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In This Edition:

Founded 1946 RAS Religion Analysis Service Holy Bible 1 John 4:6

"Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" 1 John 4:6

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RAS TEAM NOTES

A Word from the President of Religion Analysis Service to our Discerner readers and supporters:

I want to take this opportunity to let you know that our longtime and faithful editor of the Discerner recently underwent double bypass heart surgery here in the Twin Cities of Minnesota. He is recovering nicely, and we would surely appreciate your prayers for Larry, and his dear wife Shirley as he continues on his road to health recovery.

We also appreciate your patience for any delays this has caused in getting out this issue of the Discerner.

Also, in October of 2014, we are beginning public presentations on counter-cult and Christian apologetic issues at the University of Northwestern-St. Paul. Our first presentation will be on the subject of a Christian critique of reincarnation. If you live near the Twin Cities and would like to receive e-mail updates concerning these meetings in the future, just send us an e-mail at info@ras.org and we will put you on our update list.

Steve Lagoon

WITH THIS ISSUE

We trust that you will find this issue very informative. Our lead article is by Sharon Lindbloom of Mormonism Research Ministry. Her article is a fascinating account of the famous or infamous Mountain Meadow Massacre perpetrated by early leaders of the Mormon Church in Utah. I have contributed an article responding to claims by Jehovah's Witnesses that the unity of their group proves that they are the true Christians. Along with the above, we have a "News Round-up" and an interesting and timely article by our board member Rick Dack on the subject of how Hollywood treats Christian themes, and particularly how the media distorts the biblical message.

We hope that you will enjoy being a discerning reader!

Thank-you,

Steve Lagoon

IN THE LINE OF DUTY: MOUNTAIN MEADOWS

by Sharon Lindbloom

"There was a massacre in these hills...." (Stewart Lee Udall, *The Mountain Meadows* [1990], from a poem written by Udall, a descendant of John D. Lee, and read at the re interment of victims bones at Mountain Meadows, September 1999)

It was spring of 1857. Promises of a bright future in the west beckoned. A collection of families banded together, leaving their homes in Arkansas, to find a better life. They traveled by wagon train; forty men, thirty women, and seventy children (Will Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets*, p.4). Along the trail they met other travelers who shared their journey for awhile. One of these, a Mormon missionary returning to Utah, recounted later that they were *"people from the country districts, sober, hard-working, plain folks, but well-to-do and, taken all in all, about as respectable a band of emigrants as ever passed through Salt Lake City"* (Blood of the Prophets, pp.96-97).

The people of this wagon train, led by Alexander Fancher and John T. Baker, carried their hopes and dreams with them all along the Oregon-California Trail. But they never made it to California. Their journey came to an end within the boundaries of Utah Territory.

On 7 September the emigrants were camped in a lush, quiet meadow in present extreme southwestern Utah. This was their last chance to rest before beginning the difficult crossing of the Mojave Desert. As they sat down to breakfast on that chilly Monday morning they were surprised by gunfire. The camp was under attack. The men marshaled their weapons and for the next four days fought off what they believed to be an Indian assault.

By Friday morning, 11 September, the wagon train was in desperate straits. Fewer than two dozen men were left to defend the women and children. The emigrants were cut off from their water supply and they were nearly out of ammunition. When the camp was approached by white men waving a flag of truce, the emigrants were ready to listen. They spent the following two hours with Mormon John D. Lee arranging for the emigrants' surrender.

Lee was a high-profile Mormon. He was a brother-in-law and adopted son of the Mormon Prophet Brigham Young; he served in the LDS Church secret police (the Danites) when the Saints were in Missouri; and he served in the theocratic Council of Fifty under Brigham Young. To the Arkansas emigrants, Lee appeared as a savior, sent to rescue them from the Indians.

Even so, the surrender proposal met with debate among the beleaguered emigrants. Lee insisted that the only way the travelers could escape from the Indians was in the surrender of their weapons, but he promised to control the Indians while Mormon men led the unarmed people to safety. Several of the men in the Fancher/Baker party expressed their belief that it would be foolish to give up their guns, that it could result in their deaths. However, as one of the children present later wrote in her memoirs, *"…they were about famished from thirst, and were ready to accept almost any terms"* (Blood of the Prophets, p.145).

So the Arkansas men gave up their arms, piling them into a wagon. Placing bedding on top of the guns, they then filled the wagon with their wounded and a few women and children. A second wagon held more wounded and children. Lee led the emigrants out of the camp: wagons first, women and children next, and finally, trailing far behind, the men; all were walking in single file. As the men marched they were each given an armed Mormon militia escort.

Half an hour into the march Major John Higbee fired a shot into the air and with a predetermined command, told his troops, *"Do your duty!"*

Immediately the Mormon guards turned and shot their charges. Not all the bullets found their marks, however, so the killing continued with knives. Some used their guns as clubs. Ahead on the trail, more Mormon men shot and killed the wounded in the wagons. Others, disguised as Indians, along with a few real American Indians, sprang out of the brush to slaughter the women and older children (*Blood of the Prophets*, pp.5, 146-150).

Survivor Sarah Baker, only 3 years old at the time, later wrote, *"You don't forget the horror. You don't forget the blood-curdling war-whoops and the banging of guns all around you. You don't forget the screaming of other children and the agonized shrieks of women being hacked to death with tomahawks. And you wouldn't forget it, either, if you saw your own mother topple over in the wagon beside you, with a big red splotch getting bigger and bigger on the front of her calico dress"* (Quoted in Blood of the Prophets, p.150).

In the end 120 people—including more than two dozen women and 50 children—were slain by both Mormons and Indians at Mountain Meadows. Nephi Johnson, the Mormon lieutenant who led the murders of the women and children, later confessed that *"white men did most of the killing"* (*Blood of the Prophets*, pp.147, 151).

The bodies of the dead were stripped of their clothing and jewelry and left to become food for the buzzards and wolves. The wealth of the wagon train—including wagons, cattle, and cash—was divided among Mormons with token gifts going to their Indian allies (*Blood of the Prophets*, pp.157, 171-173).

Only 17 children, all under the age of seven, were left alive. They were taken to the nearby home of Rachel Hamblin. She later described how the children arrived *"in the darkness of night, two of the children cruelly mangled and the most of them with their parents' blood still wet upon their clothes, and all of them shrieking with terror and grief and anguish"* (Quoted in *Blood of the Prophets*, pp.158-159). The following day John D. Lee took the children and disbursed them among Mormon homes in southern Utah where they remained for several months. In 1859 Indian Superintendent Jacob Forney recovered the children and returned them to their relatives in Arkansas. Adding insult to injury, the Mormon guardians billed the U.S. government $7000 for care and feeding of the orphans (J. P. Dunn, Jr., *Massacres of the Mountains*, p.307).

After the massacre the Mormon participants were ordered to keep the whole thing secret and to *"lay it all to the Indians"* (John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled*, p.250). Yet it was impossible to maintain the secrecy—and the fabricated story. Within weeks those outside of Utah Territory knew of the killings and attributed the crime to the Mormons. Inside Utah, faithful Mormons were shaken and troubled over the

murders condoned by their Church leaders and committed by their friends. Still, they would not betray their neighbors and instead helped cover up the truth (Juanita Brooks, *Mountain Meadows Massacre*, pp.139-140; 164-165; 177).

