Biblical Themes in Hollywood Movies

Part 1 of 2: Responding to Darren Aronofsky’s “Noah”
with Darrell Bock, Naima Lett
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Welcome to The Table where we discuss issues of God and culture. And our topic today is movies; not just movies in general, but in particular movies that have a Biblical or a Christian theme to them. And we’re going to ask the question about how should we think about these movies, how should we watch them, what’s going on. When you do a movie on a Biblical topic, you get all kinds of reaction. And if you have any doubt, just take a look at the latest Christianity Today review of the movie that came out recently, Noah.

Here is the review of the movie, just this, about six, seven pages long, longer than most reviews. And here are the comments on the movie. Okay. When I ended up - this is - this is another 16 pages.

So if you want to get reaction, just say you’re going to do a topic on a Biblical subject and you have a built-in Richter scale meter. So my guest is Naima Lett. I’m going to let her introduce herself, tell us a little bit about her. We’ve had her before, but she gets to repeat her story for us here, and then we’re just going to dive in. So Naima, tell us why in the world would I ask you to help us discuss this topic?

Well, thank you for asking me to discuss it. I appreciate it. And the reason why would be that my husband and I have a production company in Hollywood. It’s called Letts Rise Productions. And I’m an actor and producer and writer, as well as we’re in full-time ministry. We have a ministry, Hope in the Hills in Beverly Hills, and we live and work and minister in Hollywood. I am – we make movies. We are in movies.

We have friends that are in movies. We minister people in movies. Like the movie industry is our industry all the way around. So that’s why I am here to talk about it.

And you also just happened to graduate from Dallas Seminary at the same time.

Yay.
Darrell Bock: There might not be too many people [laughter] who have that illustrious combination of vocations in their life.

Naima Lett: Yes, yes. I’m so excited. I was the first graduate in the Masters in Media Arts track here at Dallas Seminary. So I am thrilled to be back. I really am.

Darrell Bock: And it’s a real pleasure to actually have you in studio. The last time we did this, we had you via –

Naima Lett: Yes.

Darrell Bock: – technology and Skype.

Naima Lett: Got to love technology. Got to love technology. Love it, love it, love it.

Darrell Bock: That’s right. But we’re glad to have you here. Well, you know what our topic is. Our topic is movies. And we’ve had a spade of them recently.

Naima Lett: Yes.

Darrell Bock: I just – I took one day to dedicate myself to this podcast. [Crosstalk] And in one day in sequence, I saw Noah, God is Not Dead, and the Son of God. Now, I have to say, I haven’t had this much popcorn in a long time. [Laughter] And so it was quite an experience. All my kids were, “Dad, are you really going to do this.” And after it was over, they called me. “Did you survive this?” I thought I was – where was I going that I’d have to worry about surviving? [Laughter]

But anyway, so we’ve seen the movies that we’re going to be talking about.

Naima Lett: Yes.

Darrell Bock: And both of us have seen all the movies that we’re talking about.

Naima Lett: Yes.
Darrell Bock: And so we’re going to take a dive in. Let’s start off here. When I go to see a movie that has a Biblical topic, what expectations do I carry that maybe I shouldn’t carry?

Naima Lett: A very good question. So the expectations that I have seen, and particularly when it comes to a movie like Noah or kind of a larger Hollywood blockbuster movie, the expectation that I’ve seen from our Christian brothers and sisters that maybe we should not have is that it will actually be jot and tittle biblically accurate, meaning I do not believe I – and I work in Hollywood – I don’t – I do not have the expectation that the Hollywood studio movie that comes out is going to be jot and tittle. I just don’t have that expectation.

And most of the time, I take my cues from the filmmakers, so from the filmmakers and the studios because a lot of times, there are going to be interviews. There’s going to be marketing. People are going to talk about it. We started hearing about Noah over a year-and-a-half ago. So a year-and-a-half ago I wrote a blog and said, “Hey, there’s a flood of Bible movies coming out. Please don’t expect them to be biblically accurate, meaning jot and tittle word-for-word, you know, whatever have you.

Noah is just the first. There’s Pontius Pilot coming out. There’s a Cain and Abel story coming out. There is another I think Moses story coming out. There is a plethora of Bible movies coming out between 2014 and 2015.

Darrell Bock: So we need to get good at this. [Laughter]

Naima Lett: Let’s just say we have a wonderful opportunity to have a whole lot of dialogue about the Bible in the next two years, you know, two to three years.

