



THE MINISERIES

A REVIEW

By Albert James Dager

The Christian world is abuzz about the new television miniseries *The Bible*, produced for television by Mark Burnett and his wife Roma Downey. Downey gets top billing, perhaps because she is better known for her role in the CBS drama series *Touched by an Angel*, while her husband has been the behind-the-scenes producer of such hit TV programs as *Survivor*, *The Voice*, *Shark Tank* and *The Apprentice*, among others. Downey heads the large international cast in the role of Mary, the mother of Jesus. The narrator for the series is Emmy winner for voice-over performances, Keith David, supported by a musical score by Oscar- and Grammy-winning composer Hans Zimmer.

On March 2, a “Series Premier Launch Event” was video streamed from Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, to a number of subscribing churches. Featured were fifty minutes of clips from the series, along with Burnett and Downey expressing their hearts behind the making of *The Bible*. Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church, spoke of how his and other churches are using the series for outreach and discipleship.

In an interview on *The 700 Club*, Roma Downey answered the question, “How do you boil the Bible down to ten hours?”

From the moment Adam and Eve fell from grace we have been a people wanting to get back in connection with God. That was one of the themes we felt we really wanted to see through those Old Testament characters. We see each of them attempting connection and failing, attempting connection and failing. And so, God so loved us that He sends Jesus for us. And our New Testament narrative begins with the birth of Jesus who comes and brings us home. And so that was the connective love story that we wanted to tell. We only had ten hours so we had to condense the stories. It ended up, really, it’s more of an introduction to the Bible.

Many Christian leaders are strongly endorsing the series.

I have not been able to view the entire series, but I was able to view the fifty-minutes of clips, and saw the first episode. I also looked at many of the trailers that have been available on television and on-line. So I can’t say this is a definitive review of the entire series. It may be necessary to cover it more extensively in the future. But I felt it good to offer a few of my impressions from what I’ve been able to see.

No one can accuse the producers of lack of a desire to make the Bible “come to life” for the masses. The technical and artistic elements are as good as anything Hollywood has produced in the realm of biblical epics.

The production values are also much better than 20th Century Fox’s 1966 *The Bible: In the Beginning* produced for theaters by Dino De Laurentiis and starring George C. Scott.

In *The Bible* the acting is off-and-on good and bad, although one wonders why in this, as in most biblical epics, so many speak with British accents. (e.g., in a future segment David doesn’t call himself a shepherd, but “a shepahd.) It seems as if British accents are *de rigueur* for biblical epics (except for Noah, who was obviously Scottish, and whose ark leaks badly, by the way).

There are very few actors cast as Hebrews who look even



DIOGO MORGADO AS ‘JESUS’

remotely Semitic. Most are Western European, including “Jesus” who, in keeping with most portrayals, is another pretty face. He is played by Diogo Morgado (33), one of Portugal’s leading TV, film and stage actors. When asked what went through his mind when approached about doing this role, Morgado stated:

“I think the first thought was, ‘I can’t do it.’ Honestly, it’s like ‘This is too much.’ We’re not just telling a story. We’re trying to touch people’s hearts. We’re telling a story that people live by. I grew up knowing the Bible. I grew up believing in Jesus Christ. So, with the fact that my own faith and my own beliefs, getting involved is like, ‘How can I do someone that I know so well? What should we do? Should we go to the thing the people will know about or just share in your own experience?’ So I think I try to do it both... a little bit.”

Although the producers insist that they strove for accuracy and authenticity with the help of a team of theologians and scholars, there are a lot of departures from both accuracy and authenticity. One departure is the casting of Nonzo Anozie, a black British actor of huge stature, as Samson. One must wonder why a Hebrew character would be portrayed by a black man. Samson was from the tribe of Dan, fathered by Jacob through Bilhah, Rachel’s handmaid.

Perhaps the series is relying on the belief of some “scholars” who speculate that Dan came from a group of people called the Denyen who ostensibly joined with the Hebrews. But this is speculation of the weakest kind. Besides, the Denyen were said to have originated in Europe, not Africa. There is no history of



NONZO ANOZIE
AS SAMSON

Billah prior to the biblical account of her bearing Dan and Naphtali, nor is there anything to suggest that Samson would have been anything other than Semitic. Why would the producers introduce such a distraction?

