



You can tell it is Easter. Whether on television, in magazines and books, or in other forms of media popular today, you can't avoid some emphasis being made about Jesus or religion. In this issue of *CrossingCurrents* we take a look at one of these that is getting the lion's share of publicity - *A.D. The Bible Continues*.

We are also preparing to start production of our second film which will be a sequel to the popular *Invisible Scars* documentary we released last May. This film will deal with what is often referred to as moral injury. This is an issue that has only recently been given any significant attention and needs much more.

In a nutshell moral injury is the result of a conflict of morals or values that is required when one enters combat. For, in order to do what must be done when facing an enemy combatant, the soldier must be willing to set aside certain principles or values which might have been held as a civilian and embrace the "warrior code".

While you may not have seen the film *American Sniper*, this dilemma is portrayed in a scene that was often shown in the commercial packages for the film. In that scene the sniper has in his scope a young child who is carrying a bomb and walking toward the sniper's comrades. The sniper's civilian code taught him you do not shoot a child, but he knows if he doesn't ignore that "code" his buddies will be killed. The dilemma posed by this choice will prove to take a toll on him.

Such decisions are faced many times over by our hero soldiers as they serve our nation. Many of them will struggle with the decisions they made for years to come. As with those who suffer from PTSD, help is needed. We'll share more details in future updates but for now let me just say that our team of Eugene Cuevas, Don Malin, and Linwood Bragan are hard at work in the pre-production phase.

*Invisible Scars* continues to be in high demand by our veterans and those who serve. Many organizations have now joined us in the distribution process and we are in talks with a few more that could really increase the number of copies we are giving away.

You can learn more about this and keep up to date on the new film at The *Invisible Scars* Project website. [www.invisiblecarsproject.org](http://www.invisiblecarsproject.org)

May God bless you and yours as you celebrate this Easter. He is Risen!



Bob Waldrep

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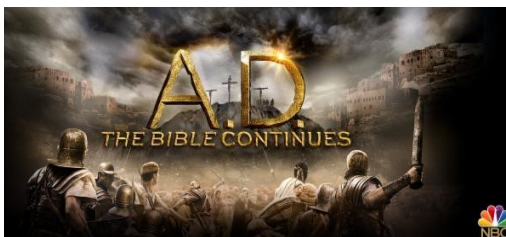


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## A.D., ANOTHER SERVING OF PRIME TIME BIBLE? BY BOB WALDREP



Leading up to the 2015 Easter season, television viewers have been bombarded with commercials and advertisements for programming with religious themes - nothing unusual as broadcasters hope to capitalize on the heightened interest in Jesus that occurs during the season. One program receiving a significant amount of "prime time" attention is *A.D. The Bible Continues*. This twelve-part miniseries, which begins airing on NBC on April 5, is produced by Mark Burnett and Roma Downey.

It is the follow up to their highly successful series, *The Bible*, which also aired at prime time on the History Channel during the Easter season of 2013 and broke all the records for cable broadcast viewing.

*A.D.* continues the story where *The Bible* series ended. The producers have said it will cover the first ten chapters of the Book of Acts which anticipates additional installments. In fact, reviewers such as *TV Guide* and *Rotten Tomatoes* have already listed this airing as "Season 1".



Making it a multi-seasonal series has been in the producers plans from its inception. In an interview with [TV Guide](#) in July of 2013 Burnett said, "It could run in the same way as *Game of Thrones*, 12 hours year after year. I don't think for a minute that *A.D.* lasts for just a season."

Further making this connection during promotional interviews, Burnett has repeatedly referred to *A.D.* as *House of Cards* meets *Game of Thrones*. Of course, in making this comparison he is alluding to the elements of intrigue, excitement, and danger; however, based on the success of *The Bible*, he is no doubt making a connection to the success of those series, as well.



Roma Downey and Mark Burnett

Rather than continuing where *The Bible* ended, the first two episodes are actually a remake of the final episodes of *The Bible*. The first episode of *A.D.* is the crucifixion of Jesus (this was most likely a calculated decision to draw in high ratings for the Easter premiere, despite one interviewer's expression of how fortunate it was that the premiere coincided with Easter) and the second is about the empty tomb and Jesus' ascension - both of which were covered in *The Bible*.

The remaining ten episodes will deal with the foundation and growth of the early Church which was also covered in the last episode of *The Bible* - along with the ministry of Paul and the traditional accounts of the deaths of the Apostles. Obviously, much of the story had to be left out in order to cover so much in a single one hour episode; so, it will be good to see how they handle it with ten hours of film.