Darrell Bock: Okay, mm-hmm.
Right now, the slate is about two years out because technically speaking depending on how these next couple of years go, we’ll see if they’ll continue or not. But I don’t believe our expectation should be that when we go – and particularly if the filmmaker has already said that it’s not – you know, if the filmmaker says the biblical account can be found in the Bible, that’s a pretty good cue that we probably should not have that expectation that the filmmaker has somehow made it biblically accurate, like jot and tittle word-for-word, that kind of thing.

Okay. So I go in to watch a biblically-based movie that’s not about the Bible [laughter] and go from there.

Doesn’t that sound crazy?

Yeah.

I mean, it sounds – but here’s – and I had the wonderful opportunity. I blogged about Noah on Friday and got comments. [Laughter]

Got comments like [crosstalk] you’ve read her mail. [Laughter] Yeah.

But here’s what came out again and again. And I said when it’s all said and done, there’s going to be creative license taken. When stories are created, they’re going to fill in the gaps in terms of what is known and what is not known. And the filmmaker, depending on what kind of story they’re trying to craft, is going to develop that story accordingly. And we, again, can take our cues from the filmmaker.

In this case with Noah, the filmmaker pretty much kind of put it out there that he was doing a fantastical tale. He wasn’t trying to follow kind of the – and Noah, I mean literally the account in Genesis is so small, but he wasn’t trying to stay very close to that, even though –

Yeah, 10-minute feature film doesn’t work, does it?

[Laughter] Not necessarily.
But we also have, say like you mentioned Son of God, and – but I’ll tell you this. There were a lot of Christians that were really upset about that because they mix things, like different things that Jesus said at one point or another were all kind of mixed together and scenes were kind of mixed. And so people would say, “Well, that’s not jot and tittle word-for-word Bible either.” So it’s like okay, well, you win if you do, you win if you – I mean you lose if you do, you lose if you don’t.

Like it’s – I think one, one of the hurdles that we have had to jump across is our family of faith already has a certain amount of distrust with the Hollywood system anyway, right?

There is already a mistrust that we are somehow going to mishandle the information. And people are just waiting for that opportunity when we do to say, “You got it wrong. And now we’re going to tell you why you got it wrong and how you got it wrong.” So we’re already kind of pushing a boulder up a hill so to speak, but then, you know, when you get something as fantastical as Noah, you know, that’s really a fantasy in this regard or whatever have you, then it really kind of affirms the belief by some of our family of faith that see –

They can’t trust Hollywood to do this.

This is why we can’t trust you.

Yeah.

This is why we cannot trust you.
Well, I tell you what I’ve thought about it in coming up to this week and this spade of movies and knowing that we’re heading into a sea of the Bible, if I can keep the metaphor going, and that is I look back at movies that most people regard as classics, and even as representations of the best of Biblical movies I think of the 10 Commandments, for example, Cecil B. DeMille. And that tracked along with Exodus to a certain degree, but he did –

Creative license.

He had creative license.

That was such creative license.

Yeah, exactly.

All of them have taken creative license.

Exactly right. And so –

Not a single one of them has been –

But here’s the curveball in this for me. The curveball in this for me is if you look to see what the Bible does with its own stories, okay, you will see creative moves being made from one account to the other.

Oh.

They don’t necessarily repeat jot and title the story the exact same way. Most of the things that I deal with on a regular basis within the Gospels –

Yes.

– as we deal with the relationship between Matthew, Mark, and Luke, see a story retold from a different angle with features in one version of it that you can’t see in the first version of it.

That’s good, yeah. Yeah.
Darrell Bock  
And so I sit there and I say, well, if the Bible, to bring out points, can work with narrative gaps, et cetera, collapse ideas, remove characters from one scene versus the other, I think of the Jesus’ meeting of the centurion who asked for his slave to be healed, and in one account, it’s a conversation directly between the centurion and Jesus. In the other account, the centurion never physically shows up. It happens through messengers.

Okay, now which version of that story am I taking and what am I going with?

Naima Lett  
Okay.

Darrell Bock  
Or how do I deal with that? So each writer has made a choice either to simplify the story or to give you all the detail, but the point of the story is still there.

Naima Lett  
Mm-hmm.

Darrell Bock  
And so I wonder if, in thinking about the standards that you’ve talked about, if we shouldn’t – if we’ve asked the wrong question, if I can say it this way, rather than asking how accurate is this in relationship to the Bible rather than just asking that question. That’s an important question to ask. We should also ask: are the values and the issues that the text is raising addressed in this movie?

