

No Faith in the Spectacle of ‘Exodus: Gods and Kings’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on December 12, 2014 - 9:54pm

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The world certainly didn’t need another “Ten Commandments,” but director Ridley Scott tries to remake the 50’s Biblical epic anyway – led by Christian Bale as a scowling and shouting Moses. Yet Bale can’t hold a staff to Charlton Heston and Scott is no Cecil B. DeMille. Ostensibly this is a movie about the power of faith, but Scott’s film has no soul within.

Bale stars as the favored adopted son of the aging pharaoh Seti (John Turturro). He’s the pharaoh who would rather hand over the keys to his kingdom to Moses than his own flesh and blood, the egotistical Ramses (an uncomfortable-looking Joel Edgerton). Moses starts out a cynic, but after a little trip to see the suffering the slaves are enduring, he learns of his own true Hebrew heritage.



Joel Edgerton, John Turturro and Christian Bale in ‘Exodus: God and Kings’

Photo credit: 20th Century Fox

Once the pharaoh dies and Ramses takes power he has Moses banished to exile. Moses becomes a sheep farmer, settles down with a wife and child, until he’s called to head back into the palace to free the slaves and tell the Pharaoh to “let my people go.” Bale plays Moses as an easily enraged leader on the battlefield prone to shouting for little or no reason. He’s all beard and boorishness with a muddled British accent.

Edgerton looks sublimely uncomfortable in his Egyptian getup. He seems too embarrassed to chew the scenery even when holding a venomous snake, but can’t find any sincerity in his character either. He’s neither a glowering villain, nor a troubled sympathetic figure. So

often he just fades away into the overstuffed cast of bushy beards and bronzed up white guys in smoky eye makeup.

Scott is a skilled purveyor of big budget effects, and he fills his screen with sweeping images of approaching army of extras, desolate battlefields and Egyptian pyramids. But it's the plagues that get the audiences in the seats, and you'd think that would be the time to go big or go home. However, his digital effects team sacrifices wonder and spectacle to create scientifically plausible plagues. So while watching the Nile turn red because of an attack of crocodiles is fun for awhile – and digital swarms of locust fill the landscape – there's nothing awe-inducing about it. Even the parting of the Red Sea gets chalked up to shifting currents and a CGI tidal wave instead of divine intervention. It almost makes you long for the wind-swept oratory of Heston again.



Battlin' Moses in 'Exodus: God and Kings'

Photo credit: 20th Century Fox

More problematic is the script (credited to 4 writers) which doesn't seem to have faith, or any investment in its own material. Moses heads back to free the slaves after getting bonked on the head by a rock slide during a rain storm. While trapped in mud, Moses sees the burning bush. Then the film presents God as a petulant, British pre-teen brat who may be a figment of Moses' imagination. The film tries to update the story with a heightened sense of realism and attention to detail, but by keeping the story at arms length its robbed of its narrative powers – so Moses' mission comes off not as a chosen people's deliverance from slavery and more like the delusional dream of a shouting lunatic.

This is an expansive but impersonal big budget blockbuster. And for reasons known only to Scott, he has stuffed the cast with any old star who happened to be available and on the back lot no matter how out of place they may seem. Cecil B. DeMille had Edward G. Robinson as a Machiavellian Israelite, Ridley Scott has John Turturro as Pharaoh Seti. I think it's safe to assume we won't be seeing this one on TV each Easter for years to come.

"Exodus: Gods and Kings" opens everywhere on December 12th. Featuring Ridley Scott, Christian Bale, Joel Edgerton, Sigourney Weaver, Aaron Paul, Ben Mendelsohn, Ben Kingsley and John Turturro. Written by Adam Cooper, Bill Collage, Jeffrey Caine and Steve Zaillian. Directed by Ridley Scott. Rated "PG-13"



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