Brigham Young obstructed investigations and attempts to prosecute Mormons for any part in the crime (*Blood of the Prophets*, pp.243-245, 249-250). A dozen years after the massacre there still had been no justice for the victims. Under mounting pressure from both inside and outside the LDS Church, the Church finally conceded the involvement of a few renegade Mormons. John D. Lee was alleged to be the person ultimately responsible for the massacre and was excommunicated in October of 1870 (*Blood of the Prophets*, pp.270-272). Six and a half years later, on 23 March 1877, Lee was executed by firing squad, having been found guilty of first degree murder, the only person ever convicted for the atrocities at Mountain Meadows. Lee's all-Mormon jury never attempted to explain how one man could have murdered 120 people with a gun, a tomahawk, a knife and a club, but they hoped the conviction would shift blame away from the Church and put a stop to non-Mormon speculation about the Church's duplicity in the matter (*Blood of the Prophets*, p.315; *Mountain Meadows Massacre*, p.211).

Until the 1995 bombing in Oklahoma City, the Mountain Meadows Massacre was unparalleled in United States history. It was the worst civilian mass murder ever carried out on American soil. But unlike Oklahoma City, where the perpetrators were small in number and acting independently, Mountain Meadows involved an entire society—either in the execution of the crime or in the cover-up that followed. One historian wrote: *"There was not a Mormon of any prominence who did not know the truth about the massacre, and not one who did not take part in this deception"* (*Massacres of the Mountains*, p.314).

As LDS historian Juanita Brooks pointed out, *"A careful study of the lives of the participants will show that they were normally not highway men or murderers; they were sober and industrious folk, deeply religious, superstitious, perhaps, but unquestioningly loyal to their church"* (*Mountain Meadows Massacre*, p.218). This may provide the key to understanding how the massacre at Mountain Meadows could have happened.

How?

In the spring of 1857 LDS Apostle Heber C. Kimball counseled the Saints, *"…when brother Brigham says dance, then dance; but when he says stop, then stop; and when he says prophesy, then prophesy, but be sure to prophesy right"* (6 April 1857, *Journal of Discourses* 5:23). Total obedience was expected of the Latter-day Saints.

"What is a man's duty here?" asked LDS Apostle John Taylor. *"It is obedience to the oracles of God that are in our midst;…Now Brother Brigham has said all is right, and he is the representative of the Almighty upon the earth, and it is for us to stand by him and obey him; and he says 'Rejoice, and live your religion, and all shall be well.' Is not that the voice of God? It is"* (30 August 1857, *Journal of Discourses* 5:191-192).

For ten years Mormonism had thrived in virtual isolation. Latter-day Saints lived under Brigham Young's theocracy where there was no separation between the secular and the holy. The people were indoctrinated through the exclusive teaching of Church leaders while the society placed a heavy emphasis on performance. They were building the kingdom of God, and that required absolute obedience to the law:

"Nothing but obedience to [God's] law, obedience in families, obedience to Bishops and to the Priesthood in all its ramifications, and especially to President Brigham Young as the head, to carry out his law to the whole people, can accomplish the purposes of God or our salvation as a people," Apostle Taylor taught (20 September 1857, *Journal of Discourses* 5:265).

In addition to the commands of duty and obedience, Church leaders fostered a general distrust of outsiders. The sermons continually reminded the Saints that they had a multitude of enemies and no one from outside their community could be trusted—even some from within the community were dangerous (For examples see *Journal of Discourses* 5:4-5, 11-12, 24-25, 56-58, 74-76, etc.). Furthermore, they were told, the Saints had the responsibility to maintain truth and righteousness on the earth against all odds. It was us-against-them, all or nothing. Consider a sermon preached by Brigham Young just weeks after the Mountain Meadows Massacre:

"The President of the United States, his Cabinet, the Senate, the House of Representatives, the priests of the various religious sects and their followers have joined in a crusade to waste away the last vestige of truth and righteousness from this earth, and especially from this part of it. Yes, they have joined together; and we have to maintain truth and righteousness, virtue and holiness, or they will be driven from the earth. With us, it is the kingdom of God, or nothing; and we will maintain it, or die in the trying,…" (18 October 1857, *Journal of Discourses* 5:342).

All of these factors worked together to produce a community dedicated to serving their god by obeying their leaders. Mormons were discouraged from questioning their superiors or thinking for themselves. LDS Apostle Wilford Woodruff instructed, *"You need not fear; all we have to do is to be passive in the hands of the Lord, and follow the counsel of our leaders, and not be particularly anxious that the Lord should reveal to you or to me his mind and will and intentions concerning our present difficulties;… All we have to do is to live our religion; and when the Presidency say*

'Come here,' or 'Go there,' let us be on hand to obey, and all will be right" (27 September 1857, *Journal of Discourses* 5:268).

So, in September 1857 the Saints obeyed their leaders. With concern—and even misgiving—Mormon men did their "duty." One hundred and twenty men, women and children were betrayed and killed for the sake of the Mormon kingdom of God. Yet the question remains: Why did LDS leaders believe it was necessary to murder these emigrants?

"But how to cleanse the stained earth? / To erase old griefs and grievances? / To quench long- dying embers of anger? / To forgive unforgivable acts?…" (Stewart Lee Udall, *The Mountain Meadows*, loc. cit.)

Why?

Virtually all historians agree that the massacre was ordered by Mormon leaders, but there is disagreement over the level at which the order originated. The LDS Church *"has steadfastly denied responsibility, first blaming Indians and later a rogue church official for the crime,"* reported the New York Times. Some historians believe there is enough evidence to place the order for the massacre squarely on the shoulders of Brigham Young (Emily Eakin, "Reopening a Mormon Murder Mystery," *New York Times*, 12 October 2002, online edition). It is beyond the scope of this article to decide the matter, but instead will leave any conclusions in the hands of the reader. The following information provides the context in which the Mountain Meadows Massacre occurred.

War

On Sunday morning, 16 August 1857, Brigham Young stood at his pulpit in Great Salt Lake City. Looking out over his church congregation he declared, *"I am at the defiance of all hell [and] Governments, but especially ours.…[they] raise a force to come and slay all the Latterdaysaints, men, women and children.…I tell you, the Lord Almighty and the Elders of Israel being our helpers, they shall not come to this territory. I will fight them and I will fight all hell"* (16 August 1857, unpublished sermon, quoted in *Blood of the Prophets*, p.89).

As Young continued his sermon he spoke of the depredations he imagined the United States army would commit against Mormon women and children. He spoke of government plans to hang Mormon church leaders. He spoke of burning every building and crop, laying the territory to waste and turning it into a Potter's field rather than let it fall into the hands of these enemies. *"Can you flee to the mountains, men, women and children, and lay wast[e] and desolate everything before them?"* Young asked his followers. Sound exploded as thousands shouted their willingness to lose all for the sake of the Mormon kingdom (*Blood of the Prophets*, pp.89-90).