Naima Lett  
Gotcha.

Darrell Bock  
And how are they addressed? And so I’ve come ready today. Here is an e-mail that I got that shows you this tension I think pretty well. I got this e-mail from – I’ll just say a president of a Christian organization that reflects a conversation we were having by e-mail. He knew what I was going to do this weekend, and we had gone back and forth in light of some things he had sent me initially about some of the movies I was going to see.

And I’m just going to read through this. And I don’t normally do this, but I think this is a particularly illustrative example. Here’s what this person said. And they’re going to remain unnamed so I can protect the guilty.
“I learned a great lesson on staying focused on the most important thing. On March 21st, 2014, the movie his organization had been promoting, God’s Not Dead, came out in a limited number of theaters around the country. It was a success and I was so glad we jumped onboard to promote it. On March 28th, 2014, the movie Noah arrived in theaters with one of my favorite actors, Russell Crowe, playing Noah. I had heard some negatives about the show not being true to the biblical account, but I wanted to see it anyway.

Late in the evening, someone I trusted very much posted these words about the movie on internal pages for our organization’s leaders. Here’s the quote. ‘Total garbage and blasphemy. Get the word out to other Christians before they waste their time or money as we did. I feel tricked. It was horrible.’

Without hesitation, I immediately went into reactionary mode, sent his comments to everyone I knew, posted it on every social media page to which I had access. That was the mistake. One of the e-mails I sent was answered by a friend who has helped our organization recruit people for the organization. Her comments pointed out the mistake. She said, ‘I believe this e-mail poorly represents the excellent ministry you have at (your organization). I have not yet seen Noah, but I plan to see it, as I plan to see many movies, whether they tell a story based directly on the Bible or not.’

‘Regardless if I enjoy the film or not and regardless of the objective quality of the acting and the storytelling, I will not consider it a waste of time or money. Hollywood is getting back into telling Bible stories, and that’s exciting. I’m thinking Ben Hur, The Ten Commandments.’ And then this is in bold. ‘This is a wonderful opportunity to have a meaningful conversation with people who would never normally want to talk about God, the Bible, or anything religious. The arts are always great conversation starters. This seems like something your organization would be interested in rather than encouraging people to avoid.’

That’s the end of the emphasis. ‘With all due respect, you have an obligation as the head of the (the organization) to set a good example of winsome clear-thinking Christianity. If we, as believers, can be this threatened by a piece of art based on Biblical events and not even claiming to represent them exactly; after all, they did publish a disclaimer in this regard; then it is no wonder we fail so miserably at kind of communication when there are more significant issues to be addressed.’
‘I have huge respect for you and for your organization and simply encourage you to keep striving towards excellence.’” And then this is the reaction of the leader to whom this e-mail was written.

“Lesson learned. Noah offers a great opportunity to engage others in this conversation, but we need to see the movie in order to intelligently enter the conversation. Unfortunately, we will have to decide between the importance of being prepared or voting with our money. An article about Noah said it best. The article was called, “Noah, a prime opportunity to talk to pagans when Jesus comes it’s too late to choose sides.””

And that’s the end of the e-mail.

Naima Lett That’s good.

Darrell Bock And I think that’s kind of the issue as I see it.

Naima Lett Yeah.

Darrell Bock And what I would like to do with some of our remaining time is to talk about how Noah can do this. Yes, there are problems with Noah. The watchers [laughter] okay.

Naima Lett Did you like that? [Laughter]

Darrell Bock Those guys – in fact, I – now I work in biblical studies, so I know a little bit of what’s going on here, and for people who don’t know the background to the watchers is it’s a development of the theme of the Nephilim in Genesis 6, which some people believe are pictures of angels who have physically taken on characteristics who mated with females on the earth, and that’s one of the views of that passage. Not the only view, but that’s one of the views of that passage. And that particular interpretation is actually very ancient.

It is reflected in Second Temple Jewish texts around the Bible, around the time of the Bible, works like First Enoch and other such works. So now granted, they aren’t – how can I say this – X-men figures, action figures or something like that, which is what the movie made them into, but you do have issues like this and I actually think under analogy here; when Mel Gibson had the problem in The Passion about how to portray Satan –
Okay. The question is how do you portray something that’s unseen and make it visible in a visual medium? Most people who just attend movies may not even think about that question as an artistic problem. It is a slight – just a minor detail, artistic problem considering the conflict with Satan is kind of central to the Jesus story.

