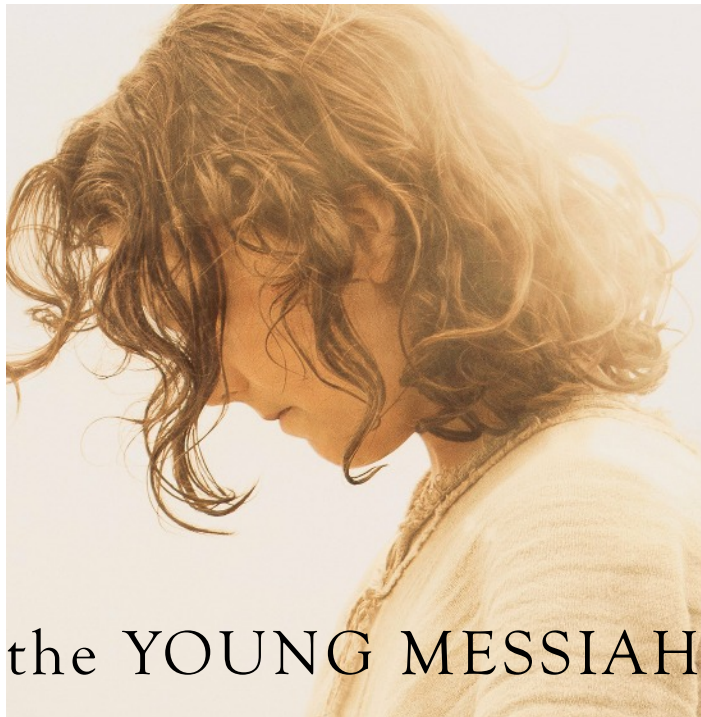


# MEDIA



# SPOTLIGHT

A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS & SECULAR MEDIA



## the YOUNG MESSIAH

**A**RE THERE ANY mainstream movies based on the Bible that remain true to the Bible? In the past 39 years of reviewing such films I've never run across any, whether produced by non-believers or professing believers in Jesus. *The Young Messiah*, adapted from the Anne Rice novel, *Christ the Lord*, is no different.

Directed by Cyrus Nowrasteh, *The Young Messiah* is a fictional account of Jesus' life as a seven-year-old boy. The plot follows the young "Jesus" as he moves from place-to-place from the ever-present threat of Herod's attempt to kill him. This would be Herod Antipater (aka "Antipas"), son of Herod the Great who commanded the death of all children from two-years-of-age or younger in Bethlehem after hearing of the Messiah's birth from the wise men of the east. Hearing of a young boy performing miracles, Herod fears the threat to his throne that his father felt, and commands the centurion who had led the slaughter of innocents at Bethlehem to seek him out and kill him. The centurion, Severus (Sean Bean), still guilt-ridden for his role in that atrocity, nevertheless must fulfill his duty as a soldier in following orders.

## A REVIEW

By Albert James Dager

This is a weak spot in the story, as Roman soldiers were not at the command of Herod, certainly not without the approval of the Roman prefect of Judea, who at the time was Annius Rufus. Nor in this film does Severus command a hundred troops, which was the role of a centurion. In this movie his band of Roman soldiers number fewer than twenty.

No matter; we can't be distracted by facts as long as some entertaining semblance of "truth" may be conveyed.

There is little biblical truth in *The Young Messiah*; conjecture and imagination fill in the blank spots of Jesus' childhood that Scripture evidently forgot to include. God's Word forgets to mention that He healed a bird in the presence of His (adopted) brother James. When He is bullied by a group of boys while still in Alexandria, Egypt, "Jesus" (Adam Greaves-Neal) does not retaliate, but is accused of killing one of the boys who is tripped by Satan throwing an apple in his path as he runs away from "Jesus." Of course, only Jesus can see Satan and the apple, and He is confused when no one else sees the person he tries to point out as the culprit.

Being the nice little boy He is, "Jesus" heals the boy, even as the boy's parents refuse to forgive Him, and they insist Joseph and Mary leave the city.

They decide to go to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast, and encounter a number of adventures along the way. "Jesus" heals His uncle Cleopas of an un-named terminal disease. He stumbles upon Severus killing Jewish rebels prior to Herod's command to kill Him, but Severus allows His family to leave, lacking proof they were with the rebels (which, of course, they weren't).

It is only when the fame of "Jesus" begins to spread due to His miracles that Herod puts forth the command to have Him killed. Amazingly, "Jesus" doesn't know why or how He can heal; He just knows He can do it. Joseph and Mary think He is too young to be told who He is, so they keep Him in suspense throughout most of the movie in spite of His pleas to know what is happening and why. They try their best to protect Him from reality, shielding His eyes when they find themselves on a Roman road festooned with crucified people on both sides of their path.

