

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*

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Let's have the confidence in ourselves that we can figure out where dramatic license has been used and not attribute that to the gospel accounts.

By now, many of you have heard of the new Mel Gibson movie, *The Passion*, which will be released on Wednesday. The movie seeks to recreate the last twelve hours of Jesus' life up to the crucifixion. Yahoo News reports that the movie will open as a blockbuster, saying, "Demand from exhibitors all over the country has pumped the site count over 2,800 (just 100 less than *The Last Samurai*), erasing previous limitations on its ability to potentially open as a blockbuster." Last week, online ticket seller Fandango reported that "Passion" tickets accounted for 43% of all its sales. (Visit www.movies.yahoo.com and www.thepassionofthechrist.com for more details.)

Almost every news broadcast over the last ten days has featured interviews with persons who have seen a prescreening of the movie or with Gibson himself. Some like the movie; some do not. Jews are complaining that the movie will stir up anti-Semitism. Meanwhile, the movie is being marketed to churches across the country as a huge opportunity to reach people who have never heard the gospel. Through mailing advertisements, this congregation has been urged to buy bumper stickers; door hangers; banners; and even rent out a theater for an exclusive showing.

As we have approached the

Now back to *The Passion*. Because of the marketing campaign I mentioned above, I have a DVD with the movie trailer. In only four minutes, the trailer gives you a sense that the producers wanted to portray the events as realistically as possible. I can say the trailer had its effect, because it has motivated me to want to see the movie in its entirety. Why?

Christians need to be reminded of the extreme sacrifice made on our behalf. Can we be honest enough to say that we have a hard time imagining the brutality of what our Savior suffered? As a whole, Americans have no idea of what physical suffering is like. Think of how far removed our society is from what continues to be reality in many parts of the world. How many times have we lightly passed over what is written in the gospels? How often do we allow our minds to wander as we are partaking of the Lord's Supper? Can we hear each lick as the Roman soldiers applied a brutal beating to our Savior? (Mk. 14:15) Have we taken time to think of the pain that He endured as the soldiers forced a crown of thorns on His head? (Jhn. 19:2) Can we hear the cry of the people as they cried out "Crucify Him," and "His blood shall be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:23, 25) Can we feel the impact of a wooden cross being slammed into the ground as the Savior is suspended between earth & sky? Can we hear Him saying, *Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing?* (Lk. 23:34) From what I can tell, this movie will go a long way in reminding us of the extreme sacrifice on the part of Jesus. Sometimes we need to be awakened to the painful reality of what was involved in this sacrifice! *Can we not consider this movie as a tool to improve our understanding of what is written in the gospel accounts?*

A few years ago I came across some writing by a medical doctor who explained the effects of death by crucifixion in great detail.

release date of *The Passion* I have seen a few articles written by brethren—mostly negative—or at least cautioning brethren about what they may see in the film because of its "R" rating. Some have reminded us that there is much in the movie that is subject to the imagination of the movie producer. And that is obviously true. Does anyone know with absolute certainty as to what Jesus looked like? How long was his hair? What did Mary look like? This is all left to supposition since the gospels do not reveal this information to us. In my opinion, these concerns do not rise to the level of warning someone not to see the movie.

What about the "R" rating? The movie has been tagged with an "R" rating due to the graphic violence depicted. Should the Christian refrain from viewing the movie solely because of the "R" rating? I believe this falls into the realm of personal judgment. Should we make a "blanket rule" and throw out all "R" rated movies or consider each one on an individual basis? Again, this falls into the realm of personal judgment. (Disclaimer: Many movies deserve the "R" rating—and are not fitting for viewing. Hollywood enjoys moving boundaries away from wholesome and family entertainment. Over the last twenty years, think of the depths that producers have gone to in order to give us graphic depictions of sexual encounters and movies filled with foul language. Hollywood glories in flaunting immorality

For me, it served as a wake up call as to the reality of what Jesus *probably* experienced. (See www.mhallen.com/articles/1998/041998.htm) This article does a good job in driving home the point that Jesus died a very painful death. Such things are good for us to consider.

While *The Passion* may take dramatic license here and there—its producer claims to have endeavored to make it as close to the gospel accounts as possible. We shall see. Let's have the confidence in ourselves that we can figure out where dramatic license has been used and not attribute that to the gospel accounts. If you go, use this as a tool to help improve your understanding of the greatest sacrifice man has ever known.

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and lifestyles contrary to Christian living. There are many movies (rated "R," "PG," or "G") that Christians need exercise caution in viewing.)