Naima Lett Right.

Darrell Bock So how do you do this? How do you portray the figure of the watchers as an overlay to an antediluvian time period, that kind of thing? That’s what the movie maker was wrestling with. And granted I may not like the solution, but okay, alright, take it with a grain of salt.

Naima Lett He made choices.

Darrell Bock He made choices.

Naima Lett He did make some choices.

Darrell Bock Move on.

Naima Lett Yeah.

Darrell Bock Now here’s another one. I’m giving you the negatives first. My sense is this may – and people can feel free to disagree with me on this – my problem with the portrayal of God in this movie is, is that God was somewhat of a deist God.

Naima Lett Yeah.

Darrell Bock He was removed from the action. People prayed to him. He never answered. That kind of thing. And that description of God actually works if you discount part of the twist at the end of the movie.

Naima Lett Okay.
Okay. There’s a very important scene towards the end of this movie, Noah, in which there’s a discussion about what Noah was supposed to learn by the experience God took him through without talking to him.

Okay. And so actually the key core human issues that the movie raises are wrapped up in this scene. It’s actually wrapped up in a scene that we don’t directly see in the biblical story because in the biblical story, although we have people riding on the ark with Noah, we don’t have the question of where did the children come from out of Noah’s – and the movie goes in this direction, another choice.

Okay. And we have what I call an Abraham/Isaac moment in the midst of the movie in which Noah makes the decision, is he going to remove the two children that have been born because they weren’t supposed to be on the ark to begin with, or is he going to let life continue. And it’s a choice between mercy and law, if I can say it that way.

Right.

And so – and divine command, at least as Noah had conceived of it. Now here’s the twist. The twist is, is that in the discussion about Noah’s decision not to do what he was inclined to do, which was to kill the children, but to allow them to be alive. And I’m sorry for ruining part of the movie –

Yeah.

– to do it, but we have to do this. [Laughter]

Warning, warning.
The remark is made, God wanted you to learn. And so the life lesson of the story is put in the midst of this conflict and the movie couldn’t have been clearer about the sinfulness of man. It literally is portrayed all the way through from the beginning to the end.

Yeah.

We see characters wrestling with the presence of this all around, and we see characters wrestling with the fact that all of humanity is going to be wiped out. We see a global flood.

Yep.

All those things happen. We see an ark designed pretty much as the Bible lays it out, so we’ve got that dimension too. So there are very biblical features in the story. And the question is, will we wrestle with the human-divine triangle questions, human – the humans I live with and God questions that the story raises. That’s what I think the movie goes after. I don’t know how you read it, but that’s how I read it. And I found myself in the midst of the movie as these issues were coming up pondering the questions about humanity that the story as the filmmaker was telling it and as I was familiar with it in the Bible were raising.

Gotcha.

That combination.

Okay. So in your wrestling, and I so appreciate you using that term, as a moviegoer, I think for me, I went in with kind of real low expectation in terms of how any of this was going to match up biblically or whatever have you. It was – it’s the same thing that I go in when I go to see Transformers or Superman or Batman or X-Men or any of The Avengers, whatever have you. I went in to enjoy a feature film. And I did not, as they were going through the story, of course I know the biblical account, but I looked at it very much like the biblical account inspired the filmmaker to go off into his own imagination and creativity.

Mm-hmm.
And – which was a very dark reality –

Absolutely.

– for these characters. But here’s the key; you’re right. Even as – if I’m going through the story as a filmgoer, and I’m just invested in that story, I have to wrestle with that combination because they kept bringing it up, that through line of mercy versus justice. And the characters are saying things like that -is this just? Well, this is what’s just. And there was this tension between we are going to be punished because we have done wrong.

We have sinned. We have failed. Like this is our punishment, versus the grace of the Creator or whatever have you. And so there was this wrestling and tension, and the filmmaker did make that however the other pieces of the puzzle come through, and if you just look at the ark and the way that a movie goes anyway, he followed all of the points of a good movie, of a story, you know what I mean. And so – and everything in between. But that’s what he kept bringing us back to; will you choose justice?

Are we going to choose what’s just or this merciful type of thing? Very similar I would say to Les Mis, which of course was nominated for the Academy Awards last year, which also had Russell Crowe starring in it as well. And it was that sense of the law or justice versus mercy. And I think that’s a very real conversation that we can have in 2014 in the 21st century because people are asking that question every day, at least where I am.

