

FIVE DAYS WITH THE REAL

NOAH

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HOW CHRIST FOLLOWERS ARE RESPONDING TO THE NOAH MOVIE

(Adapted from an article by Trevin Wax)

Darren Aronofsky's blockbuster *Noah* has made waves among Christ followers, but let's be honest: we're not all in the same boat here. In fact, has there been *any* film that has drawn so much praise *and* criticism from Christians.

Here's the rundown of options:

1. CHEERS

Of course *Noah* does not get the Bible right, but there is a cultural opportunity this movie affords. Popular film reviewer, Phil Boatwright, pointed out the extrabiblical elements, but **recommended it** as a discussion starter:

"Noah is an epic movie experience that engages not only the cerebral but the emotional. On the way to the car, people discuss it... That's when you know you've experienced true art. It's not just a timefiller before going to some other timefiller. It's a film that demands debate."

Christianity Today featured an **extensive, seven page review** of the film. It begins with an encouragement for Christ followers to engage this film and then offers five reasons why:

1. *Noah* is a good movie made by good filmmakers who pursue important questions and think of movies as art.
2. *Noah* is a solid adaptation.
3. *Noah* is visually and imaginatively compelling.
4. *Noah* re-enchants the ancient world in powerful ways that counteract some of the worst excesses of modernity.
5. You should actually see it for yourself.

Greg Thornbury, president of The King's College in New York City, points out two major theological objections but believes the film is path breaking and will help re-enchant a new generation with the biblical narrative: Noah is a way of putting ourselves before the Bible's "dangerous question". *The grim, gritty, and supernatural antediluvian biblical world takes us back into ancient history, of origins. Who are we? What has gone wrong with the world? Where is justice? Is God there? What does he have to say? That ancient world sets us back on our heels and forces us to take stock in this strange new world inside the Bible.*

Jerry Johnson, president of the National Religious Broadcasters, offered **5 positives** and **5 negatives**, and then encouraged Christians to **engage rather than boycott**:

The main events from the Noah story are depicted in a powerful way on the big screen by name brand actors and quality production. Christians should be ready to engage moviegoers in conversation about biblical and cultural themes that are portrayed in this movie.

2. JEERS

Those who are critical of the movie fall into one of three camps. First, you have the Christians who think the movie fails at the level of storytelling. **Brian Godawa** (a Christian who's no stranger to Hollywood productions) thinks the movie fails at fundamental levels: *"On the nose" dialogue. Flat characters that you just don't care about. A sick twisted hero that you just don't care about. Look, I know your hero has to have a character flaw, but this is so extreme that you can't stand Noah, and you just want to leave the theater.*

The second category of critics are those who believe it fails because of its unfaithfulness to the biblical story. **Ken Ham** didn't mince words: *Friends, last night I watched the movie Noah. It is much, much worse than I thought it would be—much worse. The director of the movie has been quoted in the media as saying that Noah is "the least biblical biblical film ever made," and I agree wholeheartedly with him.*

Sophia Lee of World sees the film as missing the mark, primarily for being an epic that shows God's judgment without His mercy: *Expressed only through dreams and nature, Noah's God is mythical, impersonal, and devastatingly involved. Any references to God are seen through Noah's perspective. That's a good sum up for the film itself—a wholly human approach to figure out deep yet simple theology with great intellect, emotion, and creativity, yet somehow missing the crux of it. That's the true tragedy of Noah.*

Third, you have those who argue that Christians were duped into being part of the promotional machine of a movie that is not based on the Bible at all, but on Gnosticism. In this vein, the most thought provoking response is **Dr Brian Mattson's** who says it is not Scripture, but the Kabbalah, a form of Jewish Gnosticism, that undergirded the movie seen in such things as a translucent Adam and Eve, and snake skins. Yes the movie portrays the Creator, but in Gnosticism our Creator is no less than an ill tempered, matter preoccupied god who doesn't recognize his superiors. Brian's point: *Should Christian leaders have endorsed this movie, either outright or being used as part of a Hollywood promotional machine? Given the fact that Aronofsky drew from these types of sources, and given the themes and imagery of his final product, I say the answer is no way.*

3. MIXED

While some are jumping out of their theater seats to applaud *Noah* and others are taking to social media to express their disdain for this film, a smaller number are greeting this movie with mixed feelings. They are neither ecstatic in support nor categorical in their rejection. For example, **Joe Carter** sees his take as falling somewhere in between the cheers and jeers:

Noah is an art movie masquerading as a big budget Hollywood blockbuster, an incongruous hybrid that is unlikely to satisfy most movie goers. Yet despite all its flaws, Noah is a worthy addition to the deluge apocalypse genre. It's not a great film—it's barely a good one—and it certainly isn't the biblical masterpiece many of us were hoping for.

