

“Resurrection” Movie 2021

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“Resurrection” as produced by Roma Downey and Mark Burnett, producers of the Bible Series and A.D. which aired on The History Channel. It aired on DiscoveryPlus channel on March 27, 2021.

Being that Roma Downey and Mark Burnett were producers of the biblical epic movie series “Bible Series” and “A.D.,” “Resurrection” is right in their wheelhouse for producing another biblical epic movie. This one focus’ on the resurrection of Jesus Christ and what the disciples experienced and how faith triumphs.

This “write-up” is not merely a review, but also a debut of a new Christian-Biblical critique. One of the key questions before critiquing any biblical epic movie is to ask what is the movie’s purpose? Is it for entertainment? Is it for Christian devotion and piety? Or is it to instill faith? Or is it for more than one reason or all of these? Since the purpose is not actually stated in the movie or in the credits (that I can see), we have to figure out the purpose from how the movie is presented and written. We are complex people; a movie can have aspects of all three. I will state in the conclusion what I think is the main purpose of this movie.

In this review, I introduce a new criterion scale in critiquing such a Bible-based movie: a simple True Plausible Unlikely False scale. This scale can be applied to verbal lines (e.g. a conversation), characters, graphic depictions, and scenes. We, viewers and this reviewer has allowance conversations realizing that the Bible does not record most conversations and that movie writers have to fill in a lot of lines to “fill in” their story. Not every conversation needs to be critiqued, but if there is a particular line that I deem as Unlikely or False, they I will assign that critique. In the literary world, we grant a ‘poetic license’ creators of these modern works (in movie or book form). The general question we should ask ourselves while viewing the movie (which applies to any Bible-based movie or biblical character movie) is do the lines support the Scriptures? This Christian-Biblical critique sets the standard fairly high: we should settle for no less than complete and diligent accuracy in all things based on the **biblical texts**.

The truth is, practically every single Life of Christ movie and biblically-based movie ever made that has taken such ‘poetic licenses’ including verbal lines or depictions that are very unlikely to be true and can be deemed False. Certain non-biblical lines, characters, and/or scenes are added to thicken the plot, intensify intrigue, heighten suspense, or increase action and entertainment.

This criterion does not judge or assess the sets or scenery per se since we reasonably acknowledge it will not look exactly like it did in biblical days, only if a scene is put in that clearly is not based on the Bible. I strongly applaud many of Life of Christ movie makers in their many scenes that look real good, which is good enough for a modern movie. It is the Indiana Jones-George Lucas-Steven Spielberg-esque science fiction flares in movies since particularly after the year 2000 that may be added into a biblically based movie that I take issue with (see day of Pentecost in “Resurrection” review below). Details in scenes, such as how high was the platform on which Pilate judged Jesus and presented Him before the crowd? Are too trivial to need critiquing; only when or where details depicted that clearly do not line up with Scripture.

This Christian Biblical Movie Critique with a strong standard is needed more than ever before in light of the moral and cultural deterioration and degeneration in this contemporary age. The apostles of our Lord Jesus exhort us to hold fast to our faith, our principles, the Christian tradition, and of course our Scriptures! The Holy Spirit gives us the gift of discernment to discern truth from error. If something seems to not be true to the discerning Christian who has the indwelling Spirit, it probably is not true. It is in fact super hard to make any biblically-based movie that is completely accurate in all things with nothing added that is unlikely to have happened and still be entertaining enough to get the money to produce the movie. Based on the experience of this reviewer keenly watching at least a couple dozen biblical movies through the years, every one of them in fact have at least two or more flaws, including the great life of Christ epic movies.

In transitioning now to the “Resurrection” movie, this movie is not classified as simply a “Life of Christ” film since the producers stated its also about what the earliest disciples went through and takes us into the first chapters of the book of Acts. So it is thus the final week of the life of Christ up to His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, and the apostles through Acts ch. 3, catching the highlights. In critiquing Life of Christ movies,

we need to figure out which Gospel or Gospels are being used as the basis. This requires knowing each of the Gospels well, for its hard to be checking each of the four Gospels as you are viewing the movie at the same time. Because of the time limits, no one movie can include all the Gospel narratives. Each movie has to be selective. In regards to critiquing, it should be fair and realistic. If a creator used primarily the Gospel of Mark, John's Gospel should not be used in critiquing.

In the case of "Resurrection" it starts at the tail end of the Palm Sunday event of Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem and rapidly moves to the Good Friday trial of Jesus to set the stage in order to get to His crucifixion and then to His resurrection. It therefore is undetermined at this point which Gospel if just any one is being followed (as the movie continues, elements from different Gospels are combined into one story). Therefore, we should not unfairly assess the absence of several of the Holy Week events. Finally in critiquing, we should consider the length of the movie. In the case of "Resurrection," it was kept short to 1 and ½ hours which means there are scenes and conversations that it left out for the sake of time.

"Resurrection" is a contemporary movie of Jesus' resurrection and what His disciples went through during this time (end of Gospels accounts and bridge to Acts ch. 3), as stated by the producers in the interview**.

