

'A.D.' Series Debuts With Solid Ratings

Husband and wife team Mark Burnett and Roma Downey continue their journey to bring the Bible to the silver screen in their new series *A.D. The Bible Continues*. The first episode aired Sunday evening (April 5) on NBC and will continue each Sunday for the next 11 weeks.

The first episode focused primarily on the crucifixion of Jesus, although the act of putting Jesus on the cross takes only a few minutes of screen time. Most of the action followed other characters including Pontius Pilate, Caiaphas, and Peter.

Episode 1 began with Caiaphas asking Jesus if He is the Messiah, to which He replies in the affirmative. Thus begins Caiaphas' screams for crucifixion. Then Jesus is brought to Pilate, who is concerned about ordering the death of a seemingly innocent man. He is also concerned because of his wife's dream the night before.

The directors chose to skip Jesus' flogging and instead spend time focusing on nailing Jesus to the cross. There we see a bloody and beaten Christ. We watch as nails are hammered into His palms and feet. Then He is lifted up to die.

This shouldn't come as a spoiler to any, but Jesus doesn't stay dead long. The episode ends with an angel rolling away the stone covering the opening to the tomb while a bright light leaks out from inside.

Those are primary scenes sourced in Scripture. However, there are many other scenes that will not be found in the pages of the New Testament and were added for dramatic effect. Some make logical sense: a discussion between Caiaphas and Pilate about Roman guards being placed at the tomb to make sure no

one steals the body of Christ; Caiaphas could be strongly angered and scream at Joseph of Arimathea because he put Jesus' body in his personal tomb and thus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah; Peter and the other disciples wanted to escape Jerusalem and go back home.

Similar to the first miniseries, writers and directors of *A.D.* made some decisions that Christians will feel less happy about. The series skips Jesus' flogging, the journey to Golgatha, and all but one of Jesus' sayings on the cross.

Items added include an angel flying through dark clouds and looking quite like a fairy. This may not be theologically wrong, but it does look strange. Other scenes include Caiaphas visiting the cross of Jesus after He was removed. He orders the cross moved and broken into many pieces. In a later scene a zealot attempts to convince Peter and the other disciples to join an open war against Rome. Peter tells him that those who live by the sword die by the sword.

Not a theological problem, but viewers will find it difficult to keep up with who each character is. Few introductions are given and it feels as though the show expects viewers to know who each person is just by what they are doing. In some cases this works, in others it is unclear, and you are forced to make an assumption. Those not familiar with Scripture will have a hard time keeping up.

All in all, *A.D. The Bible Continues* is a strong effort to bring the Bible to life through the medium of television. While it could not replace a thorough reading of Scripture, it will hopefully push people in that direction. Like its predecessor, the visuals are great and the acting is par for a television production. Because it does contain scenes of crucifixion, it may not be suitable for very small children, but it is as family-friendly as a story containing those elements can be.

While not an endorsement of subsequent episodes of the series, the first episode of *A.D. The Bible Continues* shows promise and is worth watching.

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