Aaron Earls views the film from the perspective of the director, Aronofsky, who is a secular Jew. He concludes **his review** with an insightful analysis of a backwards facing Noah, and why Christians are bound to see the film's theological component as lacking:

Aronofsky can give us a Noah who longs for creation, but he cannot show us a Noah who looks forward to the cross. In his account there is no covenant from the Creator to promise a future redemption. This time, the serpent's head goes uncrushed. The ark in this film can only remind us of what was lost and try to salvage as much as possible, it cannot point beyond itself to the place we can run into and find ultimate salvation and the eventual redemption of all of creation – humanity included.

The film raises tremendous and worthy questions about sin and grace, justice and mercy. Christ followers should be thankful any time we have a chance to discuss those in culture. We can enjoy it as a film and an opportunity for significant discussions with fellow Christ followers, and with not yet believing friends and family.

But it cannot give us the right answers because this Noah is faced the wrong way. With only creation in view, Noah has its back to the cross, leaving viewers adrift in an ocean of opinions and wishes without any solid ground to provide true hope for what comes next.

Noah found salvation in the ark, but without turning our gaze to the cross, there is no room for us.

DAY 1 WITH THE REAL NOAH

Read Genesis 6:14

The 'sons of God' (v2,4) may refer to either fallen angels or to tyrant kings, which means there are two possible meanings for our lives in these verses.

This is one of the most mysterious portions of the whole Bible. We cannot be totally sure what it means, but there are two main views:

View one: The 'sons of God' refer to fallen angels (Job 1:6 and 2:1 refer to angels as 'sons of God' here) who – either by manifesting as men (which is common in the Bible) or by possessing men – who then married and slept with the world's most beautiful women.

(Verses like 1 Peter 3:19-20, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 may, but we can't be sure, refer to this event.)

The point is that the exploding population (v1) was also spiralling downwards into greater darkness – losing all discernment, even opening themselves up massively to the demonic world. If this view is correct, the message God has for us is that one of the things that the fall introduced to the world is that society, apart from God's restraining grace, open themselves up increasingly to the occult. One needs to just look at the explosion of the so called New Spiritual Consciousness in the west, and the animists in the rest of the world, to see how societies have done just that.

View two: The 'sons of God' refer to ambitious tyrants who rose up in power. They took whatever women they wanted (v2). They were 'the heroes of old, men of renown' (v4).

This does not mean they were good men, rather they were feared and respected as they ascended as the tyrants of the ancient world. If this view is correct, the point is the fall of humanity introduced the rise of the tyrant, the person who sought to dominate the world through force and terror. One only needs to think of the last century to see how these kinds of men reap destruction. The mention of Nephilim (v4) (which means 'fallen ones') seems to refer to criminals – which no doubt prevailed in this time too.

Read Genesis 6:3, 6:5-7, 6:11-13, 6:17

GOD IS DEEPLY AFFECTED BY OUR SIN, AND PROMISES TO JUDGE IT.

Humanity had become totally corrupt (v11). At a societal level, there was sexual perversion (v2), tyranny and / or openness to the demonic (v2), crime (v4), violence (v11).

At a personal level, every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time (v5). And God saw it all – both the actions in society, and the thoughts and motivations in every individual. Still today, all of humanity is corrupt – perhaps not to the same degree described here. And still today, God notices it.

God was deeply affected by their sin (v6), and still today God is deeply wounded by the way his imagebearers deface his image, by the way the very creatures he made have become so rejecting of their very own Creator.

God announced a judgment (v7, 13). A flood was coming (v17). And still today God judges sin. Still today God stores up his righteous anger to be revealed on the day of Judgement (see Romans 2:4). We have advance warning. Judgment Day is coming to this world.

All of creation is implicated in God's judgment of humanity's sin. Verse 17 – 'every creature perishing' – makes it clear that when mankind fell, the world fell with us. When we are judged, our environment is judged also.

Notice finally that God delayed judgment. When God said that they will only live 120 years (v3) he did not mean that each person will live for 120 years, but rather that the human race had 120 years left until the judgment of the flood would come.

This reminds us that God is slow to become angry – but he is also patient, hoping that we repent (see 2 Peter 3:9). Still today, God delays judgment today in the hope that people will turn back to him.