The U.S. army was marching on Zion. Utah Territory had been in quiet rebellion against the federal government for some time. Brigham Young ruled his people according to his own conscience rather than by territorial laws. U.S. President James Buchanan delivered a message in 1857 in which he stated, *"Without entering upon any minute history of occurrences, it is sufficient to say that all the officers of the United States, judicial and executive, with the single exception of two Indian agents, have found it necessary for their own personal safety to withdraw from the territory, and there no longer remains any government in Utah but the despotism of Brigham Young"* (Quoted in *Massacres of the Mountains*, p.286). The President dispatched troops to Utah for the purpose of insuring *"the establishment and maintenance of law and order"* (*Blood of the Prophets*, p.79). By 16 August, when Young preached the above quoted sermon, the army was well on its way. The Saints were preparing for war.

Meanwhile, LDS Apostle George A. Smith carried news of the coming confrontation to the southern Utah settlements. During a month-long tour, Smith effectively stirred up the Saints with fear and hostility against all outsiders. Also meeting with the Paiutes in the area, Smith told the Indians that Americans were their common enemies. He promised that if they would fight with the Mormons, they would be well cared for (*Blood of the Prophets*, pp.84-86).

In September the U.S. army sent Captain Stewart Van Vliet, a sensitive and diplomatic man, ahead into Salt Lake to assure the people that the army's mission was a peaceful one. Brigham Young invited him to Sunday services. As Young took the pulpit he told the congregation of 4,000 that he was too angry to preach. But he did preach, rehearsing the persecutions the Saints had endured in the past and decrying unwarranted interference from the U.S. government. *"We have borne enough of their oppression and hellish abuse, and we will not bear any more of it; for there is no just law requiring further forbearance on our part. And I am not going to have troops here to protect the priests and a hellish rabble in efforts to drive us from the land we possess…"* (*Blood of the Prophets*, pp.134-138; Brigham Young, 13 September 1857, Journal of Discourses 5:227). No matter what Captain Van Vliet might have told the Mormon people about the army's mission, they did not believe him after hearing from their Prophet.

Later that day Young sent a clear message from his pulpit to the government: *"Our enemies had better count the cost;…If they persist in sending troops here, I want the people in the west and in the east to understand that it will not be safe for them to cross the plains."* Young told of how he had previously kept the Indians at peace with white people crossing the territory, but that his ability to do so could not be guaranteed any longer. *"Probably, scores of persons have been killed,"* Young said (13 September 1857, *Journal of Discourses* 5:236).

The Fancher/Baker party was already dead, though Young did not receive confirmation of the fact for another few days (*Blood of the Prophets*, p.170). Historian Will Bagley wrote: *"The emigrants fell victim to Brigham Young's decision to stage a violent incident that would demonstrate his power to control the Indians of the Great Basin and to stop travel on the most important overland roads"* (*Blood of the Prophets*, p.380). The emigrants were sacrificed as an example and a threat against the U.S. government so that *"no officer apointed [sic] by government should come and rule over us from this time forth"* (Brigham Young, quoted in *Blood of the Prophets*, p.135).

Vengeance

Another possible motivation for the Mountain Meadows Massacre was vengeance. While the Saints had enjoyed ten years of peace since arriving in the Great Basin, they carried with them scars from a dozen years of conflict with their previous non-Mormon neighbors. Having left their homes in both Missouri and Illinois under duress, the Saints harbored anger and bitterness against "gentiles" (i.e., non-Mormons)—feelings which were fed by fiery sermons from the pulpit:

"We have had to stoop to our enemies heretofore and bear many things from them worse than death; but if there is anything that gives us joy and consolation,…It is when I heard the Brethren say, 'You are free, brethren, you are free and you may prove yourselves before God and man that you are willing to defend yourselves against tyrants and oppressors.' … It would sweeten death to a man to know that he should lay down his life in defense of freedom and the kingdom of God, rather than to longer bow to the cruelty of mobs,…I thank God, and I rejoice that this people are determined to be free of mobocracy and oppression, and that they are determined to have peace, if they have to fight for it" (*Mountain Meadows Massacre*, p.22; John Taylor, quoted in *Mountain Meadows Massacre*, p.23).

While the U.S. army was marching toward Utah Territory, and the Fancher party was making its way to Great Salt Lake City, the Saints received some heartbreaking news. One of their most beloved Apostles, Parley P. Pratt, had been murdered in Arkansas. His killer was a "gentile"; the Saints considered Pratt a martyr for his Mormon faith (*Blood of the Prophets*, p.70. Hector McLean murdered Pratt in cold blood, accusing him of taking McLean's wife and children. Pratt did take McLean's wife for one of his own plural wives, thereby living the Mormon "principle" of polygamy. Hence, in the Mormon mind, Pratt died for his faith. See *Blood of the Prophets*, pp.68-70).

Pratt's widow, Eleanor, lovingly prepared her husband's body for burial. *"Parley, thou are not dead but sleeping,"* she said. *"And thy innocent blood and thy wounds are before the God of Israel, to plead for the innocent, and call forth vengeance on the guilty"* (Quoted in *Blood of the Prophets*, p.71).

Pratt died two weeks after the Fancher party left Arkansas, yet the Utah Saints connected the people of the wagon train with Pratt's murder.

Once the Fancher party reached Salt Lake rumors began to fly. Mormons claimed the emigrants were abusing Indians, assaulting Mormon women, poisoning water, and burning property as they went. They were allegedly boasting of having been involved in some of the crimes enacted against the Mormons in Missouri and Illinois. These and many more were the accusations. One historian wrote: *"Rumor wearied her countless wings in incessant flight, carrying before them the reports of their evil deeds, which grew and spread until their original inventors might have blushed for them.…True, they saw none of this evil-doing as the emigrants passed them, but their belief in it was not shaken by that. They had Mormon testimony to its truth, and that was sufficient"* (*Massacres of the Mountains*, pp.290-291. Even LDS historians agree there is no truth to these rumors. See Richard Turley, Ensign, "*The Mountain Meadows Massacre*," September 2007).

By the time the Fancher party reached Mountain Meadows their fate was set. Mormon leaders had enlisted the help of Indians to avenge the wrongs committed against the Saints in days past. Mormon doctrine maintained Indians were *"the battle ax of the Lord,"* a weapon in the hands of the Mormons to be wielded against their enemies (*Mountain Meadows Massacre*, p.56; Blood of the Prophets, p.36). Furthermore, LDS scripture told them, *"…thine enemy is in thine hands; and if thou rewardest him according to his works thou art justified;…"* (*Doctrine and Covenants* 98:31. Earlier in this *D&C* section Latter-day Saints are instructed not to retaliate against wrongs done to them, but verse 31 begins, *"Nevertheless…"*).

Intriguingly, two months before the massacre a newspaper in California considered possible fallout for the murder of Parley Pratt. The journalist wondered *"whether the hot blood which must now be seething and boiling in the veins of Brigham Young and his satellites, at Salt Lake, is to be cooled by the murder of Gentiles who pass through their territory.… whether the 'destroying angels' of Mormondom, are to be brought into requisition to make reprisals upon travelers, or, whether, as has been done before, 'Saints' disguised as Indians are to constitute themselves the supposed ministers of God's vengeance in this case"* (*Daily Alta California*, 9 July 1857, quoted in Blood of the Prophets, p.72. Fifteen of the white Mormons involved in the Massacre did disguise themselves as Indians. In 1859 a young survivor told his playmate, *"My father was killed by Indians; when they washed their faces they were white men." Blood of the Prophets*, pp.143, 154).

