

Movieguide Asks: What's Wrong With 'Noah'?

Darren Aronofsky's *Noah* has all the trademarks of a big-budget Hollywood production, including a tightly written and executed script and superb performances.

Turn to social media, and you'll see most of the divisions of opinion about the film gravitate around two irreconcilable poles: 1) Who cares if Aronofsky took some liberties with the biblical narrative if it makes a great movie, and 2) How dare Aronofsky take liberties with the biblical narrative?

The dichotomy misses the point.

The real question we should be asking ourselves is: Do the changes highlight or deviate from the truth of the narrative upon which it is based?

In fact, is Aronofsky's *Noah* based on the Bible at all? Is it pure invention? Or does it pull from other source materials?

Since the beginning of time, great writers have been in the business of borrowing materials from their predecessors. Oftentimes variations were introduced in an effort to clarify and point the reader toward the truth embodied in the story.

What happens, though, if the changes introduced not only mask the truth but subtly transform it so that the new tale becomes dangerously misleading?

I'm not the first to worry about such things. Plato banished storytellers from his ideal city-state not because stories led to corruption but because story is the most powerful vehicle for shaping humankind, our minds and our souls. Tell a tale that promotes the wrong kinds of values, and it has influence. (Plato cared most of all about protecting the minds of the

young, as they are the most malleable and open to corruption.)

Where does all this come into play in Aronofsky's *Noah*?

I knew when I first heard about the movie that liberties would be taken in order to build a tight three-act structure. I was ready for them. Like Aristotle, I understand that great storytelling must follow certain rules in order to be effective. The same remains true of great Hollywood blockbusters.

However, changes can be truthful or misleading. In the case of *Noah*, most changes fall dangerously into the second category. They steer us away from truth and, in fact, point us in the opposite direction.

There's a lot of talk on the Internet about the invention of "the Watchers." The name itself is a clue that they were not invented. The writers of the movie seem to have turned to the book of Enoch to introduce details of the world before the flood. (Enoch himself is named early on in the movie and referenced by Noah's grandfather as the story unfolds.)

On hunting for great story devices in the apocrypha, I applaud the writers. Why not introduce motifs and ideas from old stories about Noah?

The problem is the transformation of these motifs in the script. Aronofsky's *Noah* implements details from the book of Enoch without integrating the overall truth of the story.

In the book of Enoch, there is nothing friendly about the fallen Watchers. They are inherently evil. They are cursed and cut off from God.

Understand that the term *Watchers* refers to both the good and fallen angels. Thus, Gabriel is a Watcher, and Uriel too. The Watchers who have fallen to earth for being sympathetic to Adam and Eve refer to those angels who followed Lucifer in his

rise up against God. (These are the fallen angels who ultimately mate with female women and produce the nephilim—the race of giants.)

After their fall to earth, the outcast angels are damned. Most importantly, they do not repent. It is in this vein that they continue to “play gods” in the human arena and defy God all the more by teaching technological advances and all kinds of learning to humankind. (This, too, is referenced overtly in the movie, as it relates to the growth of cities.)

The question arises, then: Why borrow the Watchers and make them Noah’s friendly helpers, who serve him and (by implication) God by assisting in the building of the ark?

The very suggestion that the fallen angels are benevolent creatures is misleading. Especially if we realize that one of them referenced in the movie is Lucifer himself: Azel/Azazel the “courageous one” and “arrogant one” who rose up against God.

In early commentary traditions, probably based on the book of Enoch itself, Lucifer’s uprising took place on the second day of creation, the day of division.

One of Aronofsky’s Watchers even references the second day explicitly: “I was there on the second day of creation.” Why? This fact is not necessary to the story line. It’s not even remotely integrated into the stakes of the narrative. Such a reference clearly plays into a backdrop of deceptive and misleading theology. (You can read more about why the Hebrew Bible doesn’t include the statement “It is good” about the second day of creation here.)

Perhaps the flawed representation of the fallen angels makes its way into *Noah* by accident. I’m willing to believe that. The fact remains that it is not good and that media-wise viewers will do well to educate themselves as to why nursing sympathy for those cast out of the heavens is dangerous.

Even more dangerous is the statement, right before Noah boards the ark, by one of these demons as he watches his companion in crime transformed into fire and rising upward, as if into the sky: "The Creator has called him home."

Nowhere, not even in the book of Enoch, is there a suggestion that the fallen angels will be redeemed. Lucifer will not be called home (nor will he be victorious, as many occult groups would like to believe). In the book of Enoch, the fallen angels are transferred to a prison of fire, where they suffer until the end of days. God shows no mercy for them. Therefore, to feel sympathy for them is to privilege our own emotions over God's will. (Those of you who have read Dante's *Inferno* will relate to this.)

I am concerned about other New Age elements and symbols that permeate the narrative too: the pyramid of strings (made by Methuselah, playing with Noah's son); the recurring imagery of the one all-seeing eye; the allusion to the third eye when the last demon rips open his chest.

One more thing: In the book of Enoch, Noah never imagines he and his family will not survive the flood, because God sends the archangel Uriel to tell them to build the ark. Noah and his family members are good and destined to ensure the future of humanity. Uriel makes this explicitly known, as per God's command.

Why, then, does Aronofsky's *Noah* portray the protagonist as a lost, distraught, even crazed soul, ready to murder his granddaughters? Here again, the storyline and rising conflict could have been equally well-served by the mother herself, Ila, threatening to kill the children. That would have offered Noah a final opportunity to affirm God's will and remind us that we need not know how the plan will play out; we need only, as Christians, have faith that God is good.

At the end of the day, one has to wonder why the fallen angels

help Noah at all. It's not necessary for the storyline. It would have been just as epic for them to side with the fallen men and for God to save Noah from destruction. It would also have saved the movie from an inherently flawed and dangerously misleading theology.

Aronofsky's *Noah*, in this sense, plays the part of false counsel. Those who leave the movie feeling even remote sympathy for the Watchers and the attempt of such creatures to redeem themselves inadvertently miss the mark, as do those who imagine Noah as a frail man who wrestled with his decision to follow through on God's command.

The implication at the end of the movie is jarring, as it leaves room to question whether or not humanity survived because of Noah's inability to go through with God's plan (an accident, as it were) or because God knew all along Noah would "choose love."

Should we throw out the baby with the bathwater? Not at all: Aronofsky's movie is well worth the watch and is starting many conversations. However, viewers will do well to be informed and to recognize the flaws that many, at this point, consider to be mere embellishments, invented in order to add Hollywood drama.

Kay Butler writes for *Movieguide*. This article originally appeared on .