DAY 2 WITH THE REAL NOAH

Read Genesis 6:8-7:5

LET GRACE TRANSFORM YOU.

- Noah found grace (6:8). Where sin increases, God's grace increases all the more (Romans 5:20). This is what we see here. Wickedness in the world was on the increase, yet God graciously revealed himself to Noah. Noah did not earn the grace, but rather found it. It came to him undeserved. Still today, in the midst of wickedness and God's judgment, God reveals himself to us by grace. We don't earn it. We find it.
- Noah believed God. We're told that Noah was a righteous man (6:9), but the New Testament clarifies that this was not self-generated righteousness, but the gift of righteousness and acceptance that God gave him when he believed in the grace of God. Hebrews 1:7 says, 'By his faith (Noah) ... became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.' Still today, God accepts us the moment we believe in the gospel, and the offer of God's grace. We don't self-generate our righteousness, but rather receive it by faith.
- Noah loved God. Noah walked with God, blameless (6:9). This does not mean Noah was sinless, but that, in response to God's gracious revelation, he kept company with God, living in his presence, keeping in step with God. Still today, we are called to love God, to walk with him, to live life in a way that pleases him. Like Noah, we're called to live differently, breaking from the status quo. While sin pulls down society at large, God's grace lifts us up. It defies the gravity of sin.
- Noah obeyed God (6:22 and 7:5). Everything God told Noah to do, he did! Grace brings us to the place of obedience, where we do what God wants us to do.
- The takeaway truth for us: like Noah, we believe, love and obey God not as a way of earning his grace, but in response to his grace. We find grace – and this naturally (with our cooperation of course) leads to a life of trusting, loving and obeying God!

GOD HAS GRACIOUSLY PROVIDED A SAVIOUR TO HELP US ESCAPE THE COMING JUDGMENT. NOAH AND HIS ARK FORESHADOW THE COMING OF THE SAVIOUR, JESUS.

- God is Judge, but he is also Saviour. The world of Noah was under judgment. Judgment Day loomed near. Yet God graciously provided a way out of his own judgment. Noah and the ark were his provision of salvation from judgment. Amazingly, God seeks to rescue us from his own judgment – which is far worse than Noah's judgment. Jesus 'rescues us from God's coming wrath' (1 Thessalonians 1:10).
- Jesus is the sinless Saviour. Noah was godly and obedient, but not perfectly so. Yet his level of righteousness was sufficient to save many people. However, Jesus'

mission is far greater – he seeks to save billions from eternal judgment. This is one reason that Jesus is perfectly godly and righteous, without sin. Only a sinless Saviour could save sinners.

- All we have to do is enter in. All a person or animal needed to do to be saved was enter into that boat. So simple. Still today, the way of salvation is to enter the ark of Jesus by simple faith. The ark was the means of salvation. The cross – also made of wood – is our means of salvation today.
- We'd be wise to encourage others to enter in too. Apparently Noah tried to persuade many to enter in, and seven family members, believing his warning, did so (see 2 Peter 2:5). Many must have mocked him, refusing to believe that they were under God's judgment when life seemed to be going so well (see Matthew 24:37-39). But some believed him. Still today, many may not believe that all is not as well as it seems.
- Many may not believe that we are under God's judgment in desperate need of a Saviour.
- Many may fail to see Jesus for what he is: a Saviour. But some will! And this should spur us on to do all we can to encourage people to enter in!
- Salvation is not just about restoring humanity but all creation. When man sinned, all creation fell under God's judgment too (6:17). Here we see the salvation of animals too. This foreshadows the promise that the salvation Jesus accomplished is not just about individuals being spared from judgment, but the whole of creation being renewed (see Acts 3:19). This is why the Bible speaks of the promise of a new heavens and a new earth. It is for this reason that the church must see itself not just as saved ones escaping God's judgment, but, like Noah, agents of a new creation, doing all we can to protect and restore God's creation.

DAY 3 WITH THE REAL NOAH

Read Genesis 7:68-19

THE END IS NEAR SO ENTER INTO CHRIST BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.