Three and a half years after the massacre at Mountain Meadows Brigham Young made a tour of southern Utah and met with John D. Lee. Young told Lee that those killed had been relatives of those who

had murdered the prophets and so had merited their fate. Six days later Young visited the massacre site. He found that a pile of stones 12 feet high had been erected by American soldiers as a monument to the dead. Topping the rock cairn was a wooden cross bearing the inscription: *"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."* Young read the inscription aloud, but altered it to reflect his own feelings. Accounts vary, but Young is remembered saying either, *"Vengeance is mine saith the Lord; and I have taken a little,"* or, *"Vengeance is mine saith the Lord; I have repaid."* Then, lifting *"his right arm to the square,"* Young silently directed his men to destroy the monument. *"[I]n five minutes there wasn't one stone left upon another,"* one of those present reported. *"He didn't have to tell us what he wanted done. We understood"* (*Blood of the Prophets*, p.247; Mountain Meadows Massacre, p.182-183).

Atonement

Closely tied to the idea of vengeance is the concept of atonement. Vengeance is defined as the return of an injury for an injury in punishment or retribution; revenge. Atonement promotes the primary idea of reconciliation by making amends or reparation. Secondarily it is satisfaction given for wrongdoing, injury, etc. The Fancher party may have been killed to exact punishment against a nation the Mormons believed had wronged them and their kindred; or the Arkansans may have been killed to atone for their own sins.

Brigham Young taught his followers that some sins were beyond the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The only way to be cleansed from these sins was to atone with one's own blood (*Journal of Discourses* 4:53-54). An LDS Apostle proclaimed the same message, instructing those whose sins fell into that category: *"…let your blood be shed and let the smoke ascend, that the incense thereof may come up before God as an atonement for your sins,…"* (Jedediah M. Grant [Second Counselor in the First Presidency], *Deseret News*, 1856, p.235).

Brigham Young expanded this doctrine of blood atonement beyond merely being effective for Church members wanting to atone for their own sins. He also included Saints sacrificing others in order *"to save them."* From the pulpit in February 1857 Young said, *"This is loving our neighbor as ourselves; if he needs help, help him; and if he wants salvation and it is necessary to spill his blood on the earth in order that he may be saved, spill it.…That is loving mankind.…Now, brethren and sisters, will you live your religion?"* (*Journal of Discourses* 4:53; 4:220).

When the Mormon militia received their orders regarding what to do with the Fancher wagon train, some wondered whether it was right to follow through. Historian J.P. Dunn said the men sought the guidance of God. *"On the still night air of that mountain pass, one voice after another rose in fervent prayer, asking God to say to them whether or not they should betray and murder one hundred and twenty of their fellow-men. The last*

voice ceased; a moment of silence ensued; then Major Higbee announced, in confident tone, 'I have the evidence of God's approval of our mission. It is God's will that we carry out our instructions to the letter'" (*Massacres of the Mountains*, p.295).

The following morning they did just that. When it was over the men, women and children from Arkansas lay dead and scattered across the Meadows. Seventeen young children were spared because, according to Mormonism, children are not accountable for their sins until they reach eight years of age (When devising the Massacre plan, Mormon leaders assigned Indians the task of killing the women and older children in order to protect Mormons from inadvertently shedding *"innocent blood." Blood of the Prophets*, p.143).

After the massacre Brigham Young began to worry about repercussions for the Church and wondered what should be done. John D. Lee reminded the Prophet that the militia needed to be supported by him; they had committed the massacre under orders and in accordance with the Oath of Vengeance they had taken in their temple endowments. That oath had been instituted by Young himself after the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum Smith in 1844. Each temple participant from that time on had pledged, *"I will pray, and never cease to pray, and never cease to importune high heaven to avenge the blood of the Prophets on this nation, and I will teach this to my children, and my children's children unto the third and fourth generations"* (*Blood of the Prophets*, p.176). The Oath of Vengeance was removed from the Mormon temple ceremony in 1927, but in 1857 John D. Lee understood that Mormons were *"placed under the most sacred obligations to avenge the blood of the Prophet, whenever an opportunity offered…"* (*Mormonism Unveiled*, p.160).

"There was a massacre in these hills. / Four generations have come and gone, / but the deed that haunted the children / that haunted the lives of the militiamen / hovers over the silent land…." (Stewart Lee Udall, *The Mountain Meadows*, loc. cit.)

The Mountain Meadows Massacre was a demonstration of early Mormon theology in action, the tragic result of blindly following a man rather than God. Mormons today often say we can know the truth of Mormonism by its fruit. Here, friends, is fruit that must not be overlooked. True, some Mormon doctrine has changed in these intervening years, but the underlying principles remain. God passionately warns us in His Word, *"Beware of false prophets."* History shows us how Brigham Young led his followers to moral ruin. Even worse, false prophets lead their followers to spiritual ruin.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES: CULTIC UNIFORMITY VERSUS BIBLICAL UNITY

by Steve Lagoon

Anyone encountering the Jehovah's Witnesses will eventually hear the argument put forward that their group's unity proves that they alone are the true faith or the true religion on earth. This is usually accompanied by attacks on the various Christian denominations in which their differences are highlighted and their agreements are downplayed. This argument has been used quite successfully by Jehovah's Witnesses.

To one being recruited into the Watchtower, it seems like the Watchtower is an amazingly unified society of people gathered in Jehovah's name. Add to that a constant barrage of attacks pointing out every scandal that occurs in the so-called churches of Christendom, and it is easy to see how Jehovah's Witnesses sincerely believe that their unity proves they are the true religion, that they alone are the true Christians. They are simply unaware of the scandalous history of the Watchtower and its own schismatic track record.

Attacks on Christendom

A regular feature of Watchtower literature are attacks on Christendom (as the Watchtower refers to the various Christian denominations).

For example, the Watchtower stated:

> Christian unity is the eighth requirement of true worship. However, Christendom's divisive religions have not helped to this end. Many so-called mainstream denominations have splintered into a variety of sects, and confusion is the result . . . The divisions of Christendom are paralleled by those of religions outside Christendom—whether Buddhism, Islam, or Hinduism. What did the apostle Paul counsel the early Christians? "Now I exhort you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you should all speak in agreement, and that there should not be divisions among you, but that you may be fitly united in the same mind and in the same line of thought."—1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:11.[1]

1 *Watchtower* April 15, 1996, Brooklyn New York (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.) 20.

Along the same lines, the Watchtower also said:

> Responsible for this is her being split into many hundreds of religious sects and denominations. In itself, *this disunity proves that she is not what she claims to be—Christian*. Christendom's Babel of religions and the differing religions of the rest of the world could not all be right. Truth is one, absolute, for it is at unity with itself.[2]

Of Course, the Watchtower is leading its readers to believe that whereas so-called Christendom is characterized by division and is thus false, so the Jehovah's Witnesses are characterized by unity and are thus the true religion:

> That unity exists now and is evident in 206 lands and islands of the sea around this globe. You can be a part of such worldwide unity. We invite your close inspection of the Word of God and of the organization he is using today to bring to the people the good news that unites all mankind.[3]

What Kind of Unity Does Paul Call For?

