

Nokesville UMC Sunday Worship [2nd Sunday in Lent]
March 5, 2023
Rev. YoungMin Kim

Sermon Series (2): Shine
Isiah 60:1-3

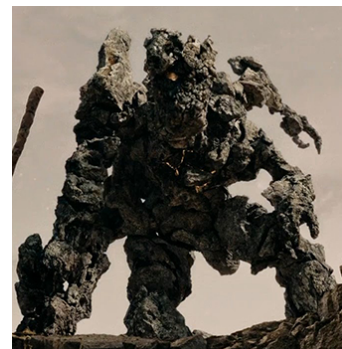
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Last Sunday, we began the sermons in a series with a movie, “Noah” (2014) during the season of Lent. Due to some issues in the movie, such as a different story about Noah from the Bible and some implicit messages against the Bible, the movie has been controversial among Christians. But the purpose of the sermon series with the movie is not to find how the movie “Noah” is different from Noah in the Bible and to judge how non-biblical the movie is. Instead, through the movie written and produced by non-Christians—a Jewish-American atheist and a Jewish-American scientist—we will listen to how they perceive God, creation, good and evil, salvation, and other serious questions related to faith. And sometimes, they challenge us with paradoxes, violence, and blindness in the Bible through the voices of the protagonist Noah and his antagonist Tubal-Cain. And then, regarding the issues, questions, and challenges, we will try to find our own answers based on the Bible and our Christian faith. Through the work, we can come to communicate with those who have different religions, thoughts, and beliefs from us. And again, I need to ask for your understanding that watching the movie in the church is covered by the license that we purchased, but it is not allowed to share the movie through Facebook or YouTube. Thus, those who join our worship through the livestreaming cannot watch the video clips that I share during the sermon but can hear the conversations between the characters. If you missed the last sermon, you can watch it on our church website or our YouTube channel.

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As the movie begins, the narrator briefly explains the creation, the temptation, the fall of Adam and Eve, and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Cast out of Eden, Adam and Eve had two sons—Cain and Abel. But Cain became enraged at his brother when God refused his offering but accepted Abel’s offering. Being out of control by his jealousy and rage, Cain killed his brother and was banished to the East. There, Cain and his offspring were prosperous. One of Cain’s descendants was Tubal-Cain, the one who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools as the Bible describes and the antagonist of Noah in the movie. While Cain was prosperous in the East, Adam and Eve came to have another son—Seth. Under his parents’ love and care, Seth and his offspring were prosperous on the land. One of Seth’s descendants was Noah. All about the story above was described just the same as in the Book of Genesis chapters one through five.

But suddenly a strange group of characters named “The Watchers” appears. They explain themselves in this way (video). The Watchers were fallen angels. In order to help human beings on earth, they disobeyed God and came down to earth. And they handed down their knowledge and wisdom to the descendants of Cain. As a result, Cain’s descendants became stronger and prosperous, but at the same time, they spread wickedness among them, and it devoured the world. And they killed most of The Watchers. So, the rest of The Watchers became feared, outraged, and hopeless to the fallen men. They pleaded with God to take them back to heaven, but God was always silent. Let me pause. Most of you must have been perplexed by this character. They seem to be giant rocks or trolls. They would bring ridicule upon ourselves, or they would hinder our concentration on the movie. Who are they? Are they imaginary characters created by the screenwriter or the director to give dramatic effects?



Have you ever heard of the words: the canon, the Apocrypha, and the Pseudepigrapha? The canon is the 39 books of the Old Testament starting with Genesis and ending with Malachi that we have and read. The Apocrypha is a group of Jewish writings beyond the 39 books in the canon. Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches include some books in the Apocrypha in their Bibles (e.g. Roman Catholic Bible includes Sirach, Wisdom, Tobit, 1 & 2

Maccabees, Judith, Additions to Esther and Daniel). But the Pseudepigrapha literally means falsely attributed. In other words, it is writings written under the name of a biblical person but was not really by them. Thus, no churches accept the books in the Pseudepigrapha. The reason that I explained the difference among the canon, the Apocrypha, and the Pseudepigrapha is that the story of The Watchers in the movie is described in the Book of Enoch chapters 1 through 36, and the Book of Enoch is in the Pseudepigrapha which is falsely attributed so that no church accredits its authenticity. I did not find any resource that Aronofsky and/or Handel referred to The Watchers in the Book of Enoch, but I can cautiously assume that the movie “Noah” was created based on the Book of Genesis, the Book of Enoch, and Aronofsky/Handel’s imagination.

Let’s go back to the movie. Because of their fear, anger, and frustration to the fallen men on earth, The Watchers did not believe that God told Noah that He would punish men on earth with a flood. But they saw God’s miracle of water gushing up from the ground and covering countless trees in the area. Thus, they decided to help Noah and began to build the ark. We do not know how many years had passed. The ark was almost completed and just in time, rain from heaven and flooding from the ground began. Tubal-Cain and his people rushed to the ark to plunder it. It was absolutely impossible for Noah and his three sons to counter the crowds. And here, the director’s imagination shines (video). The Watchers had no hope in their words. They lived in the dark area with ashes. With thick and heavy rocks, they barely walked. Covered by rocks, they lost their light. Worst of all, they believed they were abandoned by God so that there was no way to be reconciled and return to God. But when they sacrificed themselves for Noah and for God’s plan, they shined again and returned to heaven.

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In today’s passage, God called the prophet Isaiah when the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed by Assyria and the southern kingdom of Judah was like a candle in the wind. The kingdom of Assyria kept threatening Judah. Judah’s ally—Egypt—turned their face away from the crisis of Judah. What was worse, surrounded by enemies on all sides, Judah allowed Assyrian idols and worshiped them in order to draw Assyrian favor. Facing the national crisis, the people of Judah lost their hope. They cried out to God for His salvation from the hand of Assyria, but God kept silent. Their everyday lives were hopeless, meaningless, and lethargic, just like The Watchers.

But Isaiah stood among them and cried out saying, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the people, but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (vv. 1-3). Isaiah encouraged the people of Judah to have hope in hopelessness and to shine in the darkness in their hearts, homes, communities, and nation with God’s promise. Rather than being overwhelmed by fear, the people of God should rise and shine.

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Let us flash back over ourselves. We were called to be God’s people. Deeply appreciative of Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross for us, we decided to live for Him as His faithful disciples. However, against our willingness, we fell again and again. Every time we fell, rather than repenting of our sin and turning back our faces to God, we decided to stay away from God. And we would say, ‘it is easy and free to live without Him.’ As a result, we come to be like The Watchers—having thick and heavy rocks on our bodies and hearts and living in the darkness and meaninglessness. When too many burdens overwhelmed us, we cried to God and said, ‘Why do you keep silent?’

Please remember that we are the ones who already have the light. The glory of God has risen upon us, and His glory would appear over and through us. Even though the light and the glory of God within us may be covered by the rocks in forms of our doubts, fear, struggles, lack of faith, or burdens of life, when we as His faithful disciples restore our relationship with God, are reconciled to Him, and practice His teachings in our homes, church, community, and nation, the rocks attached to our bodies, minds, and hearts come apart, and we will shine the light and the glory through us. Amen.