



STEPPING INTO THE ROLE: Mac McConnell portrays Simon Peter during the Fort Lauderdale Christmas Pageant. Photos courtesy of Mac McConnell



ACTOR AND AUTHOR: McConnell portrays St. Paul in chains. McConnell's first book of five, *Forever Changed, a Journey in Jericho*, is now available online.



IN CHARACTER: McConnell portrays Nicodemus reading the Torah, from the biblical drama *Nicodemus*. McConnell also is writing a book about Nicodemus.

BIBLE TALES COME ALIVE

Author's novels tell the stories of real people in a five-book series.

BY DAVID VOLZ
 SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

A Cooper City author explores what it was like to live during biblical times in his first novel, *Forever Changed, A Journey in Jericho*.

Writing is a new direction for biblical actor Mac McConnell. Locally, he's best known for serving as the narrator of the Fort Lauderdale Christmas Pageant, held annually at First Baptist Church of Fort Lauderdale.

"This book describes what would compel a good Jew to turn his back on his fellow Jews and go to work for the Romans as a tax collector," said McConnell, who is working on four more books to complete a series he calls *The Journeys*. "His mother died early. And when Zacchaeus decided to become a rabbi, his mentor, a temple priest, betrayed him. Zacchaeus caught the priest with a harlot and this crushed his view of religion."

So, disillusioned by the Jewish faith, Zacchaeus decided to go to work for his father, a tax collector. But his father was a domineering and oppressive man and Zacchaeus was picked on by his peers, McConnell said.

The book follows Zacchaeus from boyhood, when he was devout in his practice of the Jewish faith.

"I had been writing scripts and dramas and knew I always wanted to write a book," McConnell said. "It is important to spread the news of the faith without sounding like a Sunday school lesson. When I began reading the Bible like a novel, it came to life for me."

He's almost finished his second book, *Bozra, the Unprepared Shepherd*.

It is the story of a young shepherd boy who was asleep in the fields near Bethlehem when the angels made the announcement of the birth of the Messiah.

Throughout his life, Bozra came close to meeting Jesus, "Yeshua," but always failed to make contact for some reason. When he went to Jerusalem for Passover in hopes of meeting Jesus, Bozra learned that he'd already been crucified.

This book will be published in the spring. Future titles include *Hadad, the Unsuspecting Innkeeper*, *Joseph, the Unexpected Father* and *Nicodemus, a Crisis of Belief*.

"Like my plays, these books are first-person eyewitness accounts of people's lives in first-century Judea, and how people encountered Jesus, 'Yeshua,'" McConnell said. "Too often, we forget that legendary figures had real lives. Too often we pigeonhole them in very small boxes forgetting they are like us, complex with heartaches, joys, failures, successes or just having a bad day."

Since 1992, McConnell has traveled around the country offering six biblical dramas. They are *Forever Changed*; *Nicodemus*; *The Gospel According to Simon Peter*; *Last Words of St. Paul*; *Joseph, the Unexpected Father*; and *Three Faces at Christmas*.

"These plays are dramas, not recitations of Scripture," McConnell said. McConnell became a biblical dramatist in 1989 when he was an understudy as Simon Peter in the Fort Lauderdale Christmas Pageant. In 1994, he assumed the full role of Simon Peter, which involves narrating the pageant.

In 1995, McConnell sold his business of 21 years, the Artful Framers Gallery, and devoted his life full time to biblical drama.

Over the years, he's performed in churches of 37 Christian denominations, and at youth camps, dinner theaters and other venues. "My purpose has always been to illuminate the Bible and make the biblical personalities real and alive and to draw people closer to their faith," McConnell said.