Noah's flood – an ancient judgment – powerfully portrays the future judgment, the end of the world. Jesus made this point in Matthew 24:37. Peter highlights that one main difference is that instead of a flood of water, there will be fire (2 Peter 2:5; 3:6). So let's consider the parallels between the ancient and future judgments:

1. God's judgment is coming. In the same way the flood suddenly came, bringing destruction of the ungodly (7:1124) so one day God's judgment will suddenly come upon the world. The wages of sin is death – and all those who live in their sin will die.
2. Enter into God's provision of salvation. Noah and his family, and the animals, entered the ark. This was all they needed to do. It is true that God is full of wrath against sin, but he is full of love for the sinner. This is why he, through Noah, provided an ark for all those who would listen to his warning about judgment. Jesus is that ark. Jesus – and his substituting death on the cross – is the provision of God's salvation. He loves us so much that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in (or 'enters in') him will not perish, but will have everlasting life (see John 3:16). On the cross, the Son of God offered his life so that we could keep ours. That's love.
3. Once you're in, be assured that you're safe no matter what. Once Noah was in, the Lord shut him in (see 7:16). It was Noah's responsibility to enter, but it was God's responsibility to preserve him once he entered. God provided the security – despite the surrounding storm and flood, he was safe. Similarly, it is our responsibility to believe in Christ, but it is God's responsibility to preserve us in this life and forever. Once Jesus takes hold of us, he never lets go (see John 10:28). We will pass right through Judgment Day unharmed – and be able to enter God's new world (see John 5:24).
4. Judgment Day is the purging, but not the total destruction, of the planet. The flood purged the world of sin, but did not totally destroy it. God 'rebooted' the ancient world by releasing humans and wildlife back onto the 'new' world. Similarly, Judgment Day will purge the world of evil and corruption, but will ultimately restore it by recreating it into the new heavens and the new earth.

DID THE FLOOD REALLY HAPPEN?

- The flood and Noah's ark really happened. For one, the great detail given in Noah's account of the timing of the flood, and the measurements of the ark shows that the story presents itself as factual, not figurative. So we cannot merely treat it figuratively. It presents itself as a fact of history, although there may be aspects of symbolism included in the weave of the story.

- Some people believe that the whole world flooded literally as this account says. And they verify this by pointing to the findings of many scientists who say that there is evidence on almost every continent of a historical flood of unimaginably disastrous proportions. Most fascinating is that anthropologists have discovered that on every continent there are ancient tribes that – through millennia of oral tradition – hold to a similar story of the flood that once swallowed up everything.
- However, many hold to another view: they believe that the mention of all land surface being covered with water, and all life being destroyed are from the perspective of Noah. In other words, it was not the whole world but his surrounding region, along with its animal and human life that was flooded. This is much like what we find in Colossians 1:23 where Paul says the gospel had been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. This was from Paul's perspective, whose known world – and there were many unknown civilizations – was reached with the gospel. We must remember that the authors of the Bible, in their time, were limited by their knowledge of the world at the time. This does not mean that the Bible is inerrant, just that the people God was revealing himself to did not have perfect factual knowledge of the world. For example, we know now that already at 20000 BC there were civilizations in Africa, America and Australia. The flood mentioned here, according to this second view, did not wipe them out – but it did wipe out the Mesopotamian civilization, of which Noah was part. This also implies that the animals he collected and preserved on the boat were from his surrounding region, not from every continent – which would have been impossible anyway. Interestingly, this second view may find geological support from a recent discovery: the massive, now Black Sea region was once a fertile valley inhabited by multitudes – but in 5600 BC (which may likely be the timing of Noah's life if we assume that there are gaps in the genealogical records of Genesis 5 and 10), the whole region was suddenly and catastrophically flooded by rapidly rising oceans, caused by worldwide glacial melt at the time. Also interesting is that mountains of Ararat (8:4), where the boat eventually grounded itself, is near to the Black Sea. [Click here](#) for more.
- Finally, a common attack on the credibility of the story of the flood is that the writer of Genesis adapted it from a Mesopotamian account of the flood at the time. Go to [this link](#) which rebuts this line of thought.

DAY 4 WITH THE REAL NOAH

Read Genesis 8:20-22

GOD MAKES A COVENANT OF PROMISE WITH HIS PEOPLE, BASED ON BLOODSACRIFICE.

- Blood sacrifices throughout the Bible are always part of God's making a covenant with his people. They symbolize 'atonement', which refers to God transferring the punishment our sins deserve onto an innocent substitute. In the New Covenant it is Jesus, on the cross, who becomes our substitute, and the basis upon which God makes a covenant with us – a covenant of promise.
- God saved Noah and his family into a life of promise – a promise that no flood of that magnitude will ever happen again (v21), and that the seasons that make life predictable will continue as before (v22). Similarly, we are saved into a life of promises. God will protect us, and lead us, and use us for the advance of his kingdom – he promises!

