

The Promise

(Glorious Films)

In a dramatic retelling of the birth of Jesus using computer-generated imagery animation accompanied by a Broadway-style soundtrack, *The Promise* is a 44-minute movie by Glorious Films founders Todd Shaffer and Ronald Mezey—film industry veterans who started their company in 2010 to create “quality entertainment from a strong biblical worldview that spreads a passion for the message of Jesus Christ.”

Four poetic passages in Luke provide the basis for the musical film.

“The birth narrative of Jesus as told in Luke is full of musical poetry, describing the human and angelic excitement to the Messiah’s arrival,” Shaffer says. “By telling this story in song—as Luke did—we were able to put a big spotlight on these deep passages, which really capture the gospel message of why Jesus came to earth. With its beautiful composition, sophisticated animation style and compelling story, we believe families can sit down and enjoy this film together, watching the Christmas story unfold as never seen before.”

The film’s optical animation style blends animation techniques with performances by ballet dancers and stage actors.

Composed by James Gelfand and Louise Tremblay, the film’s soundtrack features the Montreal Boys’ Choir. Songs include “Nothing Is Impossible,” “I Will Magnify,” “Simeon’s Blessing” and “Lullaby for the King.”

Lon Vining, outreach director for the film, believes the mixture of music and animation will help viewers remember key points from the story.

“Every year, individuals read or hear the Christmas narrative,

but few pick up on the heart of the story,” Vining says.

“That is where *The Promise* comes in. We placed great emphasis during the film’s development on blending together animation and music to help provide a connection between the viewers and the story’s historic characters. We feel audiences will get a new perspective for what each person was experiencing.”

A Call to Resurgence

With only 8 percent of Americans practicing true evangelical Christian faith, Driscoll gives a clarion call for believers to wake up.

God Isn’t Mad at You

Many people—Christians included—view God as an angry deity waiting to strike them down. It’s time to reveal the truth about a loving Father who desires the best for you.

If God has the whole world in His hands and knows every hair on my head, then why do I always feel so far from Him? Could it be that God is mad at me?”

I have heard that question over and over during my 20 years in ministry. In the early years, I simply would tell people, “God isn’t mad at you—**He loves you!**” But after ministering to hundreds of thousands of people and hearing the same thing again and again, I began to realize how widespread this thinking is. Millions of people from all backgrounds have

bought into the idea that God is not only angry but also that He's angry *with them*. This **belief** is damaging countless lives, and I believe God has given me a mandate to set the record straight.

How Americans—and the World—View God

There is a passage in Isaiah that's almost impossible to believe. In it, the Lord declares: "'I'm promising now no more anger, no more dressing you down. For even if the mountains walk away and the hills fall to pieces, my love won't walk away from you, my covenant commitment of peace won't fall apart.' The God who has compassion on you says so" (Is. 54:9-10, MSG).

No more anger. No more dressing you down. My love won't walk away from you. I often wonder how, with **promises** such as these in Scripture, so many people can believe God is angry with them. But the fact is, the cultural noise is simply overwhelming. It can be absolutely deafening. It seems today that everyone is an expert on the subject of God.

For instance, I live in Birmingham, Ala., where catastrophic tornadoes swept through the heart of the city on April 27, 2011. That day, roughly 200 twisters touched down across the Southeast. Five states reported damage. More than 300 people lost their lives—234 in Alabama alone—and hundreds of buildings were destroyed.

As the news media covered the tornado outbreak, I heard more than one person declare, "God is judging our city for its **past sins**."

Natural disasters tend to bring introspection. This happened both after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in August 2005 and in March 2011, when an earthquake and tsunami devastated the shore and inland cities of Japan. More than 15,000 people were killed in Japan, and the tsunami set off a nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

After the disaster, Shintaro Ishihara, the governor of Tokyo, was quoted as saying, "I think [the disaster] is *tembatsu*." *Tembatsu* means "divine punishment." Ishihara's remarks are similar to those made by then New Orleans mayor Ray Nagin following Hurricane Katrina. "Surely God is mad at America," Nagin said. "He sent us hurricane after hurricane after hurricane."

Both men, when faced with unspeakable disaster, saw the devastation as **punishment** for human sin.

