



2012 (Cert 12A)

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Overview: Hollywood falls first in this worldwide disaster epic whose seismic meltdown hurls tsunamis big enough to lash the Himalayas.

Director: Roland Emmerich (*Independence Day, The Day After Tomorrow*) (2009).

Producers: Columbia Films.

Length: 158 mins. **Cautions:** Contains scenes of destruction throughout and some use of offensive language.

THE FILM

2012 is the year when a raft of ancient faith predictions of worldwide destruction will come true, governments and scientists reveal. From this sombre forecast, the action cuts to the predicted apocalypse, when solar flares cause the warming of the earth's core and dramatic seismic shifts. Yellowstone National Park volcano erupts, Washington DC is destroyed, Asia sinks and Hawaii is in literal meltdown. Even the London Olympics is affected. This is mayhem and destruction on a scale that Cecil B DeMille could only dream of. Alongside this, a catalogue of human stories in true disaster movie style asks the standard questions: who will survive, why and how? To these, it adds themes of patriotism, self-sacrifice and biblical overtones that are also firmly in the epic movie tradition.

The human element in this CGI-fest definitely takes second place, certainly as far as script is concerned. Jackson Curtis (John Cusack) plays the estranged husband to Kate (Amanda Peet), struggling to connect with his children on a camping trip to Yellowstone Park, and subsequently leaping, driving and flying in the most unlikely of vessels to save himself and his family. Meanwhile the last President of the United

States is given a humane spin by Danny Glover. President Wilson presides over a variety of scientists and weasel political characters with integrity as they plan to save the planet with Armageddon-proof cruise liners.

The cast is completed by the familiar disaster movie characters, the selfish Russian magnate, the old time radio hack who knows the truth (Woody Harrelson), the beautiful first daughter (Thandie Newton) and dislikeable politician (Oliver Platt). Full of family farewells and reconciliations, sentiment is spread thick, prayers (largely ineffectual) are muttered from all the world religions and all is delivered with some surprisingly effective low-level comedy.

Impressive Ark-like vessels arrive to save the day, but not before a more traditional 'who can fix the mechanical problem that could spoil everything' crescendo has wound the tension to near breaking point.

FIRST REACTIONS:

- The implications of the next eruption of the Yellowstone volcano are well documented (and equally terrifying). Such possibilities are brought to life through some very powerful CGI. Did you find this convincing, or would you have preferred a greater focus on the human story?
- Essentially this film plays as an escape or survival film, though of course most people do not escape the destruction. How did the destruction and flight to safety make you feel? Why do escape films seem to prove so enduringly popular?

INTERACTIONS:

- Does the film leave you concerned or sceptical about the possibilities of global earthquakes? Should it have had either effect?

- The Pope and several world famous religious icons perish amid the destruction. In this film, as with previous ones, Emmerlich implies that faith is largely futile or irrelevant. How do you react to this suggestion?
- The link between personal wealth and survival is not a subtle theme in this film, but is it a valid one to make?
- If you knew that a major disaster was coming our way, what would you do?
- Extensive global flooding is depicted as a real and present danger in the film. Does this affect your view of the biblical flood narrative in the book of Genesis (Chapters 6,7 and 8), and if so how? In the biblical account it was human evil that led God to bring the judgement of flooding upon the earth. In 2012 does the action of some humans contribute to the suffering of many? (See also the Reel Issues Epic discussion on the more light-hearted Evan Almighty on this topic.)
- Jesus of Nazareth famously said there could be no greater love than shown in laying down your life for another person (John Chapter 15.12–14). How does this film depict love?
- One subplot to the film involves the depiction of personal and family relationships. Are these credible or simply clichés?

CLIP TO DISCUSS

Scene: *Towards the end of the film at the launch centre for the Arks.*

Not all of the Arks are ready for launching and both workers and high-paying passengers are left on the dockside to await their fate. On board one of these USA leaders debate whether or not to let down the doors of the Arks to allow other passengers on board.

Meanwhile the entire subcontinent of India drowns. One character says that how they behave at this moment will demonstrate the value they place on human life and future generations will judge them by their actions.

- Should a real situation like this arise, do you think you would behave in the same way as they do in the film? Why?
- How do we show what we value in our society?
- Do the current climate issues raise the same dilemmas for us?

Read Acts 11.1–18: The disciples gather to discuss whether non-Jews can be accepted into the Christian family. Does their discussion and response have something to say to the issue raised in this scene? You may like to look at Jesus' teaching on caring for outsiders – either the parable of the Good Samaritan, (Luke 10. 25–37) or in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5. 43–48). In our daily lives what opportunities do we have to 'let down the doors'? What helps or hinders us in doing this?

OTHER ANGLES TO TALK ABOUT

When Emmerich directed the film *The Day After Tomorrow*, he implied that global warming had brought about the film's massive destruction. 2012 suggests a different cause: planetary alignment and solar activity.

- What contribution does 2012 make to the debate about human stewardship of the earth's resources?
- Can human technology save the human race?

Luke Walton is Bible Society's Arts Development Officer. He is also Director of Enter the Pitch, an online short film competition, and last year produced an award-winning short film, Unscripted.

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