For Burnett and Downey, who profess to be Christians (See our article, [The Bible Comes to Prime Time](#)), telling the story of *A.D.* is about more than just ratings - it is also about communicating a message. During an appearance on the [WSJ Cafe](#) (*The Wall Street Journal's* online video) Downey was asked, "When you do these kinds of faith-based projects is your first aim to evangelize or to entertain?"

"I guess our aim is to tell the story in a relatable way so that it touches people's heart. I think our job is to clear the path-

way that we have told the story in an exciting and engaging way creating a humanity to these characters, remembering that they did not know they were in the Bible, they don't know the outcome, and often times these people are flawed in the Bible. And, so I think that the way we have presented *A.D. The Bible Continues* will resonate and get the country in conversation about faith."

From her answer, one might conclude the short answer is both - to entertain and to be a means to express their faith. Without question, the success of *The Bible* has confirmed there is an audience for these productions whatever the intent.

Downey acknowledged as much during an appearance on [Fox News' The Kelly File](#), stating, "Our experience has been that we have felt a tremendous hunger for this kind of material. That People are hungry for hope, they're hungry for story, they're hungry for connection. I think they're hungry for God and we certainly - as we have traveled across the country - have felt a great wave of enthusiasm for the program coming."

Burnett agrees. When asked what is different in the creative process of producing a show which has a "strong message" like *A.D.* and that of his other successful programming (he also produces *Survivor*, *The Apprentice*, *Shark Tank*, and *The Voice*) Burnett replied, "This nation was built on two things really, free enterprise and the Bible - this [the message of *A.D.*] is the Bible, this is the nation. It's the majority. We [Christians] may act like a minority but we are the majority.

While Burnett has clearly stated it is not their mission to preach to people with the series, he adds, "We have reached multi-millions who have now turned back to church, opened the Bible - this is doing God's work, there is no question it's a calling."

When asked how important it is to stay as close to the biblical account, as possible, Downey replied, "I think that bringing both *The Bible* series and *A.D. The Bible Continues* to the screen is a big responsibility; one that we took very seriously. We worked with scholars and theologians and pastors to make sure that when we deal with scripture we do so accurately and authentically". It should be mentioned that those who endorse the series includes a number of highly respected Evangelical and Roman Catholic leaders.

As with *The Bible* series, Burnett and Downey have expressed a desire to remain true to the Biblical accounts. They obviously do not mean 100% accurate, as in word for word; for, *A.D.* is a "historical" adaptation - as was *The Bible* which included a graphic at the beginning of each episode to remind viewers: "This program is an adaptation of Bible stories. It endeavors to stay true to the spirit of the book."



The same message will most likely appear with each episode of *A.D.* This is not necessarily a reason for concern. As I stated in a review prior to the release of *The Bible*, "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."

These "artistic liberties" are often necessary when adapting any book to screen; particularly one with a storyline as massive as that of the Bible. Such changes are generally made in order to help move the story along or for increased dramatic effect. Following are some adaptations made to the New Testament storyline of *The Bible* which illustrate this point.

In the first episode of the New Testament, a scene is added in which Roman soldiers enter a synagogue and grab a man to exert taxes. Joseph happens to be in the synagogue and opposes the soldiers and causes a riot. Mary is also present and flees the synagogue. As she stands outside watching the chaos unfolding around her, an angel dressed as a soldier appears and tells her she will have a son.

The story of Joseph starting a riot is not in the Bible and was clearly added for dramatic effect. However, even though not in the Bible, it is not outside the realm of possibility since the Bible does not disclose where Mary was when the angel came to her. The important event is not where Mary was or the circumstances going on around her when visited by an angel - what is important is that an angel visited her and told her she will have a son - on this point the adaptation is true to the "spirit of the book".

Another example is in the very next scene when Mary is shown to be with child and Joseph confronts her about being pregnant. She responds by telling him the child is of God and she needs him to be the father of this child and to trust her. Joseph tells her God does not do such things and leaves. Though not found in the Bible, it is not hard to imagine such a conversation taking place. Such an insertion into the storyline doesn't obscure the truth of Scripture.

The story continues with Joseph going off by himself and asking God to help them if the child is of Him. The same angel that appeared to Mary comes to him and says the child is of God. Joseph then seeks Mary out and finds her surrounded by a mob shouting derogatory remarks about her condition. Breaking through the crowd, he stops them by saying he will take Mary as his wife.

