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## Noah Movie: Worth Seeing, Despite the Errors

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**Even before its opening March 28 the film**

***Noah*** starring Russell Crowe as the man commissioned by God to build an ark, stirred controversy among Christians. A number of Christian



reviewers have praised the movie. But *Noah* has its significant detractors, many of whom have condemn its unbiblical mounting of the Genesis story. This reviewer was sent numerous emails warning of the film's secular exploitation of Sacred Scripture. Many without seeing the movie, condemn it because its director Darren Aronofsky is an atheist, and assume the movie is anti-Christian because it does not use the name "God," takes liberties with the biblical text, turns Noah into a radical environmentalist, does not seem to have considered that incest for the sake of continuing the human race presents a moral dilemma, and fallen angels get saved. Some believe that the overall message of the film is that the world would be better off if every member of the human race was annihilated. One reviewer even labeled the movie as "brilliantly sinister anti-Christian filmmaking."

The fact is *Noah* is a provocative, complex piece of filmmaking that is pro-God, pro-religion and ultimately pro-life. In other words, some Christian critics have it wrong.

The movie, while approaching the biblical Noah story seriously, does take liberties with the text. The film begins with a division between Noah's family—descended from Seth—who are faithful to God, and the evil descendents of Cain. Yes, Noah is very much the protector of God's earth, while Cain's clan, led by Tubal-cain, rape the earth for whatever they want. Contrary to vegan Noah, who admonishes his son for picking a flower just because it was pretty, the Tubal-cainers are miners and meat-eaters, whose environmentally unfriendly policies have created a barren, lifeless land in which

tribes turn to violence over food. God seeks to annihilate the world because the human race has treated it so badly.

This is one of the flaws of the movie. God will wipe out mankind almost exclusively for sins committed against the earth and animals, while man's immoral behavior in other areas is of little to no consequence, as if man's inhumanity to man didn't matter to God at least as much as man's ill-treatment of His planet. The movie can be faulted as a lopped-sided morality tale in which the environmentalist theme is dominant.

Consistent with this theme God is only referred to as "the Creator." While such a term for God is not theologically in error it is nonetheless doctrinally and spiritually narrow and a one-dimensional view of God's relation to his people.



Christians may find the conservationist theme more than annoying, yet the film is faithful to the real issue raised by the biblical episode. Gen. 6 :5 states God sought to destroy humanity because every desire of his heart was evil and the world filled with corruption. The heart of this movie is not sustainability, but has to do with the value of the human race and whether God wills, after all, that the human race continue in Noah's family saved from the flood. Scripture immediately provides the answer, yes. The *Noah* movie also says yes—but as a film it takes a much more tortured route to the affirmation and this provides the story with its primary source of dramatic tension and interest.

Unlike the biblical text, at least two of Noah' sons enter the ark without wives. The elder son Shem has a love interest in an orphan girl Ila, played by Emma Watson, adopted by Noah and his wife, but she is sterile due to a wound received in childhood. Thus the continuance of the human race proves something of a problem. Noah's middle son Ham is desperate to find a wife by which he may found a family. This prompts Noah to find him one among the violent neighboring Tubal-cain tribe. Noah arrives at their camp where women are brutally forced into slavery in

exchange for food and helpless animals are torn to pieces. He suddenly sees in the face of one of the vicious tribesmen the face of the Evil One in the form of the ancient serpent of the Garden.

Noah is now driven by what he believes to be the will of God—the complete destruction of humanity through the flood. Thus the ark is not built to save mankind through the survival of Noah's family, but strictly to ensure the preservation of animal species. The human race will die out with the death of Noah's youngest son Japheth as Noah has concluded that not even his sons are good and worthy human beings. All men are evil-doers and under the wrath of God.