Where is this good God that you all speak of, right? Is He just removed and we’re all just making things happen on our own? If there is sin, if there is – I mean if there are bad things happening, is He just going to let them happen? We just had another earthquake on Friday [laughter]; earth starts moving and shaking. People are like, “Okay, are we getting closer to the big one?” You know what I mean?

Yeah, 5.1, just a minor shake.
Naima Lett  Oh my gosh just a 5 – and – okay. So – and let me just tell you  

little something. We’re so used to it now, we were actually with a  
group of leaders that we meet with and are accountable to, kind of  
insiders every month, and we meet month to month. And we’re so  
used to it now that things started moving and like we paused for a  
second and everybody’s like, “Is that an earthquake? Yeah, it feels  
like an earthquake,” you know, shaking a little bit. Nobody jumped  
der under a table.

Nobody went to the door. I said – oh, I said, “This is not good,  
people.” Like we – [laughter] like we should at least – I said let me  
just go and stand under the door post like we’re supposed to  
because –

Darrell Bock  The only earthquake I’ve ever been in is the little 3.5’er out there  
when I was out there once teaching at Talbot and I –

Naima Lett  Did you feel woozy?

Darrell Bock  I was in the bed – it was at night and the bed started to shake, rattle,  
and roll, and I went, “Oh, this is interesting.” And my next remark  
is, “This must be what an earthquake feels like.” [Laughter]

Naima Lett  This is it.

Darrell Bock  And this is it.

Naima Lett  This is it.

Darrell Bock  And sure enough, I got up after all the shaking stopped. I went to  
my computer, and low and behold, about two minutes later on, see  
a little CNN thing a little 3.4 or 3.5 or something like that  
earthquake hit the Los Angeles area today. I said, “Well, good,  
that’s my first one. I can chalk that one up.”

Naima Lett  Check that off, I’ve had an earthquake.

Darrell Bock  “I’ve had that experience.” That’s right. And that’s all I want.  
[Laughter] That’s no more.
Naima Lett: Well, they’re spreading now, you know. My family experienced one in Georgia about a month ago, so I said, “Well, hey, if they’re coming to Georgia, you may as well move to California.” [Laughter] Because you kept saying you weren’t coming to California.

Darrell Bock: Exactly right, yeah.

Naima Lett: But you know, that’s off topic.

Darrell Bock: The only place to go is the Arctic. Unless you live in Chicago, you’ve already been there.

Naima Lett: Yes, _____ I’m sorry to get us off topic.

Darrell Bock: Yeah. So no, that’s alright. That was –

Naima Lett: But those types of natural events happening bring up these conversations of, “Is God removed? Is He involved? And is He just a God who will allow these bad things to happen or whatever have you?” Or how can you, as a Christian, like why is this personal? How is this personal? Who are you serving?

Darrell Bock: You’ve raised a question here that I think is important, that there are two directions I want to go. So I’m going to put this – I’m going to go to this one place quick and then come back to where we’re going.

Naima Lett: Yes.

Darrell Bock: You’ve mentioned the kind of fantasy world that the moviemaker in this case put together for us that kind of operates on the edge of a perception of reality in these kind of beyond-the-normal things that go on with the way the watchers are handled and that kind of thing that it almost has a fantasy element to it. I do think there is a negative that comes out of that that Christians were sensitive to that may have triggered some of their reaction to the movie, and it is: if I treat the Bible and its content as a fantasy, then I may not end up taking the word of God seriously.

Naima Lett: Mm, gotcha.
And that is a problem because even though I think part of the reason that it was being done was because the world, as its described in the Bible before the flood, is a different world than the world that we live in. People lived longer. There were other kinds of things going on that don’t normally happen, that kind of – that’s what I think he was reaching to portray. But I think he did it in a way that sends the wrong signal in some ways about what the Bible is. And so when he describes, as he did, the Noah story as a kind of Jewish Midrash, I mean, as a moviemaker, he’s Jewish. He understands Midrash. He understands what interpretive and expanded story is, that kind of thing.

When he says it that way, he’s putting the text in a category into which it may not actually belong, and that’s harmful. So that’s a side comment.

I want to get that out. That is a negative.

Yes.