Let us examine what the Bible actually teaches concerning unity within the Christian Church. We have seen how the Jehovah's Witnesses appealed to Paul's words to the church at Corinth for unity:

> "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought"(1 Corinthians 1:10).

This passage certainly suggests that Christians will be united on all the basic and essential truths of the faith. Just the same, Paul himself acknowledged that there will be some grey areas and some issues in which sincere Christians will not agree, and in which the Bible does not clearly settle the issue.

In such cases, Christians are called to follow their own convictions and consciences while refraining from judging other Christians who hold a different perspective. Finally, both sides are encouraged to carefully avoid offending their brother while exercising their Christian liberty. We could quote the entire 14th chapter of Romans for Paul's teaching on this question, but a few verses should give a feel for Paul's teaching on the subject:

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2 *Watchtower* January 15, 1979, Brooklyn New York (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.) 10.

3 *Watchtower* May 15, 1971, Brooklyn New York (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.) 308.

> Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over **disputable matters** . . . Who are you to judge someone else's servant? . . . One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God . . . You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister?"(Romans 14:1, 4-6, 10).

How different are Paul's biblical guidelines than the practice of cults. Whereas Paul allows for differences of opinion on secondary issues, cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses demand absolute and complete assent to every teaching of the group.

Unity versus Uniformity

We can say that the difference between the two is the difference between unity and uniformity. Indeed, Jehovah's Witnesses teach their members to "Fight against independent thinking."[4] One is hard pressed to find Jehovah's Witnesses who are willing to express a difference of opinion from the official position of the Watchtower on any issue, no matter how minor the issue may be.

That this is so is shown every time the Watchtower leadership changes the official position on any issue, claiming new light from Jehovah. As soon as the new view is published in official Watchtower literature, millions of Jehovah's Witnesses immediately change their view, so as to conform with the alleged new light, and this regardless of how long or how passionately they had believed the former view.

Not only does this show that their true loyalty is to the leadership of the cult rather than to the Bible, but further it shows that for Jehovah's Witnesses, no difference of opinion from the Watchtower's position is tolerated, period!

This is surely indicative of the cultic mindset in authoritarian and totalistic groups. Since the leader(s) of the group claim to be anointed and appointed by God, criticism is not tolerated. Indeed, the very act of questioning is to risk one's place in the group, and this is most troubling when the member has been programmed to believe that good standing in the group is necessary for salvation.

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4 *Watchtower* January 15, 1983, Brooklyn New York (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.) 27.

Further, those who do disagree with the official line have learned to keep their opinions to themselves rather than risking being shunned from the group and permanently separated from their friends and loved ones.

Augustine's Dictum

It is helpful to recall Saint Augustine's dictum in which he stated: "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity."

I have found Augustine to be very helpful at this point. First he implores that in the essential and core teachings of the faith Christians need to be unified, and when some depart from these essentials, other Christians must part from them. This accounts for some of the numerous denominations lumped together as Christian since there are literally hundreds of groups or cults that have departed from the essential teachings of the Bible and the historic Christian church.

In such cases, it is the duty of Christians to separate from such heretical groups, despite the division it creates. This can be compared to action of a doctor in surgically removing cancerous tissue from a patient in order to keep the deadly tissue from spreading and destroying the rest of the body. Paul said, "Have nothing to do with fruitless deeds of darkness, rather expose them"(Ephesians 5:11).

Essential Christian Doctrine

Essential Christian doctrine would include such biblical teachings as the doctrine of the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Christ without mixing the natures or separating the person; the bodily resurrection of Christ; the personality and full deity of the Holy Spirit; salvation by faith apart from human merit or works; the vicarious and substitutionary atonement of Christ; the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures; the second coming of Christ; and the future judgment of all mankind.

Here it is important to point to the essential unity that the Christian Church enjoys on these issues across denominational lines. Rather than the distorted picture that Jehovah's Witness attempt to create, we rather marvel at the essential unity of Christian churches on the essential teaching of the Bible.

Have the Jehovah's Witnesses Really Been So United?

The reality is that almost every cult has a history of fragmentation and division, and this is certainly the case with the Jehovah's Witnesses. Dr. Jerry Bergman stated that, "Since its inception, the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society has experienced scores of schisms, some fairly major."[5] Bergman lists and describes 33 different groups that have broken off from the Watchtower.[6]

He also reminds the reader how Judge Rutherford used subterfuge to seize control of the Watchtower organization following the founder C.T. Russell's death in 1916, and changed many of its teachings and practices. So Bergman concludes that "The Jehovah's Witnesses are as much an offshoot of Russell's movement as are the Standfasters or the Layman's Home Missionary Movement."[7]

And we should not forget where the Watchtower Society itself came from in the first place. It is quite easy to show that Charles Taze Russell moved in the Christian Adventist Movement that followed and flowed out of the Millerite Movement that fragmented following the "Great Disappointment" of 1844 (and originally 1843). This is the same movement that gave birth to the Seventh Day Adventists. Edmund C. Gruss quoted Carl Olof Johnson "In all essential respects, therefore, Russell's Bible Student movement may be described as yet another offshoot of the Millerite movement."[8]

In other words, rather than the Watchtower organization being the pillar of unity they suggest in their propaganda, they themselves are the true schismatics since they are merely one more offshoot of the churches of Christendom they so often attack. And as we have seen, they have a history of splinter groups breaking off from their group. And finally, the unity they do have is maintained not by conviction so much as by the fear imposed upon Jehovah's Witnesses by their leaders.

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5 Jerry Bergman, *Jehovah's Witnesses: A Comprehensive and Selective Annotated Bibliography*, Westport CT (Greenwood Press, 1999) 287.

6 Jerry Bergman, *Jehovah's Witnesses: A Comprehensive and Selective Annotated Bibliography*, Westport CT (Greenwood Press, 1999) 287-338.

7 Jerry Bergman, *Jehovah's Witnesses: A Comprehensive and Selective Annotated Bibliography*, Westport CT (Greenwood Press, 1999) 287-288.

8 Carl Olof Johnson, *The Gentile Times Reconsidered* (3rd ed. Atlanta: Commentary Press, 1998, 43) as quoted by Edmund C. Gruss, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Their Claims, Doctrinal Changes, and Prophetic Speculation. What Does the Record Show?*, Fairfax VA (Xulon Press, 2001)24.

Real Unity

Now let's contrast this with the case of the historic Christian church in which there is unity on the essential teachings of the faith across denominational lines despite disagreements on secondary issues. In other words, Christians from across all the various denominations, whether they are Baptists, Lutherans, Methodist, Assembly of God, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Christian Missionary Alliance, Evangelical Free Church, and so many others, are unified in their agreement on the essential teachings of the faith. What makes this all the more remarkable is that they enjoy this unity across denomination lines despite a total lack of organic or structural unity.

What is the cause of this unity? It comes from two sources; the shared belief in the authority of the Bible and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Liberty in Non-essentials

Coming back to Augustine's dictum. He also said "In non-essentials, liberty." While Christians are united in the essential teachings of the faith, Augustine made it clear that there are less important, less critical or secondary teachings that Christians can agree to disagree over without questioning the legitimacy or genuineness of each other's faith. We may disagree as to the proper mode of baptism, the proper eschatological scheme, or how often to observe communion. We may even break up into different denominations to worship with those who share our particular theological viewpoints.