A recent book titled *America's Four Gods*, written by Paul Froese and Christopher Bader, provides an in-depth study of how Americans view God. With the help of the Gallup organization, they interviewed thousands of people—and the findings were remarkable. Roughly 5 percent of respondents identified themselves as atheists, but the professors surmised the remainder of America has four main views of God:

1. The Authoritative God. Some 31 percent of Americans believe God is both engaged in the world and judgmental, meaning He will use any way to get our attention and wake us up.

2. The Benevolent God. Twenty-four percent of respondents believe God is engaged in our daily life yet non-judgmental.

3. The Critical God. Some 16 percent of those surveyed said God is judgmental and disengaged from our lives.

4. The Distant God. Twenty-four percent believe God is non-judgmental but also disengaged from our lives.

I have to wonder how many people surveyed perceive God to be an awesome and holy Savior. I have to wonder how many have ever heard God calling their names. I wonder how many of them have felt the touch of His Spirit.

God reveals Himself through His Word and His Spirit. He doesn't reveal Himself only to a special few. He is calling

out to all of us, wanting us to awaken to Him.

And you know what? Our spirits cry out to know Him.

Setting the Record Straight

I do believe in divine judgment, but I believe in the awesome love of God even more. The very character of God is love, mercy and justice, yet what the culture hears about God is often the opposite.

Now that you understand how America views God, it's easy for you to see why many believe natural and man-made disasters must be from heaven. You can see why so many find it easy to believe that natural disasters must be due to God's anger with the nations. God must be simply stirring the ocean, blowing the wind and stomping the earth in a rage. He must be judging our sins! He must be mad at us.

In the Old Testament, God did judge nations. He led the nation of Israel into **captivity** for more than 400 years because of its rebellion and idolatry. We know Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of their sexual perversion and lawlessness (see Ezek. 16:49-50). God had planned to do the same with the city of Nineveh, but Jonah arrived in time to preach the word of the Lord. The people repented, and God spared the city (see Jonah 3).

God does judge, but what we must understand is that His **mercy and love** prevail in the tough times. God warned Israel in Jeremiah 18:6-10, saying, "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it" (NIV).

Did you catch the key word in the last sentence? God plans *good* for the nations. God loves every nation and calls out to them to serve Him. He is their refuge. He always made a way of escape in the Old Testament, but because the world was under the law, as a just God He had to punish the nations when they were disobedient.

When disasters strike, God wants us to run to Him, not away from Him because we think He's mad at us. No matter what state we find ourselves in, He is there with open arms of love, mercy and compassion. When disaster strikes, we need only to call upon Him.

An Upside-Down View of God

It's so easy to think God is **mad** at you when you spend your life looking in the mirror and never out the window. The truth is, in our Western culture, life is pretty good. We go to bed each night to the sound of some pundit ranting on a 24-hour news channel about the state of the union or some sports commentator bloviating about an overpaid athlete.

In our culture, God is often someone we mutter prayers to when we're taking a test in school, riding on a plane or feeling guilty about watching something we knew wasn't good for us.

Remember the statistics I shared on how Americans view God? Ninety-five percent of our nation sees God as authoritative, benevolent, critical or distant. In other words, the very concept of God carries with it a stigma of control, aloofness or plausible ineptness. Because of this view of God, we find it easy to believe He might be mad at us.

But I'm always amazed when I go overseas and see what God is doing in places with far fewer resources. In Third World nations, where life is so hard or it is illegal to be a Christian, the church is growing rapidly, and the believers are passionate. How can this be? Many would assume that people in countries rife with hardship, persecution, famine and

disease would think God isn't good, but the opposite is often true.

I could tell you countless stories of godly people who have experienced **tragedies**. I think about the pastor I met in Singapore who lost his small son when the boy's school collapsed during an earthquake in China. When this pastor ran to find his son, all he could see were his shoes sticking out from under the rubble. I've never forgotten how that man responded: He fell to his knees and began to worship the Lord. He knew God was good even though his heart was breaking in two.

Churches in China are growing despite the threat of intimidation, arrest and persecution. It simply doesn't make sense. Why would they take risks to worship a God who would allow them to be martyred, imprisoned or tortured?

Maybe they know something we don't know. Could it be that God is more than just a Santa Claus-type figure, more than a two-hour weekend commitment, more than the mascot for a voting bloc?

