



This activity was originally part of a longer essay on biblical themes in films, by Nicola Denzey Lewis and Patrick Gray. The full essay can be found in: *Teaching the Bible through Popular Culture and the Arts* edited by Mark Roncace and Patrick Gray, Society of Biblical Literature, 2005 (p. 127-128).

Braveheart (1995)

Loosely based on historical events involving Scottish national hero William Wallace, this film contains one of the most memorable and most quoted speeches in recent cinema. Just before a pivotal battle against the English, Wallace (Mel Gibson) concludes the speech with a rousing call to arms (DVD ch. 10): “Fight and you may die. Run and you’ll live. At least awhile. And dying in your beds, many years from now, would you be willing to trade all of the days from this day to that, for ... just one chance to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they’ll never take our freedom!”

The scene provides an analogy of sorts to the scenario encountered in 1 Maccabees. Discussion after viewing the clip can bring out the similarities and differences between the two contexts. Wallace’s speech is usually remembered as a *tour de force*, but the editing reminds the viewer that not all Scots shared the same nationalist vision. One character interrupts to endorse the “run and live” option, and the nobles, whose interests were likely to be adversely affected by any upheaval, are noticeably unenthused as Wallace whips the makeshift army into a frenzy.

Jewish tradition likewise celebrates the Maccabean revolt as a nationalist triumph, notwithstanding the marked lack of solidarity among Jews in 1 Macc 1–3. Many Jews, who stand to gain by their relationship with members of the ruling class, want to join with the Hellenists and abandon the distinctive signs of Jewish identity. Many Hasideans oppose the hellenizers out of religious scruples rather than for political reasons and are massacred when they refuse to fight on the Sabbath. Mattathias and his sons also oppose these “lawless men” but are willing to do so by taking up arms against Antiochus. In each case, one sees competing notions of freedom and the good life at play among the various parties on the same side of the battle. Finally, one also sees a similar use of set speeches in both works (cf. 1 Macc 2:27–28; 3:16–22). The speeches, while inspirational and dramatic, are perhaps best seen as epitomes or idealized recitations rather than transcripts of speeches as actually delivered. (It seems unlikely that a thirty-second address would have won over all the doubters so decisively in either scenario.) What rhetorical resemblances does one see in the speeches in the two works?

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