



Jesus of Hollywood

Adele Reinhartz

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Since the advent of the cinema, Jesus has frequently appeared in our movie houses and on our television screens. Indeed, it may well be that more people worldwide know about Jesus and his life story from the movies than from any other medium. Indeed, Jesus' story has been adapted dozens of times throughout the history of commercial cinema, from the 1912 silent *From the Manger to the Cross* to Mel Gibson's 2004 *The Passion of the Christ*. No doubt there are more to come.

Drawing on a broad range of movies, biblical scholar Adele Reinhartz traces the way in which Jesus of Nazareth has become Jesus of Hollywood. She argues that Jesus films both reflect and influence cultural perceptions of Jesus and the other figures in his story. She focuses on the cinematic interpretation of Jesus' relationships with the key people in his life: his family, his friends, and his foes. She examines how these films address theological issues, such as Jesus' identity as both human and divine, political issues, such as the role of the individual in society and the possibility of freedom under political oppression, social issues, such as gender roles and hierarchies, and personal issues, such as the nature of friendship and human sexuality. Reinhartz's study of Jesus' celluloid incarnations shows how Jesus movies reshape the past in the image of the present. Despite society's profound interest in Jesus as a religious and historical figure, Jesus movies are fascinating not as history but as mirrors of the concerns, anxieties, and values of our own era. As the story of Jesus continues to capture the imagination of filmmakers and moviegoers, he remains as significant a cultural figure today as he was 2000 years ago.

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