

An Evaluation of the Film

The Passion of The Christ

Produced and Directed by Mel Gibson

By The Equippers of Relational Concepts, Inc.

Our Evaluation

The bottom line is, we feel this is a valuable film which accurately portrays the crucifixion of Christ. Everyone who can should see this film.

- (1) The film points to the real, historical Jesus. This is not like some of the heretical films which portray Jesus as a homosexual or as having an affair with Mary Magdalene.
- (2) The film points to the Bible as a source of factual history. The implication is that the Bible is not just a religious book believed by a leap of faith but is an accurate account of actual events.
- (3) Jesus is crucified for blasphemy, that is, for His claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God. To be killed for blasphemy is only because one claims to be God.
- (4) There is nothing blatantly inaccurate about the film. Gibson adds things (which we shall discuss below), but he does not change anything given in the Gospel accounts.
- (5) The basic theology presented in the film is accurate. It's incomplete, but then he is not writing a systematic theology. He only portrays the last 12 hours of Jesus' life.
- (6) The film has a definite Roman Catholic flavor to it. There is a lot about Mary the mother of Jesus, much more than in the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion, and it seems that all the believers call her "Mother," a title never given her in the Bible. Gibson's depiction, however, does not get us off onto a discussion of Mariology, since he doesn't force us to see her as immaculately conceived or as a perpetual virgin.
- (7) It seems to us that it would be better not to show the face of Jesus until He is on the cross (where He is not recognizable anyway). Facial depictions reveal personality traits, which, when it comes to Jesus, are impossible to portray by any actor.
- (8) Mel Gibson's idea of using an original language instead of English is a great one. However, we doubt if they spoke Aramaic all the time. We realize that's the current "scholarly" opinion, but Greek was the language of the street. The apostles all knew Greek. They also used and memorized parts of the Greek Old Testament (the LXX). When Jesus said, *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*, it was in Aramaic, but it was translated for us. Mark 15:34 says, ... *which is translated, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"* This sounds like most did not understand Aramaic. Also, the sign Pilate put above the cross indicated that the most popular languages were Hebrew, Greek, and Latin (John 19:20). The Romans were Latin speakers but would have probably spoken Greek when outside Rome. Surely they would not be speaking to each other in Aramaic (such as when Pilate spoke to his wife).

(9) Mary Magdalene is presented well. She is on the sidelines, always there, but Jesus never even looked at her. He looked mostly at His mother. She is, however, equated with the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), and this seems unlikely. That woman was in the temple in Jerusalem, whereas Mary Magdalene was from Galilee. She had seven demons cast out of her (Luke 8:2) but is never said to be a prostitute or adulteress. At the cross, there were also other followers of Jesus who were women (Matthew 27:55), who were not mentioned in the film.

(10) The devil figure moving through the film is not in the Gospels. The theology is accurate—the devil wanted to keep Jesus from going to the cross and was defeated when Christ died on the cross. Nonetheless, this figure moving about is not part of the gospel accounts.

(11) The thief on the cross was well-presented. In a sense, he is the only one who makes a decision to receive Christ. The film does not give the gospel message—but then neither do the gospel accounts of the crucifixion. The thief on the cross is the only one who makes a conversion, and Christ promises him an eternal future, *Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise* (Luke 23:43).

(12) Simon of Cyrene is the most inaccurate and disappointing part of the film. It's true he was recruited to carry the cross, but then Gibson conjures up a scenario where Simon takes on the crowd and encourages Jesus to keep on going, as if Jesus needed some sort of emotional support. Actually, in the Gospels, Simon carried the cross behind Jesus (Luke 23:26).

(13) One flashback was to Jesus saying, *I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me*. We appreciate Mel Gibson for including this because it shows the one-way concept and that the exclusivity of Christianity comes from Jesus Himself. It's not something the church made up later. (See John 14:6 and Acts 4:12.)

(14) In the Garden of Gethsemane, the film had Jesus saying things (not in the Gospels) which detract from His character. We should not put words in the mouth of Jesus. Other than in the Garden, Gibson does an excellent job of portraying what Jesus said and didn't say.

(15) The flashbacks are helpful, and they relieve the tension of the violence. But point of fact, there are no such mental wanderings depicted in the gospel accounts.

(16) The film ends with the resurrection. This is essential (1 Corinthians 15:17). Without this, Jesus is just another hero who died for His cause.

To summarize, the film is accurate, dynamic, and a powerful message of the reality of Christ and the truth of Scripture. The most disappointing parts are those added by Mel Gibson, which are basically not inaccurate—at least not heretical—but are unnecessarily distracting. People ignorant of the Gospels would not separate those from historical reality. Those include:

- The devil figure
- Judas fighting with the children (demons)
- The expansion of the role of Simon of Cyrene
- The two women wiping up Jesus' blood
- Jesus' additional words in Gethsemane
- Jesus stepping on the head of the snake

- Jesus' statement to His mother, "I am making all things new" (really said by Jesus in Revelation 21:5)
- Pilate's wife's involvement with the women disciples

Here are some questions you might use when discussing the film with others.

In the film,

- (1) Why did Jesus go through the crucifixion?
- (2) Why did Jesus not defend Himself?
- (3) Exactly why was Jesus killed? Why did the synagogue officials want Him killed? Why did Pilate allow it?
- (4) Why did Jesus tell the thief on the cross, *Today you shall be with Me in Paradise?*
- (5) Why do you think Mel Gibson included the flashback where Jesus said, *I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me?*
- (6) Why do you think Mel Gibson began the film by quoting a verse from Isaiah 53?
- (7) Jesus repeatedly prayed to *God the Father*. Why didn't God the Father answer Him?
- (8) What was the point of the Satan figure?
- (9) Was the motive for Jesus' crucifixion political or spiritual?
- (10) How has this film changed your view of the crucifixion of Jesus?