Okay, but here’s the flipside of something to think about. And now I’m going to raise this question. Are Christians tone deaf when it comes to Hollywood movies? And here’s why I want to raise this question. When someone like the moviemaker who says he’s not a part of the church; he doesn’t have a religious bone to pick in his body; he’s an atheist, that kind of thing; depicts a biblical story and we see what he wrestles with, we have the opportunity to hear how the Bible is being heard by someone who doesn’t have a relationship to the God who’s talked about in the Bible by his own admission –

Exactly.
Darrell Bock  
Is it important for us to see what that portrait of God is? Is it important to wrestle what he sees and what he doesn’t see? Isn’t it an opportunity for a conversation to talk about the nature of God given that portrait? And so the summation of it is what I mean by being tone deaf is if we go to a movie to hear and see what we want to hear and expect to hear, might we miss getting the chance to listen and hear how someone else is seeing the Biblical material and learn how to engage people who are coming from that place as a result?

Naima Lett  
Yes. Absolutely. We – I believe, and especially in this 21st century, I believe it is imperative for us to be able to understand the community and the audience and just people. Like we have to understand the community that we are in and be able to hear and see what they believe and then be able to dialogue. Most of the – most of – almost all of the ministry that we do now is relationship-based, and it’s building relationship, hearing people, engaging, and being a part of that conversation. I love the way this writer put it; it’s something that I know I had been saying on all of my different posts.

I know it’s something you had been saying as well, meaning we need to be a part of the conversation. We need to be able to see what it is, you know, the portrayals that are coming out, and be able to bring our perspective to the table. We are completely discounted when we haven’t even seen the movie. Like you can’t even talk about the art if you haven’t seen it. You’re just basing it off of what other people said, and that is not – that is not something that is considered authentic, right?

So we have to be able to experience the art, jump into the dialogue, and again, set our expectations accordingly. I listened to the filmmaker. I read about him. I knew, just as you said, that he was Jewish and also atheist, and I knew that he was creating something that has been in his mind since he was a little kid.

Darrell Bock  
He said the story has fascinated him since he was a child.

Naima Lett  
Yeah, since he was a child.

Darrell Bock  
[Crosstalk] So it isn’t – so it’s like he hasn’t been paying attention to the story.
He was hearing it in Sunday school.

[Laughter] He’s very much paid attention. He’s been captivated by it.

It’s been a passion project.

Exactly.

He tried to get – he’s been trying to get this done for about 15 years. So it’s something that he committed to, he committed his life to, and wanted to create. And you are correct; this is what he created based on what his idea of God is and the story he wanted to tell. Now, as a believer of Christ and a follower of Christ and someone who loves the Lord very dearly, I’m able to come to the table and say, “This is your view. This is my view. Let’s talk about it.” Right?

Mm-hmm.

And then here’s the thing that we do. We pray for the filmmakers. We pray for the people because without a shadow of a doubt, what we have seen again and again and again is that as we pray and we begin to build relationships, like we are welcomed into the conversation because we aren’t taking up the rock and stoning people so to speak. We are – now, we know what we’re talking about. Like we have to [laughter] –

Yeah. [Laughter]

We’ve got to know what we’re talking about. You can’t come to the table and not have any clue about what you’re talking about. But having known what we’re talking about, we’re able to come to that – come to the table and have the discussion. And I think that that is so valuable and what’s key in terms of our community moving forward and if we actually believe that we are going to make an impact on the culture as it is. If we completely walk away from the conversation and say, “Hey, we don’t like that. We don’t like the way you portray your idea of God,” because mind you, you’re portraying your idea of God. That doesn’t have anything to do with my God.
I’m not offended because that’s your idea, right? I’m not offended by that.

And should I be surprised that it doesn’t match? I mean, you know, okay.

Particularly once you’ve told me – like if you’ve told me what you believe, okay, I get it.

Yeah, yeah.

That doesn’t affect my faith one iota. Like I still know who my God is and my God is not going to be – he is not changed. The God of the Bible is not changed because of the movie Noah. Now, caveat; are movies influential? Yes. Are –

That’s even more reason to be talking about them.

Hello.

Yeah.

Absolutely.

Yep.

And that’s why we advocate seeing it, jumping into the conversation, getting with some friends, talking about it. And again, our friends who are on the spectrum, they’re not just all in the box. I love how Bob Briner put it in his book Roaring Lambs. It was like we, as a community of Christians, kind of took our ball and left the sandbox. It’s like if Hollywood is dark, it’s because the light left. We are now saying, “Hey, come – bring the ball back into the sandbox. Let’s play together and figure this thing out together.” Because when our voice is missing from the conversation, it is very dark.