But none of this prevents us from working together in the common cause of the kingdom of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. And this is just what we see, Christians across denominational lines, working together in mission at home and on the mission field, all to the glory of God.

"In All things Love"

Augustine concluded his dictum with the admonishment: "In all things love." This is a great reminder that for Christians, all our relationships should be based on love. Yes, Jesus admonished the disciples to love one another so as the world will know that we are Christians by our love (John 15:12, 17). This includes Christians with whom we do not agree with on every point of doctrine. How much more does it call us to love even those who are enemies of the Gospel (Matthew 5:44). So when we encounter Jehovah's Witnesses, let us at all times treat them with love and pray that they find true faith in Jesus Christ.

NEWS ROUND-UP

by Steve Lagoon

At Rocky Mountain High School in Fort Collins Colorado, controversy was created when the students recited the Pledge of Allegiance in the Arabic language including the phase "One nation under Allah." Specifically, a student member of the 'Cultural Arms Club" which seeks to "Destroy the barriers, embrace the cultures" lead the students in the pledge. You can read the article at this web address: http://gopthedailydose.com/2014/04/28/hs-students-say-pledge-in-arabic-one-nation-under-allah/

There has long been a debate concerning whether it is appropriate for Christians to used Arabic word for God (Allah) as an equivalent for the Biblical God. A review of the background of the word shows why Christians should avoid it.

The religious world that Muhammad was raised in was polytheistic. One of these gods was Allah, the moon god. Robert Morey tells us that "The cult of the moon god which worshipped Allah was transformed by Muhammad into a monotheistic faith . . . Up until the time of Muhammad, Allah was simply one pagan god among many, his name a particular name for the moon god as worshipped in Arabia" (Robert Morey, The Islamic Invasion, Las Vegas NV; Christian Scholars Press, 1992, 62, 64).

It is troubling that these students, in the name of embracing diversity, are actually embracing a pagan god rather than the God of the Bible.

Frankenstein Today?

We are told that in ancient times, "Roman statues were often made with detachable heads so that one head could be removed and replaced with another" (Southern Minnesota Golden Link, July 17, 2013). Replacing a head on a marble body would be a handy feature to have when, for instance, the Roman emperor dies and a new one comes into power.

But what if someone wanted a new body for their real head? This Frankensteinish scenario is actually being discussed among scientist. The US News &World Report describes just such a possible scenario (Allie Bidwell, Could An Italian Scientist Pave the Way for Human Head Transplants?, US News & World Report, July 1, 2013, retrieved from internet at: http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2013/07/01/could-an-italian-scientist-pave-the-way-).

Such procedures in our brave new world challenge not only our bio-ethics; they challenge our basic understanding about what it means to be a unique human being. Christian theology exalts the human body as much as the human soul. In distinction from platonic dualism, the Bible places a high value on the body most especially with the doctrine of the bodily resurrection.

And here lies the challenge. It is one thing to trade each other's organs as life saving treatments without much confusion over maintaining individual identity. But if we are, to put it baldly, mixing and matching heads with bodies, or even human heads with animal bodies as some predict, then just who is who and what is what.

It is time we pause and reflect over the implications of the sacredness of the human body remembering that just because medical science makes something possible, doesn't mean that it is right.

Space Aliens and Baptism

Pope Francis continues to regularly make the headlines. This time over that perennial problem of whether to baptize space aliens! Newser reports on the Pope's comments: "'If for example, tomorrow an expedition of Martians came, and some of them came to us, here,' he said. 'Martians, right? Green, with that long nose and big ears, just like children paint them. And one says, 'But I want to be baptized' What would happen?' Well, the pope would baptize the alien, because 'who are we to close the doors to the Holy Spirit'"
(Newser Editors, Pope Francis: Sure, I'd Baptize Martians, May 13, 2014, http://www.newser.com/story/186824/pope-francis-sure-id-baptize-martians.html?utm_sou).

I am reminded of the words of Larry Norman from his song UFO: "If there's life on other planets, then I'm sure that he must know, and has been there once already, and has died to save their souls"

The Reach of the Watchtower Magazine

As someone who has been researching the Jehovah's Witnesses for over twenty years, I must confess that I had sticker shock when I recently checked the circulation of the Watchtower and Awake Magazines. The April 2014 issue of the Awake reports a printing of 44,748,000 and the April 1, 2014 issue of the Watchtower reports a printing of 45, 944,000.

Wow. Now I know that they are not all read, or even circulated. But that is still an astounding number and should raise concerns among true Christians who are concerned by the deceptions of the Watchtower and the souls mislead by them.

BIBLE MOVIES AND MORE: HISTORY OR HOLLYWOOD HYPE?

by Rick Dack, R.A.S. and Defending the Bible Int'l.

Since the early days of Hollywood the Bible has been a staple of the silver screen - even more so the last two years. How trustworthy are the current productions on the Scriptures? Are these faith-based projects, Bible history, or just Hollywood hype? Can Christians tell the difference?

Exodus: Gods and Kings

Christian Bale's latest biblical production "Exodus: Gods and Kings" will be released into the theaters in December 2014. A simple perusal of the theatrical trailer has raised some questions in my mind concerning this films content. What were the known customs of the day concerning an appearance before the Pharaoh's court? Was Moses and his Egyptian brother rivals? Who was the Pharaoh of the Exodus, Ramses II or another? Some of the points I will be making may seem to some nitpicky but they are worthy of note since this film and others that have preceded it will be and have been used in Sunday school classes and other faith-based institutions as learning tools. One example involves "the new Moses" Christian Bale who years earlier portrayed Christ. In the 1999 NBC film "Mary, Mother of Jesus" Bale depicted a frightened and confused Jesus forced into ministry by his strong-willed, revolutionary mother. Joann Blackburn of Kansas City, Missouri stated that she uses clips from this film in her Bible study (Amazon.com review of the film).

Making an appearance

Did Moses wear a beard prior to the killing of the Egyptian who was beating the Hebrew slave? In the film yes but not in ancient Egypt… nitpicky, huh? The Egyptians were extremely conscious of cleanliness according to A. Rosalie David's book The Ancient Egyptians. Temple entry had a strict code - the priests, several days before entry into the temple, had to purify themselves by chewing natron (a drying agent used in mummification) and then had to fumigate themselves with incense on the day that they were to enter. Lastly, they had to wash themselves, cut their finger and toe nails and shave all of their body hair. This practice was also performed on the cult statue where its clothes and makeup were removed. The idol was then was

then sprayed with incense and offered natron for the cleansing of its (statues) mouth. In Genesis we see the very act of Joseph shaving and putting on clean clothes before he stood before Pharaoh (Genesis 41:14). Further evidence is chronicled by Herodotus, a 5th century Greek, (cleanly priests and rulers) as well as *The Story of Sinuhe* - an exile who returned to Egypt after living with Semites who shaved before meeting with Sesostris I (1991-1928 B.C.E).

The Brother Ramses?

