Wood, Jeff (producer), and Donald Davenport (script). *Hell and Mr. Fudge: A Little Story about a Big Lie*. LLT Productions: Film, 2012; DVD, 2013. DVD, $19.95.

In the dim lights of his office, an exasperated scholar flings his notes into the air. A hellish controversy rages in the mind of this man consumed by long hours of research and plagued by years of false presuppositions. However, in this moment of desperation, as fiery falsehoods are extinguished, truth gains ascendancy in the life of Edward Fudge.

*Hell and Mr. Fudge* is the first feature film to be produced by LLT Productions. (Prior to this film, LLT Productions published a five-part documentary series known as *The Seventh Day* [2005]). To those unfamiliar with the story, the title may sound somewhat intriguing. In fact, it almost sounds like a comedy—perhaps a cross between Willy Wonka and Dante’s *Inferno*. While there are many humorous moments in the film, *Hell and Mr. Fudge* is actually a historical drama based upon the journey of a theologian known as Edward Fudge, who’s name “tastes as sweet as it sounds,” a quip used by Fudge upon introducing himself to his future wife, Sarah Faye.

The scripting for *Hell and Mr. Fudge* is superb. Donald Davenport (*Love Finds a Home* [2009], *Christmas in Canaan* [2009], and *Expecting a Miracle* [2009]) effortlessly draws the audience into Fudge’s life. The viewer feels as though Fudge is a dear friend and is inspired to fight alongside of him for the cause of truth. For those who may not readily hold to the views of Fudge expressed in the film, Davenport brings out challenging and thought-provoking questions throughout the dialogue.

Director Jeff Wood (*Christmas at Cadillac Jack’s* [2007], *The Conscientious Objector* [2004]) engages the viewer visually and gives life to Davenport’s script. Throughout the film, Wood masterfully illustrates the story of Fudge with cinematographic finesse. One of the primary ways that this is done is through the story-telling device Wood and his team used in the film. The movie shows some of Fudge’s friends filming a documentary of his life. This device provides an avenue for “behind-the-scenes” information to be delivered to the audience in a pleasing style.

The film also has a well-assembled cast, with Mackenzie Astin playing the lead roll of Fudge. Astin is especially remembered for his excellent work in Walt Disney’s film *Iron Will* (1994). Keri Lynn Pratt, who has also made her mark in film acting, plays Edward’s wife, Sarah Faye, while other prominent cast members include Wes Robertson (Joe Mark), John Wesley Shipp (Bennie Lee Fudge), Eileen Davidson (Mrs. Fudge), and Sean McGowan (Don Hallway).

Fudge, a Christian theologian, author, and attorney at law, was born to Bible-believing parents in southern America in 1944. As a child, Fudge began to learn NT Greek from his father, Bennie Lee Fudge, and by the age of five, he informed me, he had memorized the Greek alphabet. At the age of 10, Fudge wrestled with the ideas of hell for the first time. The young Fudge moved to the front of his church one September day in 1954 and blurted out, “I do not want to go to hell. I want God to forgive my sins. I want to be baptized” (*Hell: A Final Word: The Surprising Truths I Found in the Bible*, 14).
Apparently, the “thought of facing God in judgment unbaptized scared the bejeebers out of [Fudge]” (Final Word, 13).

A few years later, Fudge was again confronted with the topic of hell. A friend named “Davy Hollis” had been killed unexpectedly in a car accident at a young age. To his knowledge, Davy had never accepted Jesus and Fudge was faced with a chilling thought: Would Davy “go to hell and burn forever?” (Final Word, 45). At this point in his life, conscious torment in an everlasting hell was all that Fudge even knew about. However, this was soon to change.

When Fudge was sixteen years old, he sent away for Bible studies from numerous denominations. One of these Bible studies was from the Voice of Prophecy. Fudge recalls: “As far as I can remember, this was my first introduction to any interpretation of hell other than everlasting conscious torment” (Final Word, 55). However, instead of changing his views, he argued a great deal with the Seventh-day Adventist writers in favor of everlasting torment (Final Word, 147).

