

NOAH movie: Courage, Faith, Hope

By Rusty Wright

How would you feel if you thought you heard God telling you he was going to destroy every living thing on earth with a great flood?

Except he wanted you to build a boat to survive the tumult with a few relatives and a slew of creatures.

Would you jump at the challenge? Run and hide? Ask—as Bill Cosby did in his classic comedy routine portraying Noah—'Right! Who is this really?'

Perhaps you'll sense how the biblical Noah felt. Paramount Pictures and director/co-writer Darren Aronofsky brought Noah to the big screen in North America and worldwide in 2014. The cast includes Russell Crowe in the title role, Jennifer Connelly, Emma Watson, and Anthony Hopkins.

With breathtaking cinematography, this film imagines some intense struggles for Noah and his family. We see sorrow for lost masses, interpersonal conflicts, and practical realities of living on a creature-packed craft.

Taking Liberties

Paramount says Noah's story 'inspired' the film, but that 'artistic license has been taken.' Too much license, feel some. I'm reminded of TV's iconic psychiatrist Frasier Crane, concerned that an employee was 'taking far too much liberty with the liberty-taking!' Readers of the biblical Noah story won't find there, for instance, the film's multi-armed fallen angels, its pronounced environmentalist message, or hordes of people fighting to board the ark.

The biblical account is short—mostly Genesis ch. 6–9—with little detail about ark life. So, yes, the filmmakers took liberties...many. Aronofsky recently told *The Atlantic* he views the story 'as poetry and myth and legend'

that helps us understand the world and ourselves.

But the essential framework of the biblical flood story—human evil, divine judgment, hope, and salvation—remains in Noah. Consider these facets of that story and their modern implications.

Human Evil, Divine Judgment

Genesis says humanity was a mess: 'The Lord observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. ... It broke his heart'.¹

Human corruption prompted him to 'destroy every living thing'. But 'Noah was a righteous man...[who] walked in close fellowship with God'.² God told him to build a large boat, specifying precise dimensions and design.

Filmmakers took pains to follow biblical specs for their ark. The production designer had many ideas for the ark's appearance, but Aronofsky, who is Jewish, insisted: 'No, the measurements are right there'.

Salvation, Hope, Promise

Noah built his ark and took aboard his wife, their three sons with their wives, plus pairs of animals, birds, and crawling creatures. Elaborate computer-generated imagery portrays the animals for film.

Rain poured, underground water erupted, and floodwaters covered the earth. Every human, bird and land animal not in the ark perished. The waters receded, the earth dried, and the ark inhabitants disembarked. God promised never again to destroy the earth by flood, offering the rainbow as a pledge reminder.



Faith, Future

If you attend the film, I suggest reading the biblical account (Genesis ch. 6–9) first, then again after the screening. Noah's story has much for a 21st-century audience, including two nuggets about faith and the future.

The New Testament lauds Noah for his faith. He was not perfect. 'Wickedness is...in all of us', he tells his wife in the film. His own drunkenness—depicted in the film—led to embarrassment and family conflict. But his faith in God mattered. I came to faith as a skeptical university student. It has made all the difference in my life.

Concerning the future, Jesus indicated his second coming would be 'like it was in Noah's day' with people carrying on their routines and unaware of impending peril. 'You also must be ready all the time', he continued, 'for the Son of Man will come when least expected'.³

I want to be ready.

Notes

¹ Genesis 6:5–6

² Genesis 6:9

³ Matthew 24:37, 42

Rusty Wright is an author and lecturer who has spoken on six continents. He holds Bachelor of Science (psychology) and Master of Theology degrees from Duke and Oxford universities, respectively. www.RustyWright.com