Were Moses and his Egyptian brother Ramses II (speculative identification) friendly rivals as the new film trailer portrays? The Bible tells us nothing of the kind. This is merely Hollywood hype in order to build tension for the coming Exodus confrontations. There is no clear evidence that Ramses II was the Egyptian Pharaoh during the time of Moses; it may, however, have been Amenhotep II. Amenhotep II reigned 35 years (circa. 1453-1415 B.C.E.) ceasing his campaigns after 1444 B.C.E. Why? Amenhotep II bragged profusely of his military abilities. As we know from history Amenhotep II's campaigns were in 1450, 1446 and the last one in 1444 B.C.E. (Palestine). Could it be that this rulers six hundred chariots had been eliminated? If so how? Amenhotep II would not have had an effective army after 1446 due to the devastating effects of the Red Sea crossing and a minor force in 1444. If you have no army you have no chariots and have little or no ability to campaign and conquer. For more on this issue read Dr. Charles Aling's book "Egypt and Bible History" and subscribe to Artifax Magazine through the Institute for Biblical Archaeology.

Noah (2014)

Since the early days of pre-talkie Hollywood the biblical Noah has appeared in various incarnations. Well known director John Huston and actors Lew Ayres, Lorne Green (Bonanza), Jon Voight and multiple unknowns have tackled the part. In one 1928 film, Noah's Ark, a young John Wayne was in a flood sequence. In its first weekend Russell Crowe's "Noah" earned 44 million. Whether this was for good or for ill I will leave that to the readers of this article. In all candor I do have a strong opinions on this issue regarding endorsements from nationally known clergy.

Noah Reviews and Endorsements

"...any good movie has to deviate from the book" - Karen Covell, Hollywood Prayer Network, March 21, 2014. Christianpost.com video.

"A powerful, artistic interpretation of the Biblical text." - Jon Tyson, Pastor, Trinity Grace Church.

"Noah is nothing short of astonishing." - Greg Thornbury, President, The King's College.

What did the Noah film contain besides the basics of the biblical story?

Who were "The Watchers" in the Noah film?

These beings were fallen angels who became larger rock creatures when they hit the earth. When critically injured they would explode. They witnessed the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden. Jewish rabbinical sources (the Haggadah, Midrash and Talmud) refer to this and other events in the film. According to these texts the fallen angels plummeted to earth and did not turn to rock but did build the Ark (in the Noah film this does take place). In the book "Myth and Legend of Ancient Israel" by Angelo S. Rappoport he writes, "Angels helped Noah build the ark, Noah planted a teak tree which grew so big in twenty years (that Noah) was able to build the whole Ark out of it." In the film Noah planted a large berry that instantly grew trees around where the Ark would be built. The Midrash Genesis Rabbah 30:7 states, wherever [the phrase] "a man" occurs it indicates a righteous man who warned [others]. For 120 years Noah planted cedars and cut them down. On being asked, "Why are you doing this?" He replied, "The Lord of the universe has informed me that he will bring a flood in the world." In Daniel chapter 4 a watcher/watchers are mentioned but Daniel is non-specific on exactly who or what they were.

Death and Noah

In the film Noah witnesses the death of his father Lamech: There is nothing within ancient texts that tell us that Lamech was murdered although it shows that he himself had committed murder according to Genesis 4:23. The Bible states that he died at the age of 777 (Genesis 5:31). Noah's dream of being submerged with dead bodies is also a contradiction of ancient texts. According to the Midrash Aggadah Noah restored man's rule over everything, just as it had been before Adam sinned, thus setting mankind at rest. Formerly the water used

to inundate the graves of the corpses that floated out; but when Noah was born the waters subsided (Gen. Rabbah xxv.2).

Magic Methuselah on Film

Methuselah, played by Anthony Hopkins, had magical powers. He drugs Noah and heals barren women. In the first part of the film Methuselah described the Earth's destruction via a prediction of fire not flood. In the rabbinical texts it states, "Enoch answered, and said: "the Lord will do a new thing in the earth. There will, great destruction on the earth, and a deluge for one year. The son who was born unto thee will be left on the earth, and his three children will be saved with him, when all mankind that are on the earth shall die"

> ("Noah" from the book of Enoch, http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/loj/loj106.htm).

Drugs, Drunkenness, and a Family Divided

There are other non-biblical scenes that are worthy of mention such as Noah and his wife drugging the animals aboard the Ark into hibernation (in the film Noah and his wife create an airborne concoction – how come they weren't drugged into a long sleep as well?), Tubal-Cain joining forces with one of Noah's sons to kill him aboard the Ark, a murderous Noah desiring to kill off the next generation (his grandchildren), no specific sacrifice to God (Genesis 8), confusing scenes concerning Noah and his drunkenness (Genesis 9) and a divide within the family in which Ham leaves due to the death of girl that he was supposedly romantically involved with. Ham had known her for only a few hours pre-flood.

Noah Reviews and Endorsements (Revisited)

> "...any good movie has to deviate from the book" - Karen Covell, Hollywood Prayer Network, March 21, 2014. Christianpost.com video.
>
> "A powerful, artistic interpretation of the Biblical text." - Jon Tyson, Pastor, Trinity Grace Church.
>
> "Noah is nothing short of astonishing." - Greg Thornbury, President, The King's College.

What do you think?

Is Noah a good movie that needed to deviate from the Bible? Is this film "a powerful, artistic interpretation of the biblical text?" Is "Noah" nothing short of astonishing?

The Bible: The Epic Miniseries and Son of God

In 2013 Producer Mark Burnett and his actress wife Roma Downey's production 'The Bible' was broadcast on the History Channel to enormous success. Undeniably 'The Bible' miniseries had its good moments with portions of Moses, David, Daniel and Jesus but it also had its scriptural errors that also appeared in the 2014 theatrical release "Son of God."

- A child turns into an angel before the New Testament Joseph (loosely rooted in Hinduism and Mormonism).
- Jesus turning a stone to bread at the request of Satan during the temptations scenes of Matthew 4.
- Jesus acting like he was going to stone the adulterous with a large rock. The Bible tells us Jesus did no such action. Jesus wrote with his finger on the ground (John 8) and then expertly resolved the issue.
- Peter walking on water. Did this miracle happen or was it a dream? The Bible tells us that Jesus rescued Peter from the water and they both walked to the boat and got in (Matthew 14). This same general depiction also appeared on the Discovery Channels "Ancient Evidence" series in which it was questioned whether this event was historically valid or a metaphor.
- Jesus kissing the top of the head of Lazarus in order to raise him back to life - Johns gospel tells us neither Jesus nor Martha ever entered the tomb of Lazarus (this is depicted in both the television miniseries and theatrical film). When I viewed "Son of God" in the theater there was an audible gasp during this unbiblical scene. Based upon an interview I've read by Roma Downey and her husband Mark Burnett the couple appear to be more interested in the use of emotional impact over scriptural accuracy in their films (see bibliography below).

- Jesus (Diogo Morgado) acted shocked as if he was clueless about his coming crucifixion at the Last Supper. The Bible tells us Jesus repeatedly told his disciples that he would die (See Matthew 26, Mark 8, Luke 18, John 12).

- Peter punching Judas in the face at Gethsemane (not scriptural).