Fudge continued to believe in the traditional view of hell for several more years. He believed this way when he met his future wife, Sarah Faye Locke, at Florida College in 1964. He believed in an everlasting hell when his father passed away unexpectedly a few years later at the early age of fifty-seven. In fact, it wasn’t until he was almost thirty that things began to change.

In August 1976, Fudge wrote an article for Christianity Today entitled, “Putting Hell in Its Place,” that would forever change his life. While this article was somewhat controversial, Fudge continued to defend the traditional view of hell. However, when a former Seventh-day Adventist named Robert D. Brinsmead read Fudge’s article, he traveled to the Fudge home in Athens, Alabama, with a proposition. At this time, Brinsmead had rejected all of Adventism’s distinctive doctrines, except for their view on hell (Final Word, 62). Nevertheless, Brinsmead felt the need to research the validity of this doctrine and offered Fudge a job as an independent researcher.

Fudge accepted the job and spent the next year putting in about eighty hours per week—forty hours at his regular job as a typesetter, and forty hours researching the topic of hell (Final Word, 64). Throughout this grueling process, he felt God was guiding him, and he claims today that the project “changed the course of [his] life and . . . legacy” (Final Word, 63). During this time, Fudge made numerous discoveries that required him “to abandon a life-long belief in unending conscious torment.” Thankfully, the fruit of his labor turned into a book titled, The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment. This book has been readily available since its first publication in 1982 and stands today as one of the most influential works on the subject of hell. The revised and expanded third edition came out in 2011. Much of the story of the creating of The Fire That Consumes can be found on p. 364.

In 2009, Pat Arrabito and her creative team at LLT Productions began working on the film that tells Fudge’s story. In April 2012, the film received the Platinum Award at the Worldfest-Houston International Film Festival before it was even finalized (see Jennifer Jill Schwirzer, “Hell and Mr. Fudge,” Adventist Review, 20 September 2012, 20). On 5 June 2012, Hell and Mr. Fudge premiered in Athens, Alabama, and throughout the remainder of
the year special showings of the film took place for professors, clergy, and local church congregations. In 2013, the film began showing in select movie theaters in numerous cities throughout the United States and a DVD was released late in the year.

As stated above, the film itself is a masterpiece, combining professional production value with emotion-filled drama. *Hell and Mr. Fudge* will have its viewers laughing and crying, while providing thought-provoking dialogue. The film remains remarkably reliable to the facts of Fudge’s life. Fudge himself fully supports and endorses the film. In an email to me, he humorously commented,

> My wife and I are both delighted with the movie in every respect. Casting was superb, photography was exceptional, the script was magnificent, the setting was authentic (the movie was filmed entirely in Athens AL, my hometown where much of the action occurred) and Jeff Wood deserves an Oscar for directing it. And of course I am totally objective.

However, some aspects have been added or simplified to tell the story in a concise manner. For example, in the movie, the character of Joe Mark is a combination of two of Fudge’s best friends: Joe Curtis and Mark Whitt. Furthermore, certain characters such as Don Halloway and Davy Hollis are given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Also the documentary device is purely fictional. No documentary exists at this time.

Viewers should also be aware that *Hell and Mr. Fudge* is doctrinally light. It is a movie, not a documentary. The film was made to grab the viewer’s attention and stimulate a deeper quest for truth. The film accomplishes this with finesse, which makes the movie more engaging and marketable.

In summary, Fudge has positively influenced scholars, pastors, and Bible students alike. Popular Christian writer, Max Lucado writes, “My name is on the long list of those who’ve been touched by the pen of Edward Fudge. God has graced this friend with the knowledge of what matters—and what doesn’t” (*GracEmail: Daily Answers to Life’s Big Questions*, by Edward William Fudge [2003], back cover). Therefore, the reader is strongly encouraged not only to view the film, but also to become acquainted with the writings of Fudge, especially his seminal work, *The Fire That Consumes*. For more information, please visit <http://hellandmrfudge.org>.

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