

The reviews of the recent film, *Exodus: Gods & Kings*, were so bad that I didn't go to see it. And then I came across two reviews of the film that made me decide to watch it.¹ I was underwhelmed by the film, so I went back to read those two reviews again.

It would be easy to pan the film because of what it gets wrong, embellishes, excludes, or underemphasizes, and its portrayal of God as a petulant eleven year-old boy seemed pretty "off the wall" to me. I would have much preferred James Earl Jones or Morgan Freeman in that role.

After watching the film, I must confess that I started out rather as reviewer Brett McCracken described: "Christian filmgoers are a bit like Ramses: hardhearted, skeptical and maybe a bit jealous, looking for every reason to punish the secular outsider who has the nerve to tell a story that isn't theirs." At the same time, I had to acknowledge that the film's atheist director, Ridley Scott, affirmed that "We chose to play it as though it were historically true."



As was the case with the earlier film, *The Prince of Egypt*, much of the plot of this film was involved with the complex dynamics between Moses, who grew up as Pharaoh's adopted grandchild, and Ramses, his stubborn and arrogant adopted brother, who inherited the throne from their father/grandfather. Positing such realities goes beyond anything in the biblical text, but seems quite plausible, and perhaps likely, nonetheless.

As I tried to give the film makers the benefit of the doubt, I found myself asking several questions:



- **If you were going to represent God in a movie, how would you do it?** How old would God appear to be? Would God be male or female? What would be God's ethnic appearance? Would you go with an eleven year-old English boy, as Scott did, or with Morgan Freeman or James Earl Jones, as others have done?

Perhaps it's because any effort to represent God in physical form goes so quickly awry that the Second Commandment forbade it long ago (Exodus 20:4-5). I suspect that's why we have no contemporaneous representations of Jesus, either.

- While we're on the subject of the Ten Commandments, it's interesting that the Sixth Commandment tells us, "*You shall not murder*" (Exodus 20:13), when Israel's exit from Egypt was surely as blood-soaked as anything ISIS has ever imagined. And the later bloody conquest of Canaan set dynamics in motion

¹ www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/december-web-only/exodus.html;
<http://christianethicstoday.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/CE-96-2-printer-version.pdf>

that fuel continued bloodshed today. If it is true that “One person’s freedom fighter is another person’s terrorist,” **what sense do we make of all this killing?**

- This movie has its own take on how Moses found out who he really was, but Scripture doesn’t tell us how that happened. **How do you imagine that Moses discovered who he was?** And for that matter, since Jesus was fully human as well as fully divine, how do you imagine that *Jesus* found out who He was?
- The movie has God speak to Moses through a human-like figure no one else can see or hear. Scripture does in fact record quite a lot of conversation between Moses and God. How do you suppose those conversations took place? Perhaps just as importantly, **how do you understand God to communicate with you?**
- While there are aspects of the film’s depiction of the ten plagues with which we might quibble, the portrayal of the plagues, the burning bush, and the crossing of the Red Sea raise the question of what we really believe about the supernatural. It’s interesting to me how many actively religious persons, both Jewish and Christian, and both lay and professional, do not *really* believe any of the Bible’s miraculous stories ever *really* happened. **What do you believe about those accounts, one of which is Jesus’ resurrection?**

Reviewer Jennifer Crumpton noted that “Bale’s Moses changes dramatically from a strapping, confident and commanding ‘Prince of Egypt’ –the typical hero of brawn and bravado—to a wan, confused, tormented, exhausted servant. He agonizes, questions every move, doubts himself, doubts God, and yells. . . .

“[Compare this to] the iconic Great American Hero who never makes a mistake, changes his mind, or admits that he doesn’t know what to think or do. We tend to demand perfection, or at least the spin to create the appearance of it. Politicians run and win on their records of never changing their stance on issues, which also means they have not thought critically, sought or learned new information, or grown personally and intellectually.

“Both Moses and Jesus seemed insane because they believed the unbelievable, saw the unseeable, and did the unthinkable. After sacrificing any sense of comfort or security in life, and fighting the good fight, Moses missed the Promised Land and Jesus went to the cross. . . . What if our ‘Christian nation’ actually followed Jesus, who said there is no longer such thing as an eye for an eye, which results only in violence and retaliation? Would we die on the cross? Or would we be resurrected into a new life? Will we ever know?” These are good questions.

And another of Crumpton’s reflections about the film reminded me of the continuing saga of bloodshed in our own land, most recently (in the news, at least) in North Charleston, South Carolina, a town in which I used to work and worship years ago:

“Bale’s performance of Moses, and his personal reflections about the care he took in embodying him, made me wonder what would have happened to the narrative if he hadn’t been so curious and open about Moses’ authentic perception of both his own story and The Greater Story. It reminded me of the greatest dangers to our narrative as a nation:

- our propensity for not caring to truly get inside the head of the other;
- not stopping to question our version of the story;
- not bothering to understand or find value in what seems foreign to us; and

- not acknowledging the surprising truth present in experiences and realities we have not lived ourselves.”

When all is said and done, I think what I’m going to remember most about this movie is a sentence that Ramses said to his infant son more than once—that same son who would die in the tenth plague: **“Little boy, you sleep so soundly because you know that you are deeply loved. I have never slept so soundly myself.”**

We know from Scripture that Ramses did in fact have a son, and that he grieved deeply when that son died. I wonder how the history of the world might have been different if Ramses had been sure of his father’s love? I wonder how the history of the world might be different if our own children were absolutely certain that they were loved and cherished?

I wonder how the law enforcement officers of the world might behave differently if their early lives had all been lived in the love of godly fathers? I wonder how the leaders of the nations might govern differently if they, too, had known such godly love? *And I wonder what God intends for us to do with such questions*

Dave