The first scene we turn to is Jesus' short trial before the Sanhedrin headed by Caiaphas, the High Priest. This scene with the questioning is assessed as true, taken right from the Gospels. Caiaphas pulls out his 'trump card' and asks, "Are you or are you not the Messiah." Mark's Gospel has "Are you the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the Blessed?" (NKJV). Matthew's Gospel reads "...tells us if you are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of God. Luke also includes "Son of God". Thus, all three synoptic Gospels testify to Jesus as the Son of God the Father, which was a crucial theological point which was the basis the Sanhedrin used to condemn Jesus to death because of blasphemy. But the "Resurrection" movie leaves out this important claim. This could be interpreted as reflecting the minimalist trend among today's unbelieving liberals or perhaps catering to a "dumbed down" generation of today? The face of Jesus in this scene looking at Caiaphas is unfortunate in my viewing, for it looked like Jesus (as portrayed by the actor) had a facial expression of hate toward Caiaphas. This may not have been intended by actor or the movie makers. It feeds into a false "thickening of the plot" and drops this movie well below the standard of the great Life of Christ epics of the 1960's and 1970's (*King of Kings* and *Jesus of Nazareth*). We know, based on the Gospels, that Jesus would **not** have glanced any of His accusers with hate during His whole Passion unto death on the Cross based on the Scriptures (Is. 53 and the Gospels); we need no pictures to discern this since sacred Scripture leads us to this conclusion. Evident on the actor's face in this scene was a diagonal line below each eye which accentuated more of a "hate" look, but those lines are hardly noticeable in the final scene of Jesus walking with Peter and wearing a warm smile.

Post-Resurrection

This movie depicts Pontius Pilate's life consumed with stamping out this Jesus resurrection notion such that it leads to a scene that not only is not in the Gospels but is deemed to be false. While the apostles are in the Upper Room, before departing to Galilee, Pilate sends Roman soldiers to hunt them down and actually raided the Upper Room, but the men quickly escape out a back way onto other roof tops and then the Zealots assisted them to open the city gate and they escaped. The Gospels do convey that there was fear among them that the Sanhedrin more so, lesser so the Romans, may come after them too, but they were never raided in the Upper Room. This scene is Hollywood entertainment, heightens suspense, and puts fire under their shoes to return back to Galilee.

The following two scenes I assess as false. After Jesus' resurrection and the empty tomb, Pilate is vowed to stamp out the notion of a resurrected Jesus and decides to make a personal visit not only into Caiaphas' house but to inside his bath house while he is taking his mikveh bath. This serves to heighten the power struggle and conflict between the Roman rule and the Jewish Sanhedrin. But such an event most likely never happened. Another scene I deem as pure fiction to thicken the plot and suspense. After Joseph of Arimathea secures the burial of Jesus' body in his own unused tomb nearby, he happens to have a dinner appointment with Caiaphas that same evening. And Caiaphas naturally gets upset with Joseph when Joseph informs him. Though this scene is most likely pure fiction, it has some redeeming value in that it shows someone on the High Jewish Council who cares about Jesus and holds to a deep enough respect to even lay his own reputation on the line.

The Day of Pentecost scene of the apostles in the upper room is mostly based on Acts ch. 2. But the depiction of the fire swirling around them in a circle like a ring of fire is a Hollywood-esque Steven Spielberg-esque movie 'magic.' And it departs from Acts ch. 2 in not showing the flames of fire on the heads of each of the disciples. This movie also really 'drops the ball' as we know from Acts 2. In Acts 2, when the disciples were moved to go out into the streets, they were immediately speaking, prophesying and many languages, praising God in many languages. But in this movie, they, even Peter, had nothing to say! They held their tongues till they got to the Temple. But only when they arrived at the Temple, the lame man Peter encounters is from Act. 3. The movie thus cuts out the main message of Acts 2 and the 3000 people baptized that day. This day but many Christians and Churches is considered the birth of the Church and this movie jumps right over it, very unfortunate to the point of not considering this movie a completely Christian movie but a mixed "Hollywood-Christian" movie.

After Peter heals the lame man, Caiaphas' wife, portrayed as a ruthless evil woman, privately hands the man who was lame a bag of money to bribe him to say before the court that he was not really lame but pretending. It is only Matthew's Gospel which mentions Pilate's wife (portrayed in this movie), but the Gospels and Acts do not mention Caiaphas' wife. This scene is thus assessed as false.

Besides Jesus, the two other heroes in this movie is Mary, the mother of our Lord, and next, the apostle John. It is Mary who is the anchor of faith during those hours and two days between His death and His resurrection. Mary alone believed He was going to rise

on the third day. Her anchor of faith was influencing Mary Magdelene, John, and Peter, but none of them had mustered up the faith.

Faith in Jesus' resurrection is an anchor of the Christian faith, an awesome phenomenon, which transforms the mood of the movie from conflict to glory.

In conclusion, the main purpose of this movie is for entertainment purpose, and secondarily perhaps to engender faith. But that faith gets fused with the false fire of Pilate consumed at stamping out the Jesus resurrection idea. The entertainment purpose is clear in the following: not show depictions of prayer by any of the apostles (especially during the crucial hours) Mary mother of our Lord only; the obvious the use of Hollywood-esque and Spielberg-esque movie magic of signs in sky of swirling clouds and flares of light and a ring of fire; and the extra, non-biblical plot-thickening and intrigue scenes. The viewers are both entertained as well as inspired by the truth of Jesus Christ's death, resurrection, and glorious ascension, and the birth of His Church. The actors, in my view though, do not rise up to the par that the actors of the life of Christ epic movies did in the 1960's and 1970s, *King of Kings*, *Jesus of Nazareth*, and others. The actor who played Jesus did a good job, but he did not command the presence of the actors who played in the greater epics *King of Kings* and *Jesus of Nazareth*. "Resurrection" is for today's less enlightened, more darkened and degenerated society. But despite this, it has redeeming value because of the core story- the truth in the resurrection of Jesus. The power of faith in Jesus' resurrection is the central 'take-away' from this message. Mary's faith (in her son as the Messiah) was stirring and moving and is held by over two billion Christians.

*"Resurrection" was viewed by reviewer March 27, 2021 on DiscoveryPlus.com. I also watched the producers' interview on EWTN's World Over with Raymond Aroyo on March 25.