Another, similar, distraction is the casting of a black man and an Asian man as the two angels that led Lot out of Sodom. In keeping with the stereotype, the Asian angel engages in some pretty nifty martial arts sword work to dispatch the bad guys (something Scripture seems to have overlooked).

The Captain of God's army whom Joshua meets is also a black man. I don't know of any Scriptures that indicate races among the angels, but I suppose it can't be disproved either. In any case, the Captain of God's army is Yahweh Himself—the pre-incarnate Christ (cf. Ex 3:2-4:17; Jos 5:13-15).

Although there is a lot of gaiety in Sodom, there aren't any "gays." And how did the black angel get his head wound? It's a little disconcerting to learn that angels can be beaten up by men.

Okay, maybe I'm nitpicking, but as beautiful as is Roma Downey, a fifty-three-year-old woman playing a young maiden is another inauthentic stretch.

And did I really hear someone yell, "Move it!" as the Israelites were scurrying across the (wet) floor of the Red Sea? I never heard that Hebrew colloquialism before!

Moses looked like some guy they dragged off skid row; John the Baptist sports dreadlocks; Pharaoh's menacing, oft-repeated "Arrrrrgh!" as he pursues the Israelites in his chariot is comical. He never does encounter a pillar of fire or cloud of smoke, nor does he drown in the sea as Scripture tells us happened.

My concern isn't that ethnic actors had significant roles in a biblical epic; it is the political correctness and graphic departure from Scripture while claiming to be meticulously scriptural.

That's the problem with graphic portrayals of Scripture, and especially images of what is supposed to be the Son of God (see "Who is Jesus," Vol. 21 - No. 1). I've never seen one such portrayal of Scripture that did not depart from the Word in many ways.

A preponderance of words and actions from "Jesus" and other characters are fabricated; many, are left out; many are changed significantly from the biblical accounts. Left out, for example is the entire history of how the Israelites became slaves in Egypt. The narrative jumps from the birth of Jacob to Moses.

In all fairness, it is impossible to be 100% true to Scripture by compressing it into essentially seven hours without commercials. Liberties must be taken, but, sadly, there are too many liberties taken even in the scant portions I've seen.

Even so, there are some moving moments that would impress the average person who has little or no knowledge of Scripture. There is much high drama involving the stories of Abraham, David, Moses, Jesus, *et al.* Yet I found several unbiblical problems with how those stories are related.

On the other hand, there are those who would say that at least some truth is coming forth, and perhaps it may spur the unlearned to search the Scriptures for more truth.

I'm not one of those. It seems to me that if the Lord is truly behind anything that has to do with His Word it would be absolutely accurate regardless of production problems relating to time or the need for artistic license. Artistic license may be fine for secular productions, but not when it comes to Scripture.

THE CATHOLIC CONNECTION

One may ask why Ananias baptized Paul by pouring water over his head. Now you know. Roma Downey is a devout Catholic who sees God in everyone and everything. She has had readings with alleged psychic-necromancer John Edward on his TV program *Crossing Over*, in which she sought contact with her deceased mother. For many Catholics, seeking contact with the dead is not wrong. After all, if they can speak to the saints, why not their departed loved ones? Yet Deuteronomy 18:10-12 says:

There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or who uses divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all who do these things are an abomination to YHWH.



MARK BURNETT AND ROMA DOWNEY
WITH TOM PETERSON OF CATHOLICS COME HOME

The Roman Catholic evangelistic organization, Catholics Come Home saw *The Bible* as a great vehicle for evangelization:

Imagine how many viewers of all different faith backgrounds—and many fallen-away Catholics—and even people on their faith journey for the first time will be watching the series on the popular History Channel! Though I haven't seen the whole miniseries yet, I do know the impact that our "Epic" ad could have on the audience. How great it would be if we could join together to promote the Good News of the Catholic Church that Jesus founded by airing Catholics Come Home® commercials during this highly-acclaimed national programming.

Sure enough, there was the ad about half-way through the first episode, promoting the "Good News (gospel) of the Catholic Church," rather than the "Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Even before the Catholics Come Home ad, I knew there was a reason why I never felt this series was anointed. And although I know full well that God can use anything for His glory, *The Bible* lacks too much scriptural credibility. ❖