One pastor from Shanghai who lives his life on the edge for Jesus said if the head of one house church was arrested, "the congregation would just split up and might break into five, six or even 10 new house churches." The millions who serve God in nations where it's dangerous to be a Christian must realize something about God's character we need to know.

All of these great leaders have continually praised God through their trials. In fact, they say God has never been closer to them than when they walked through their trials. These warriors obviously understand what Isaiah 45:3 means when it says, "I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name."

God isn't mad at you. Nope! He is mad about you! You are the

apple of His eye. You want to know how I know this? Here are five ways God proves it is true.

1. God never stops loving you. No matter where you're from, where you've been or the mistakes you've made, God loves you. There is nothing that can get in the way of that. Romans 8:38-39 says, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Nothing means nothing. God is love, and His love for you has no limit.

2. God created you for a purpose. You are "the God-created" (Acts 17:24-29, MSG), and God made you with a destiny and purpose in mind. He didn't create you to sit and do nothing. He chose you to walk in power, freedom and victory.

God reveals His purpose through your gifts and talents. I challenge you to use your abilities to bring God glory.

3. God wants to give you an abundant life. The devil would love to destroy you, but God wants you to have an abundant life filled with His power and provision. John 10:10 says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (NIV).

There isn't a single need you have that God doesn't want to fulfill. As my dear friend Dave Martin always says, "The rest of your life is the best of your life!" Believe that God will provide all that you need, and get ready to live at another level.

4. God gave His Son as a sacrifice to cover all your sins. I love the way Romans 8:3-4 in The Message version explains what Jesus did. It says, "God went for the jugular when he sent his own Son."

The guy in me loves the sound of that—it perfectly describes the bold and intense moment when Jesus stepped into our humanity and broke the law to rescue you and me. And He did that because He loved us.

5. God has prepared a place in heaven for you. This earth is not our home! God prepared something else for us. He prepared a place where we will be able to spend eternity with our loving and faithful Father. If you've ever doubted the existence of heaven, just read the entire book of Revelation.

The bottom line is this: God loves all of us, regardless of our history. And there is a huge difference between conviction and condemnation. God convicts, and that leads us to repentance, but the devil condemns, and that leads to a life of guilt.

God isn't mad at you. He wants to spend eternity with you. Would you want to live forever with someone you were mad at? God doesn't either.

The most valuable thing you will ever receive is God's grace. He gave it to us so we can understand the power of being redeemed. He gave it to us so we can spend the rest of eternity—starting today—living with and enjoying Him.

Pat Schatzline *co-founded Mercy Seat Ministries with his wife, Karen, in 1997. Together, they have ministered to more than 2 million people around the globe and have seen tens of thousands transformed by God's power.*

Day 7

Barry and Batya Segal (Greetings From Jerusalem)

This Messianic praise and worship album is Barry and Batya Segal's seventh. Sung in mostly Hebrew, the music is used for both dance and worship.

Break Out!

Joel Osteen (FaithWords)

In his latest book, subtitled "Five Keys to Go Beyond Your Barriers and Live an Extraordinary Life," the televangelist and *New York Times* best-selling author explains how to break free of unbelief, increase productivity, improve relationships and accomplish your dreams.

Return to Me (The Restoration Chronicles)

Lynn Austin (Bethany House)

This fictional series brings to life Ezra and Nehemiah through the stories of Iddo and Zechariah.

What Happens When I Die?

Bill Wiese (Charisma House)

The best-selling author of *23 Minutes in Hell* tackles questions about the afterlife while using Scripture to validate compelling stories of people's visits to heaven and hell.

Mercy (Live)

Aaron and Amanda Crabb (Spring House)

After their studio release of *Mercy* in April, the live DVD version hits stands this month, showcasing the fourth album for this husband-and-wife duo.

Overwhelmed by the Spirit

James Maloney (Destiny Image)

Prophetic minister James Maloney helps Spirit-filled believers understand the Holy Spirit and discover their gifts and callings.

God's Double Agent

Bob Fu with Nancy French (Baker Books)

This true account of a Chinese pastor's arrest, imprisonment and escape as a member of the underground church in China gives us a glimpse into the lives of the millions of Chinese Christians living out their faith in secret due to the persecution they face.