It is very, very dark. And we’ve seen that, right? [Laughter]

That’s right.
We see what it looks like when the light is not present. [Laughter] Like we’ve seen it. And so that’s very important to us. I’m so glad that you brought that up. I wish we weren’t tone deaf. I’m hoping that we become less tone deaf and less negative against everything Hollywood.

Well, I think what we’re talking about here and kind of pleading for, if I can say it that way, because I do think we’re making it clear we have a position on this, is a kind of nuance-ing about how we view Hollywood movies, to not just – it’s all good or it’s all bad.

Right.

And let’s get in and talk about what the stew is that we’re looking at, I mean, what the mix is. There’s some of it that is positive. There’s certainly some of it that can be criticized and should be. But that’s good critique.

Yes.

Good critique is sitting down and saying, “This is what I liked about it. These were the kinds of questions that it raised that were healthy and worth considering. This is what I liked about it artistically. This is what I didn’t like about it. I thought this – they missed it here.” What movies don’t get that treatment on a regular basis? And artists, if you do that with sincerity, appreciate that exchange. That’s part of the conversation they’re actually working to evoke.

That’s right.

And if you’re completely indifferent to what they did, take it or leave it or whatever, that, to an artist, I think is probably viewed as a complete failure.

That is a failure. That is a failure.

So the interaction that we have here becomes very, very important. And so the plea is let’s have some – let’s come to the table.

Yes.
Darrell Bock: Let’s watch the movies that are impacting our culture. Let’s learn from what their perception of God is in terms of how to have the conversation and what the issues are that need to be addressed, and then let’s go for it.

Naima Lett: Yeah, yeah.

Darrell Bock: Let’s engaged and let’s engage with much less anger and much less frustration; [laughter] shouldn’t be surprised. But let’s engage as if I were talking to a neighbor who I’m called to love and care for.

Naima Lett: Right.

Darrell Bock: And love well and talk about, “Hey, let’s think about the perspective on life that is being portrayed here and what’s healthy about it.”

Naima Lett: Yeah. I have to say, I was somewhat surprised by the attacks by just saying I was going to go and see the movie. I was very surprised. And then on my social media, what literally happened is I said, “Okay, we’ve got to be able to dialogue respectfully.” So then the persons stopped attacking me but started attacking one another to the point where I said – I just had to start deleting, deleting, deleting and just finally say, “This is not that forum.” But what I yearn for as a body of believers, what I yearn for is for us to be able to speak with one another about issues that we may disagree about in a way that is still loving and respectful. I do not come to any table and expect everybody at that table to believe everything that I believe. And then I don’t stop loving you because you believe differently, right?

Darrell Bock: Mm-hmm, right.

Naima Lett: We should be able to have the dialogue and learn from one another and grow with each other and do life together without getting so upset that you don’t agree with me.
There are two key love commands in the Bible. One of them is love your neighbor as yourself, and it’s very clear from that text that we’re not supposed to draw lines and limits to this. And the second one is a little more radical in some ways: love your enemies, that that’s what makes a Christian distinct from the way the world loves.

The world loves selectively. Well, I’m afraid we’ve learned how to love selectively and we’re reflecting more of what the world does than the way we should. And I understand; I get where our perception is. We’re defending God and his honor and his scripture, and I get that. Believe me. I’m in enough fora dealing with the nature of the Bible and the way the Bible’s reacted to to know what that involves. But there still is a way to do it. And I like to say truth matters and tone matters too.

And the Scripture says I’m supposed to be ready to give a defense, but I’m supposed to do it with reverence and gentleness. And I think those two characteristics sometimes are lacking. And when we do, we actually detract from the very message we’re trying to promote and the very person that we’re trying to promote. Well, that’s kind of a view of Noah. You want to say anything else about Noah before we move on to the other films?

Well, again, just if – [laughter] if you already know [laughter] that seeing a movie that you want to be biblical, if you already know that if you go see a movie that you want to be biblical and it’s not, just know you’re going to be upset.

Mm-hmm, yeah.

Right? But if there’s a space; if there is a space that says, “Hey, I have the capacity to see this movie as I see any other movie or any other film that comes out, then by all means go and then join the conversation.” That’s what I would say hands down; go enjoy the conversation – invite people into the conversation and enjoy the conversation.