When Joseph decides it is too dangerous to go to Jerusalem after all, he upsets “Jesus” by his change of plans to go elsewhere. “Jesus” rebels against that decision and runs away during the night, headed to Jerusalem on His own (Jesus was disobedient to His parents?). At Jerusalem He again encounters Severus in the temple as Severus is looking for Him there. This after confounding an aged rabbi with His knowledge of the Scriptures.

How Roman soldiers would dare enter the temple area, which was forbidden by the prefect wishing to appease the Jews and keep the peace, we are not told. But, then, this is the figment of men’s imagination.

At any rate, Severus cannot bring himself to kill “Jesus,” so he goes to Herod and lies, telling him that he did indeed kill Him. Contrary to this fiction, Scripture tells us that Herod was *exceedingly* glad to see Jesus because he had for a long time heard of Him and hoped to see Him perform a miracle (Luke 23:8). He wasn’t out to kill Him.

Why, too, does the young “Jesus” look like a girl with long, curly hair, which was never the fashion for boys among the



Jews. (Sadly, this kid even runs like a girl.)

Just as bad as the awfulness of this fiction are the laudatory endorsements from Christian leaders who should know better.

Ted Baehr, to whom many Christians look for advice on entertainment, rates the film “Exemplary,” and says *The Young Messiah* “is extremely powerful and emotional, and presents who Jesus is in a theologically orthodox, allegorical way.”

If by “theologically orthodox” Baehr means that the “Jesus” of this movie is presented as the begotten Son of God, he is correct. But the fiction surrounding His alleged miracles and other experiences as a child are not theologically orthodox for this one fact: there is good reason God’s Word leaves out the history of the true Messiah as a child. And if it is God’s desire that His early history not be conveyed, then it isn’t up to men (or women) to intrude into that area of silence. To do so is to add to God’s Word, which is not right:

And these things, brethren, I apply to myself and to Apollos for your sakes so that you might learn from us nothing beyond that which is written, so that none of you are prideful against one another. (1 Corinthians 4:6)

If it is not revealed in Scripture, our heavenly Father has a good reason for not revealing it. Man’s imagination cannot add anything of spiritual value. Movies like *The Young Messiah* may engender feelings of warmth and emotional ecstasy, but they do not engender spiritual life. That is the difference between soulful feel-good results and spiritually life-giving reality.

Yet, desperate for anything of moral value to satisfy their need for entertainment, the vast majority of Christian leaders rave about such movies.

Kevin Palau, president of Luis Palau Association states, “I was very moved by *The Young Messiah* and found it to be one of the best biblically-inspired films I have ever seen.”

Denny Rydberg, president of Young Life says, “I just loved *The Young Messiah*.”

Other endorsements include those of Steve Issac and Bob Waliszewski of Focus on the Family; Samuel Rodriguez, President, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference; Dr. John Stumbo, President, The Christian and Missionary Alliance, and others.

Many of the endorsements on the movie’s website come from Roman Catholic sources:

Cardinal Sean P. O’Malley; Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, Archdiocese of Philadelphia; Michael Theisen, National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry; Sister Helena Burns, Daughters of St. Paul; Sheila Hopkins, President, National Council of Catholic Women; Steven D. Greydans, National Catholic Register; Jenny Uebbing, Catholic News Agency; Lisa Hendey, Founder and editor, catholicmom.com.

One must wonder if these Catholics would endorse the movie if James were portrayed as Jesus’ actual brother rather than adopted brother. Scripture names James as Jesus’ brother; there is no mention of his being adopted. No doubt that was added as an appeasement to the Roman Catholic Church, without whose endorsement the movie would have much less success. Heaven forbid that Mary would have had relations with Joseph after Jesus’ birth. She was too “holy” for that.

According to Roman Catholicism, marriage is just a necessary evil meant for procreation only. That’s one reason Catholic priests are forbidden to marry. They must practice celibacy (but not necessarily chastity; that’s reserved for nuns if they can manage it). The other reason for celibacy among priests is the cost to maintain all those huge Catholic families mandated by the Vatican’s rules for marriage. Best to keep the money in the Vatican’s banks.

Okay, I’m digressing. But for good reason. Like virtually all mainstream movies based on Scripture, producers and directors know that to offend the Vatican is the death knell to their efforts. Thus the veiled acquiescence to Roman Catholic sensibilities in *The Young Messiah*.

Yet if a movie based on God’s Word can’t be made totally true to Scripture, it is an offense to our Holy Father.

So why is it not an offense to His children? ❖