Noah is so committed to ensuring God's death sentence on the human race that, in a very disturbing scene, he even allows a woman Ham has rescued, and intends for his wife, to be trampled to death when he possibly could have saved her. However, Ila has been miraculously cured of her sterility by

Methuselah. She becomes Seth's wife and, to Noah's horror, conceives a child contrary to what Noah believes is the will of God. If the baby turns out to be a boy—Noah will allow him to live—but if the child is a girl he vows, to everyone else's horror, that upon the infant's birth he will kill the baby. Noah is so intent on this act of infanticide he even sabotages Seth and Ila's attempt to escape the ark.

You might ask, what does any of this have to do with the biblical Noah? Despite the dominance of the environmentalist message, Aronofsky's film is ultimately focused on biblical ideas and important theological questions. Rather than denying Genesis and its teaching that the human race should go on, the film is largely faithful to it. The movie begins with the Fall of man, affirming Original Sin through the menacing depiction of the serpent in Eden and the disobedience of Adam and Eve which leads directly to Cain's murder of Abel. Contrary to God's plan, man's fall from grace is the source of injustice and the dissolution of human unity.

When Noah tells his sons the creation story it is essentially consistent with Genesis chapters One and Two. The film is very clear: Creation is not an accident, God is its author—He wills it to exist and the creation of earth, man, and the animals is good and beautiful. Man and Woman are in Paradise prior to the Fall. Man's rebellion against God in the eating of the fruit of the tree from which they were forbidden to eat is again emphasized. Furthermore, there are spiritual consequences to mankind's disobedience to God which causes God to send the flood to cleanse the earth.

The movie may be faulted for its ambiguity on the teaching of Genesis that man is created in the image of God and has dominion over creation. This doctrine is not articulated by Noah, the hero of the film. It is announced by its villain Tubal-cain, who has managed to stowaway just before the ark is swamped by the deluge. He proves his disrespect for creation when, for the sake of keeping up his own strength, he bites the head off a lizard—an endangered species now rendered extinct by human selfishness. This depraved character then repeats the words of Genesis that man is created in the image of God, offers the biblical teaching that "animals serve us" and God gave man the prerogative to "subdue the earth." Does *Noah* intend to challenge the biblical view that human beings are unique and given the right to make use of the earth or is Tubal-cain's view of dominion over the earth meant to be taken by the film-goer as a perversion of the Genesis teaching? The authentic concept of dominion over creation does not mean, as Tubal-cain proclaims toward the start of *Noah*, "I take what I want"—even if it means ruining the earth, but the film deliberately lacks clarity on these essential anthropological issues.

### **Core Message Revealed at the End (Spoiler Alert)**

The challenge for the viewer of *Noah* is whether the ark-builder has properly interpreted the will of God in the annihilation of the human race or, driven by his own pessimism, gone off the deep end. After all, is infanticide really sanctioned by God?

The answer is no. Indeed, in spite of its own doctrinal biases, *Noah* is a movie with a pro-life message. First, Ila, regardless of her sterility, is tenderly affirmed by Noah as a person in her own right. He tells her that at first he thought she would be a burden, but instead her life is a gift. She births not just one daughter, but twin daughters and Noah cannot kill them after all. Instead of lowering the knife, he lowers his head to kiss them. When asked why he spared them Noah says, "all I felt was love." Noah believes, however that he has failed to do the will of God in not bringing an end to the human race. And this is where the pro-life message is found. Because Noah in his freedom made a choice to honor life he actually wound up doing the will of God as Ila points out to Noah that through him God "gave us another chance." Noah's mercy reflected God.

Despite the disturbing features of the biblical Noah story, it is ultimately about cleansing, renewal and that God-willed "second chance." The *Noah* film is ultimately focused on the mercy of God and the re-

creation of life with images of male and female animal pairs nurturing their offspring and young Seth and Ila caring for theirs.

*Noah* affirms the importance, indeed the absolute necessity of marriage and procreation and the continuance of the human race. This statement could have been stronger, considering the exaggerated focus on the “innocence of animals” and man’s disrespect for creation, but whether or not Aronofsky intended this ultimately pro-life message, it is inescapable. The *Noah* film is not completely satisfying in terms of doctrinal/biblical faithfulness, but the errors and ambiguities are balanced in such a way that Christians should go see and can support this movie.