

## TO READ FILMS ON SCRIPTURE

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Films are among the most powerful media in the history of humankind. In a culture increasingly saturated with popular media, and with escalating sophistication of attempts to shape viewers, today's theology student would do well to learn to read film depictions of the Bible. How do we approach the re-telling of the scriptures through film? Should we critique a film based on its literal faithfulness to the text? Is that the point of reading or viewing historically based stories? Are there different concerns for the Bible on film?

Film adaptations and representations of biblical contexts tell us a lot about the filmmakers and their culture. The selection of biblical material itself, the context, setting, atmosphere, lighting, music, actors, and so forth, each illustrate how filmmakers are telling their version of the story. Moreover, the politics, economics, sociology, and theology of the films also say something about the filmmakers and the marketplace for which the films are made. *The following questions are provided to help the student think through significant issues for interaction. The relative importance of individual questions will vary from film to film.*

### **Retelling the Biblical Story**

→ Why was the specific biblical context chosen? What is the significance of the title of the movie? → What did the filmmakers skip? Why? What did they add? Why? → How did the filmmakers deal with ambiguities in the text? → What are the filmmakers trying to say with the film? How does this correspond to the biblical context? → What are the priorities of the filmmakers in relation to retelling the biblical account? → What does this film tell us about the filmmakers and their intended viewership?

### **Ancient Context (in the case of direct retelling)**

→ Are the sets believable? Characters? → How would you describe the land? → How do the elements of the story relate to North American viewers? → What are the priorities of the filmmakers in relation to ancient context?

### **Target Audience**

→ Who is the film made for? How do you know? How is the story tailored to the target audience? → How might the film appear to audiences outside the target audience? → What genre or genres are used to tell the story and how does this contribute to the meaning of the movie?

### **The Divine**

→ How is God and/or the Messiah portrayed? Consider the miraculous as well as personality issues. → What techniques are used to portray the divine? → What theological vantage point is favored and/or challenged by the film?

### **Social Context**

→ What social issues are foregrounded in the film? → How well do you think the film succeed in challenging the social views of viewers? → What is the human problem, according to the film? → How are men portrayed? Women? → What are the priorities of the filmmakers in relation to social issues? → What are some of the issues in the context of the filmmakers—social, historical, intellectual, and so on—that help explain the significance of the film?