

Can You Find Biblical Values in 'Spider-Man: Far From Home'?

One of the world's most beloved heroes struggles with insecurity in *Spider-Man: Far From Home*, the latest film featuring the wall crawler, releasing July 2. In the aftermath of *Avengers: Endgame*, Peter Parker (Tom Holland) ventures beyond his Queens neighborhood into a several eastern European countries on a high school field trip before trouble follows.

This time, Peter isn't a sidekick. He doesn't have his mentor to fall back on, and the pressure compounds on the snapped-back teen from the beginning. Everywhere he turns, he feels the loss of Iron Man, along with the entire world, wondering "Who will rise up to take his place?"

This pushes the once zealous hero back into his 16-year-old shell, hoping to take a breather from the hero world and focus on a budding relationship with M.J. (Zendaya).

The world doesn't wait. After monstrous elementally-powered superbeings emerge, provoked by "the blip" (the snap) to cause destruction, Nick Fury (Samuel L. Jackson) arrives to solicit Peter's help. Peter soon finds himself pulled between his responsibilities as a hero and his own inadequacies. Flashing back to his final words before disintegrating in *Infinity War*, Peter said to Tony, "I'm sorry." This is the mind of our hero, idealistic optimism overcome with crushing guilt. Now, with Tony gone, was his faith in Peter well founded ... or his last mistake?

Peter is reassured by Happy Hogan (Jon Favreau), Tony's best friend and assistant, that Tony was himself "a mess" and struggled with self-doubt. If Peter and the world thought Iron Man was perfect, Happy confesses that he wasn't. He was a

flawed hero grounded in reality, a regular man who happened to rise above those weaknesses to do great things.

Also giving advice is a new colleague, Quentin Beck (Jake Gyllenhaal), a superpowered costumed hero the kids start calling Mysterio, appearing from another dimension to fight the monstrous Elementals. Where Fury is the impersonal authoritarian figure, Beck is a listening ear and confidant. Having another superhero in the world also reassures Peter that the burden isn't his alone.

Lest it all sound like dreary teen angst, the film is also quite funny, thanks in large part to Peter's best friend Ned (Jacob Batalon) and teacher-chaperones Mr. Dell (J.B. Smoove) and Mr. Harrington (Martin Starr). I'd love to see more of these characters in another setting.

Viewers will identify with Peter's feelings of inadequacy, something that was even common in our biblical heroes. Remember God's rebuke to Moses after he detailed his own shortcomings? "'Who has made man's mouth? Or who made the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord?'" (Ex. 4:11).

Writers Chris McKenna and Erik Sommers and director Jon Watts create an entertaining, multi-layered story for this new Spider-Man outing, reflecting the awkwardness of high school and the high-stakes dynamics of superhero adventures. There are some unforgettable scenes set on a background of beautiful on-location European settings as well as two visually-dazzling fantasy sequences.

Spider-Man: Far From Home is easily my favorite Spider-Man film and perhaps my favorite solo superhero outing in the Marvel universe. This is what happens when people who love Spider-Man create a film for audiences who love Spider-Man. It is charming, fun, action-packed and entertaining from start to finish. Previous actors (Toby McGuire, Andrew Garfield)

carrying the Spider-Man mantle have all brought something different to the role, but Tom Holland, with his energy and innocence, has become the gold standard.

Important note: Stay through the end of the credits for additional scenes that are actually worth staying for.

Spider-Man: Far From Home, which also stars Marisa Tomei and Cobie Smulders, releases July 2 from Columbia/Sony Pictures.

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