

EXODUS: Gods and Kings (2014)

Rated PG. Running time: 2 hour 30 min.

Our content ratings: Violence 4; Language 0; Sex/Nudity 2.

Our star rating (1-5): 2.5

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.

Exodus 1:8

But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"
God said to Moses, "I am who I am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I am has sent me to you.'"

¹⁵ *God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you':*

*This is my name forever,
and this my title for all generations.*

Exodus 3:13-15

If you have run out of leftover Thanksgiving turkey, don't despair—Ridley Scott has provided us with one that is stuffed full of great special effects. If only his version of the story could have lived up to those marvelous effects and gorgeous sets!

Charlton Heston played a very majestic and grave Moses in *The Ten Commandments*. Christian Bale's Moses is delusional because he has been whacked a couple of times on the head during a rock/mud slide on the slope of Mt. Sinai. Or maybe it's the screenwriters who are crazy, giving us a god who appears to

Moses in the form of a 10 to 12 year-old boy. No wonder I was the only person in the theater at a 1 PM Sunday showing! Word about this travesty of the Biblical story must have spread since its Friday night debut!

This supremely naturalistic movie epic (early on Moses says he doesn't believe in a god) could be called *Gladiator Meets the Burning Bush*. It did moderately well at the box office on its opening weekend. As a spectacle—the magnificent sets depicting Memphis, Egypt and the special effects for the plagues and the parting of the Red Sea—it rates an A, but as a film about a man of faith, it comes closer to an “F.”

The plagues are not God-inspired in this rationalistic approach to the epic Bible story. They just come, the first—water into blood—caused by huge crocodiles that attack and devour hundreds of boaters, spilling their blood into the Nile. This and the plagues of frogs, flies, locusts and such just happen—you know, like Forest Gump's famous comment about bad luck.

Neither Moses nor Aaron keep returning to Ramses' court to announce the plagues because Moses, in a sequence that could have come out of one of the Tolkien movies, has gone underground to arm and train the Hebrew slaves to fight their own war of liberation.

Back in the Midian sequence the burning bush and god are depicted—as mentioned above, the latter is a 10 or 12 year-old boy, so the little “g” is not a mistake! This is by no means the God who spoke the world into existence! Moses' political success is due to his fortunate timing in returning to Egypt just as a series of natural disasters are hitting the nation. Thus Ramses and his court attribute their Nature-caused woes to Moses' god.

The film's Red Sea scene is awesome, but in this version of the drowning of the Egyptian army both Moses and Pharaoh are

still in the path of the returning waters. In fact, influenced by so many Western shoot-outs or Robin Hood adventures, we might think another fight-to-the death scene is coming up. However, the towering wall of water hits our hero and villain before they can meet, tossing them about beneath the surface. Apparently they pulled rank on the less fortunate soldiers, each of them being able to stagger out of the water on opposite sides of the sea.

Back in Midian again, there is a tender reunion between Moses and his wife and son, whereupon follows the scene of Moses going up Mt. Sinai. We can see the Hebrews below, and yes, even the golden calf. The boy god is with Moses, but he never lifts a finger to burn the Commandments into the stone. Moses has to do it himself the old fashioned way, with a chisel and a rock for a hammer.

It seems strange that the impossible number of 400,000 Hebrew slaves is kept (great for the panoramic shots of the Hebrews leaving), but virtually none of the story's religious trappings. Unless I missed it while blinking, there was no Passover ceremony during the night when an unexplained dark shadow crept over the city and killed the Egyptian first-born.

I don't think any church leaders will be buying out an entire showing for this film. My recommendation is that you save your money and watch one of the other Moses movies described in the article "Moses Movie Star" that follows in this issue of Visual Parables. Some of them are available free on YouTube!

This review with a set of discussion questions will be in the Jan. 2015 issue of Visual Parables.