instilled in his son a sense of values, decency, moral correctness and a determination for greatness.

The other thing that kept Randy from becoming just another number in the government handout program was the doctor's words to his parents that day he was diagnosed legally blind. The doctor, looking over at their three year old daughter playing in the waiting room said, "Do not treat Randy any different than you do her."

I can hear the cries from some today at such advice, "How horrible, how anti-American, how unloving, didn't the doctor understand this boy was blind, completely unable to see? Had he no compassion, no love for his fellow man, no Christian sympathy for this poor baby?"

"Do not treat him any different than you do her!" I am sure those words still echo in the ears of his parents, for they followed this doctor's "crazy" advice. Yes dishes got broken, but Randy cleaned up his own mess. He was taught there was no limit to what he could do or learn or become. And, in the process of life, he learned this to be true.

He grew up doing everything little boys do. His parents didn't keep him out of anything—no

special schools, no private playgrounds. He has ridden a bicycle, water skied, and even driven a car. He graduated from high school with honors and received scholarships to college. Before graduation NASA and other high tech companies were after him to join them.

Now he has a wife and two children and takes them all to church. He understands what is important. He flies all over the world teaching others about technology. But there is something else he is teaching, something he shows to everyone who nods and points and shakes their heads at him as he walks down the road with his guide dog. They think, "Poor guy, blind like that, he has missed so much."

They have no idea; neither do we. For, we are the ones born blind if we buy into the lie that when life's problems come upon us—whether big or small—we should just give up and ask for handouts. When we view such things as race, age, poverty, or physical conditions—such as Randy's eyesight—as disabilities that require us to sit inside our homes waiting for someone to come take care of us, we are the blind ones.

Randy is in pretty good company with men like Churchill and Beethoven and all those who, like them, chose not to swallow the pill of pity; but, instead determined they would overcome their "disability", no matter what. I applaud you. May we all become so "blind" for you are the ones who truly see. .

So, what is your blindness? What is the one thing in your life you give as an excuse to not do the right thing or to be able to accomplish all God has set out for you to do? What is your "handicap"?

I challenge you to put down your "crutches", ask God to tear the blinders from your eyes, and see your life as He sees it. Then walk...and, while you're walking, take the time to lift someone up who really needs a helping hand—a jumpstart. That's what Jesus taught those who followed him. It's still a good lesson for us today.



Jeff Sutherland has been a religion editor, Christian worldview columnist, and writer for a news website, where he began formulating ideas blending current events and his Christian faith. He has served the local church in a number of capacities, including serving on staff of Rock Mountain Lakes Baptist Church as a Biblical Counselor. He is the author of *Pet Seminary*.

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