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Year One

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Year One

Abstract

This is a review of *Year One* (2009).

Harold Ramis' latest film, *Year One*, is a Biblically-based comedy adventure, which, although definitely not high-brow entertainment, still manages to tickle its audience's funny bones with its improbable situations and light-hearted, though at times unfortunate, jabs at Judaic myth and practice.

The movie details the adventures of Zed (Jack Black) and Oh (Michael Cera), two socially awkward Hebrew workers who are banished from their tribe after Zed eats from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. After this banishment, the two wander the land encountering many characters from the Bible, including a very stern Adam (Harold Ramis), a circumcision-happy Abraham (Hank Azaria), a stereotypical teenage Isaac (Christopher Mintz-Plasse), and a dangerously selfish Cain (David Cross).

Year One's plot can be broken down into two major themes: Zed and Oh's quest to secure the freedom (and hearts) of their love interests, Eema (Juno Temple) and Maya (June Diane Raphael), and Zed's search for his place in God's plan for humanity. From the beginning of the film, Zed believes himself to be one of God's "Chosen," in much the same vein as Moses or Abraham. However, the details of this calling are much less clear, moving the story along as Zed presents himself as chosen of God to anyone who might listen to him.

The bulk of the film's story takes place in the Biblical city of Sodom, where Zed and Oh go from guardsmen to the leaders of a revolution. The revolution itself is only the final event in a wider theme which permeates the whole of the movie, and is displayed by Zed's divinely mandated criticism of the old-fashioned practices he encounters. This gives

the movie a messianic bent, which is easily missed if the film is taken at face value. For instance, the scene where Zed stirs the slaves to revolt is reminiscent of a similar scene in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, where Jesus is in an almost identical position of power. Unlike Zed, however, Jesus is unable to call the people to take up arms. In *Year One*, blood is shed, and Zed fills the role of a more Judaic messiah than that of the Christian conception.

Also, as mentioned before, some of the film's jokes centering around Judaism and its mythology have some pretty unfortunate implications to them. For instance, the movie makes no effort to separate the religion of the Sodomites from that of Judaism, leading to such confusions as an idolatrous Holy of Holies and a sudden switch from talking about "God" to "gods," even when it's the "chosen" Zed who is doing the talking. Zed and Oh's negative reaction to Sodom's practice of virgin sacrifice is also notably less extreme than their reaction to the sacred Jewish rite of circumcision, and Zed's final rejection of the concept of singular chosen persons of God smacks of heresy to almost every denomination of Abrahamic faith.

Year One is by no means a serious film. Although there are some truly heartwarming scenes that contribute thoroughly to character development, it is exactly what it is marketed to be: a light piece of satire, made to get a few easy laughs out of its viewers. Unless the audience is particularly touchy on matters of religion, it should be enjoyable to everyone, even if its implications are left alone.