Again, these events are not presented in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke; however, they are true to the "spirit" of the storyline. The biblical account clearly indicates that Joseph initially struggled with Mary being pregnant but changed his posi-

tion after being visited by an angel. (Matthew 1:19-25)

An illustration of combining events to help move the story along is found in the calling of Matthew. The writers merge Matthew's calling with the story Jesus told of a Pharisee and tax-collector praying. The scene shows a Pharisee thanking God he is not like a sinful tax-collector who is standing nearby praying that God would have mercy on him because he is a sinner (Luke 18:10-14). The scene cuts to Matthew mouthing the words of the sinner as he is embraced by and called by Jesus.

Obviously, the writers merged these two stories to show Matthew's calling bore witness to the reality of the story Jesus had told about the two men praying. It also helps to move the story along without having to explain how the Jewish people generally regarded tax-collectors, like Matthew. It is not how the stories are presented in the Bible but it is true to the "spirit" of the message of God's forgiveness being available to all.

What should cause the viewer to be wary are changes which alter the intended message of the Scriptures or added needlessly and not "true to the spirit of the book". For example, in the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-9) the Bible says Jesus stooped and wrote on the ground as the religious men called for the woman to be stoned. When Jesus finally stands, he tells them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."



In *The Bible* series, Jesus is shown picking up a stone as if he is about to stone the woman, before turning to the crowd and saying, "I'll give my stone to the first man who tells me he has never sinned." This is a case of a change made simply to make a change. It does not move the story along and it certainly is not any more dramatic than the story in the Bible. While some might argue it is true to the "spirit" of the story, it is difficult to imagine Jesus ever holding a rock intended to stone someone, whether in jest, or not.

One other illustration of this is *The Bible* series' depiction of the raising of Lazarus. In it, Jesus is shown entering the tomb of Lazarus rather than remaining outside the tomb. And, instead





of calling Lazarus to come forth from the tomb (clearly indicating Jesus was outside the tomb) as in the Gospel account (John 11:38-44), the miniseries depicts Jesus kneeling beside the body of Lazarus and kissing the top of his head as he tells him to rise. The original story seems much more dramatic and compelling - so, why the change?

Another reason a change might be made is to insert one's particular theological perspective or perhaps to promote a view that is popular in culture even though it is not necessarily supported by the biblical account. In *The Bible* series it seems there is a calculated elevation of the role that Mary Magdalene played in the life and ministry of Jesus. This is probably due to the interest in Mary Magdalene that has been promoted in the past few decades by popular films and books, such as the *Da Vinci Code*, which present her as the wife of Jesus and/or the leader of the Church.

While, *The Bible* does not make such claims nor infer she and Jesus were married, it does seem to give her Apostle-like status as she appears prominently in many scenes with the Apostles. For example, prior to the feeding of the 5,000 Mary Magdalene is depicted as being in the boat with the Apostles. However, in Mark's account we find only the Apostles were in the boat as following the instruction of Jesus, "they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves." (MK 6:32) "They", according to Mark 6:30-31, specifically refers to the Apostles.

Also on this point, *The Bible* shows Mary Magdalene exiting the boat with the disciples; and, upon seeing the great crowd of people who have gathered to hear Jesus, she asks him to send the crowd away to find food. However, according to Matthew 14, Mark 6 and Luke 9, it was the "disciples" who encouraged Jesus to send the people away to find food. And, in John 6, the only conversation about getting food for the people is between Jesus and Philip. All of these accounts are in conflict with that depicted in *The Bible*. Additionally, *The Bible* depicts Mary Magdalene as one of those distributing the food Jesus provides by multiplying the loaves and fishes - something also not found in the Scripture.

Interjecting Mary Magdalene into portions of the biblical record neither advances the story nor adds dramatic effect; therefore, it must be intended to promote some other agenda. She will likely have an elevated role in *A.D.*, as well. This is unfortunate as she was obviously an important figure in the ministry of Jesus, as were many other women, and this could easily have been evidenced by staying true to the accounts found in Scripture.

Even with these concerns raised by *The Bible* - and those that are significant are relatively few in number - *A.D.* should be worth watching. The clips found on the film's website are very encouraging. The production value far exceeds that of *The Bible*, as does the acting. This same should hold true of the scripting, as well. And, based on the huge ratings garnered by *The Bible*, the *A.D.* team undoubtedly realizes the incredible market value of this production among Christians. As such, it should be safe to conclude that even greater effort has been made to ensure *A.D.* stays "true to the spirit of the book".



Whether *A.D.* gets it all right or mostly right, it will provide an opportunity for conversation with those we connect to in culture. Mark Burnett is correct when he states, "This is beyond a show, this is a movement."

As members of the body of Christ, we are part of that movement. Let us be resolved to share the hope that is offered by the one who founded that movement - let us seize the moment to share the good news of Jesus Christ.



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