- Pontius Pilate's pre-arrest knowledge about Jesus. The Gospels tell us that when Jesus was arrested and brought before Pilate, after his interrogation by Annas and Caiaphas, Pilate asked Jesus about the charges being brought against him by the chief priests and elders (Matthew 27:12, Mark 15:4,). Pilate did not want Jesus arrested but the chief priests and elders did. Even Pontius Pilate himself said to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man" in Luke 23:4.

Reviews and Endorsements

What did nationally known ministries say about the recent television and theatrical films 'The Bible: The Epic Miniseries and "Son of God?"

"I'm very excited about this movie and, as a church, we're very excited about it as well. I'm hoping that our church and all of our churches can get behind this wonderful production. Maybe we could buy out entire theaters, maybe we could host movie events. We're already getting behind this movie in social media opportunities. Perhaps you could buy tickets for members of your church. This is a rare opportunity to get behind the movie that centerpieces the greatest reason for our faith, Jesus Christ. I am personally getting behind it. I hope you will get behind it as well. God bless you and may God bless this movie." – Max Lucado, Author

"Mark Burnett and Roma Downey's feature film Son of God proves that when talent and passion collide, the outcome is spectacular. Having spent time with them on the set, Victoria and I witnessed firsthand the deep and abiding passion they possess for God's Word. Every aspect of this production from the acting to the poignant storytelling is accomplished with excellence. Mark and Roma have succeeded in doing what few before them have done; they have produced an epic work that tells the Story of Jesus and touches the heart". – Joel Osteen, Senior Pastor of Lakewood Church, #1 NY Times Bestselling Author

“THE BEST I’VE EVER SEEN.”

“I’ve probably seen most, if not all, of the films about Jesus produced in the past 50 years. This one stands alone, in a class by itself, as the best I’ve ever seen. Brilliantly produced with stunning cinematography, a Hans Zimmer score and academy-worthy acting, it stands head-and-shoulder above the rest.

Son of God draws you into the story from the start. Not since the release of “The Passion of The Christ” ten years ago have I been this excited about a movie…Son of God brings to the Big screen the Story of Jesus. Here we see the wonder of His birth, the power of His mission, the loving sacrifice of His death but most importantly, we see The Eternal Hope of His resurrection. I am thrilled that 20th century Fox are distributing this film and know it will be a blessing to millions when it opens in theaters all across America this Spring.”

– Rick Warren, Senior Pastor of Saddleback Church and Author of the #1 NY Times Bestselling Book A Purpose Driven Life (Source: http://sharesonofgod.com/Endorsements)

Certain Responsibilities

Defending the Bible Int’l. applauds studios that want to do Bible films but doing so also carries a responsibility. False depictions lead to scriptural confusion and uncertainty. Perhaps filmmakers and those in the Church endorsing their projects need to ask themselves, “Is the Bible Gods word or mere words that are fair game for manipulation?”

Biblical Literacy?

From 2006 to 2014 CBN, Biola University and other organizations conducted polls on what Christians know about the Bible. Beliefs ranged from Sodom and Gomorrah being a married couple to Billy Graham giving the Sermon on the Mount to Joan of arc being Noah’s wife and Joshua being the son of a Nun not Joshua, son of Nun (Joshua 1:1). (see bibliography below).

Answers

There are fine Bible films out there such "The Gospel of John" starring Henry Ian Cusick, NBC's "In the Beginning" with Martin Landau, "A.D. Anno Domini" starring Denis Quilley and others but "never" allow films to take the place of the Scriptures and always "preview before you promote" and "examine before you endorse." Listen up Joel Osteen, Rick Warren and Mr. Lucado.

My ministry, Defending the Bible Int'l, has developed "Biographies of the Bible" classes and presentations for churches and faith-based schools. Defending the Bible Int'l believes that every Christian should know who Bible characters were, what they did and how we can apply their life lessons to our modern day situations. Hollywood Bible myths are pumped into our homes via cable and satellite subscriptions daily and have confused many who are uninformed about how to defend the Bible from skeptical academics. Defending the Bible Int'l provides the latest in archaeological information in defense of the scriptures to combat academic half-truths. The "Biographies of the Bible" classes and presentations also encourage attendees with Hollywood stories of faith (actors, musicians, comedians etc.), information on pro-faith entertainment alternatives (DVD's, music, clean comedians, pro-Bible academics etc) and the ministry encourages Christian participation in the arts and entertainment industry with a no compromise yet respectful attitude. You can learn more about the ministry at www.defendingthebible.com.

Are Bible movies history or Hollywood hype? The answer is yes. Perhaps the Churches in America should create and fund their own studios by putting out guaranteed scriptural content rather than trusting in Darren Aronofsky (Noah), Ridley Scott (Exodus: God and Kings), Roma Downey (The Bible), the History channels and others who consistently fail to properly film faith "as written."

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QUIZ: PRESIDENTS

1. What religious group was President Richard Nixon associated with?

   ____a. Lutheran
   ____b. Quaker
   ____c. Presbyterian
   ____d. Methodist

2. Which president famously edited out all the miracles in the New Testament to produce an edition named after him?

   ____a. Bill Clinton
   ____b. Andrew Jackson
   ____c. Thomas Jefferson
   ____d. John Quincy Adams

3. Which president was the first Roman Catholic to hold the office?

   ____a. Lyndon Johnson
   ____b. Franklin D. Roosevelt
   ____c. Abraham Lincoln
   ____d. John F. Kennedy

4. Which recent presidential candidate was controversial because of his membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormons)?

   ____a. John Edwards
   ____b. Mitt Romney
   ____c. Joe Biden
   ____d. Mike Huckabee

5. Which president offered evangelist Billy Graham the ambassadorship to Israel?

   ____a. Richard Nixon
   ____b. Lyndon Johnson
   ____c. Jimmy Carter
   ____d. Gerald Ford

6. Which president was a member of Freemasonry (while the other three were critical of involvement with the Masonic Lodge)?

   ____a. John Quincy Adams
   ____b. Millard Fillmore
   ____c. Andrew Jackson
   ____d. Ulysses Grant

7. Which modern president signed a bill proclaiming an annual day of prayer for America?

____a. Harry S. Truman
____b. Dwight D. Eisenhower
____c. John F. Kennedy
____d. Lyndon B. Johnson

8. Which president signed into law an act to establish an annual Thanksgiving holiday to bring "Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens."

____a. Theodore Roosevelt
____b. Herbert Hoover
____c. Calvin Coolidge
____d. Abraham Lincoln

9. Which president wrote a letter to the Danbury Baptist Church to clarify his understanding of the first amendment to the constitution using the famous metaphor of a wall of separation between church and state?

____a. James Madison
____b. James Monroe
____c. Thomas Jefferson
____d. John Adams

10. Which president regularly read and quoted the Bible and was known for his famous statement that, "A thorough knowledge of the Bible is better than a college education."

____a. Ronald Reagan
____b. William Henry Harrison
____c. Theodore Roosevelt
____d. Howard Taft

Answers:

1. (b); 2. (c); 3. (d); 4. (b); 5. (a); 6. (c); 7. (a); 8. (d); 9. (c); 10. (c)

Personal Notes on the Articles:

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