Read Genesis 9:17

GOD COMMISSIONS THOSE HE SAVES.

- God saved Noah and his family, and then commissioned them too (v1,7). God commissioned them – and whenever God commissions us it is taken as a blessing in itself (v1, see also 1:28) – to repopulate the world (or at least the part of the world he is in, for those who take the flood to have been regional as opposed to global in scope). God still saves people, then commissions them. We are saved for a purpose (Ephesians 2:10). And God still blesses people today by allowing them to have and nurture children. But over and above the call to raise families, a specific commission is given to the church to make disciples of all nations, in the process populating the kingdom of heaven.
- But along with the commission come a promise of protection (v2 speaks of God causing animals to have a healthy fear of humanity), and a promise of provision (v3 speaks of the provision of food). There are also some parameters (v56 forbids the murder of image bearing humanity and calls for justice if this boundary is violated). Similarly, when God commissions us, the commission comes with a promise of protection, of provision, and with some guiding parameters (see Matthew 28:19-20 for an example of this). This should greatly motivate us to give ourselves to whatever God calls us to.

GOD IS A COVENANT MAKING GOD.

- The Bible speaks of the covenants God makes: through Noah, to the whole world; through Abraham, to his physical and spiritual descendants; through Moses, to the ancient nation of Israel; through David, to his family line (of which Jesus is included); and consummately through Christ, to all those who put their faith in him.
- Here we learn a few things about how God makes a covenant: it is God's sovereign initiative and idea (v8); it has specific people that will benefit in mind (v9-11) ; it has a mediator (in this case Noah); and it includes a covenant sign (in this case the rainbow – v13).
- The New Covenant, similarly, is based on God's sovereign idea and undeserved initiative towards us; has specific people in mind (all those whom God calls, those who trust in Christ – see Acts 2:39 for an example of this); has Jesus as the mediator; and includes the covenant signs of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

DAY 5 WITH THE REAL NOAH

Read Genesis 9:18v21

BE CAREFUL WHEN YOU THINK YOU'RE STANDING, BECAUSE YOU MIGHT FALL.

- Noah was the world's greatest hero at the time. God had used him as a saviour of people and animal life. And God had mediated a covenant through him. And he was known to be a godly man. But then something tragic happened: he fell morally, getting drunk out of his wits. (Incidentally, this is the first mention of alcohol in the Bible.)
- The Bible is very honest about the moral failures of its heroes – whether it is Abraham's dishonesty, Jacob's self-preoccupation, Moses' unbelief, David's adultery, or Peter's betrayal. There is only one truly unfallen hero – Jesus. The writer of Genesis lets us know with the inclusion of this story that Noah is not the Satan defeating Saviour promised in Genesis 3:15. Only one man in history qualified to bring about such a liberation and victory for us all.
- Apart from God's grace and support we're all as vulnerable as Noah to doing some really stupid things. We should not look down on Noah, but rather heed the warning of 1 Corinthians 10:12, 'Be careful when you think you're standing firm, because then you may fall.' Noah had just experienced the greatest high point of his life (being used by God to save people and animals), and little did he know how vulnerable success could make him to failure. Let's learn from him, and cling to Christ for support to help us stand in the face of the temptations that will inevitably war against our soul (1 Peter 2:11) – especially those temptations that come in the wake of a season of success in our lives!

Read Genesis 9:22-23

TREAT FALLEN PEOPLE WITH HONOUR AND GENTLENESS.

- Ham had contempt for his drunk, naked dad. He assumed that just because his father had acted dishonourably it was acceptable to dishonour him (v22). But Shem and
- Japheth knew better. They did not try cover up his sinfulness, but they did try to treat him with honour (v23).
- We'd be wise to do the same: when people act dishonourably, it gives us no right to dishonour them, and treat them with contempt. Rather we should try to treat them with mercy, and do all we can to uphold their dignity. This is especially true of parents who may not appear worthy of our honour. Like Shem and Japheth, we need to find a way of honouring even dishonourable parents.
- We'd also be wise to follow their example in dealing gently with those who fall. Instead of trying to expose the details of a fallen person's life, we should cover their

nakedness. This does not mean we cover up their sin. But it does mean we don't exploit their weakness and failure. It means we don't feast on the details of their sin and shame, deriving some kind of pleasure from their failure, much like a vulture feasts on a fallen animal. Rather, we do all we can to gently restore those who have fallen (see Galatians 6:1).
