

Is Hollywood's Faith Fascination Evidence of America's Spiritual Hunger?

Epic Hollywood faith-based films used to bring to mind titles like "The 10 Commandments," starring Charlton Heston, "Ben Hur," also with Heston at the helm and "Quo Vadis," starring Robert Taylor. But recent years have seen a resurgence of the Bible on screen.

And whether accurately portraying scriptural accounts or distorting them almost beyond recognition, 2014 films brought faith to the screen in a whole new way. Some even say Hollywood went so far as to declare 2014, unofficially, the 'Year of the Bible.'

Religion and culture expert Dr. Alex McFarland says that while some of the films produced include gross misrepresentations of Scripture, the uptick in faith-based movies—and their continued popularity among moviegoers—demonstrates Americans' deep-seated spiritual hunger.

"The reason faith-based movies continue to draw large audiences goes far beyond people wanting 120 minutes of cinematic escape," McFarland said. "In truth, these films connect with a spiritual hunger people have, and they connect with our core desire to believe that something—Someone—exists who is beyond us, who is greater than us, and who cares for us."

Faith-based movies in 2014 ranged from the epics *Noah*, which ditches biblical accuracy in favor of re-writing Scripture to warn against climate change; and *Exodus: Gods and Kings*, which largely discounts God's role in freeing the Hebrew people from slavery; to *Son of God*, based on the History Channel series *The Bible*; *Heaven is for Real*, which some criticize as failing

to address the truth of salvation through Jesus; and *God's Not Dead*, which tells the story of a Christian college student who takes on an embittered atheist philosophy professor who challenges him to prove God's existence.

"What we saw in 2014 were, in some cases, accurate portrayals of Scripture and, in others, attempts to discount God and minimize His reality by retelling biblical accounts as sociological or environmental statements," McFarland continued. "But, the one thing all of these films had in common was the starting point of the spiritual and supernatural, and it's this starting point that drew in moviegoers across the country.

"To this spiritually hungry world, Christians can say with confidence that despite any misrepresentations on the screen, we have the answer. Jesus is real."

According to data by the Barna Group, even the majority (62 percent) of unchurched adults in America consider themselves Christians; more than one-third (34 percent) describe themselves as "deeply spiritual," and more than one-half (51 percent) are "actively seeking something better spiritually than they have experienced to date."

Additionally, *Christianity Today* reports that data from LifeWay Research shows that more than half of Americans (56 percent) want more films with Christian values.

That said, according to an online poll conducted in March by Bible Gateway, the majority of readers want Hollywood adaptations of Scripture that "adhere strictly to the details of the original story." And an American Insights poll found that among Christians, the majority (79 percent) responded that a film's accuracy in biblical interpretation is a large deciding factor in whether or not they will see a movie. Of these Christians, 42 percent believe Hollywood does not accurately portray the Bible.