



# THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW

**Rated:** PG-13 • **Running Time:** 2 hours, 3 minutes

**Starring:** Dennis Quaid as Jack Hall; Jake Gyllenhaal as Sam Hall; Ian Holm as Terry Rapson; Emmy Rossum as Laura; Sela Ward as Lucy Hall; Jay O. Sanders as Frank

**Director:** Roland Emmerich

**Themes:** Heroism, environmentalism, faith in either God or man, teens boldly speaking truth, self-sacrifice

## Story Summary

"Anything we can do to raise consciousness about the environment is a good thing. It's part of why we made this movie," said producer Mark Gordon.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, there's nothing subtle about *The Day After Tomorrow's* if-we-don't-get-serious-about-global-warming-we're-all-doomed environmental agenda. That's one reason we've created a curriculum for this film; it offers mature viewers a way to explore Hollywood's knack for promoting a particular cause or worldview in the context of a high-octane popcorn flick. Another reason is the movie's moral characterizations and restraint, which are above average for a disaster movie.

We begin in Antarctica where renowned paleoclimatologist Jack Hall and his research team barely escape a huge icequake. That close call heightens concerns that man's dependence on fossil fuels has accelerated global warming, melted polar ice caps and desalinated the North Atlantic current. Jack warns world leaders (a callous American vice president among them) that soon the phenomenon will wreak untold havoc on weather patterns, create catastrophic storms and usher in a new ice age.

Just before nature unleashes its fury, Jack's estranged teenage son, Sam, flies to New York City for an academic competition. He's accompanied by classmates, including his secret crush, Laura. Everything goes haywire. Tornadoes devastate Los Angeles. Large hail pounds Japan. A tidal wave engulfs Manhattan. Fortunately, Sam and others escape the marauding wall of water by holing up in the public library. A phone call to his parents arms Sam with the knowledge that the storm will worsen and anyone caught outside will die. Jack insists that Sam stay put, promising to come for him.

The temperature drops dramatically, icing over New York's flooded streets. Most of the nation begins migrating south. So do many impatient people who sought refuge in the library along with Sam. Despite the teenager's pleas to wait it out, those individuals brave the elements on foot and eventually perish. Those who stay behind forage for food and warm themselves by burning books. Laura takes ill, inspiring Sam and two friends to hunt for medicine aboard an abandoned Russian freighter that floated down Fifth Avenue before freezing in place. The boys must outrun the storm and a pack of ravenous wolves.

In the meantime, Jack and two colleagues trek into the teeth of the storm in search of Sam, while Jack's physician wife chooses not to evacuate her post but remain alongside a sick child. Such selflessness is common, giving viewers plenty of people to root for on the way to a "happy" ending:

**Cautions:** Two s-words are among the film's 20 profanities, with numerous exclamations of "oh god," "my god," etc. A man starts to unbutton his date's blouse. A shivering Sam (wearing only soaked boxers) huddles with Laura to avoid hypothermia. Intense situations of peril yield mass destruction and fatalities. While those deaths are handled discreetly, casualties and widespread devastation may upset younger viewers. Recommended for older teens and adults.

For some unknown reason the vicious super-storm stalls short of global annihilation. Meanwhile, father and son reunite, young love blossoms, and the grumpy vice president realizes the error of his ways.

NASA research oceanographer William Patzert said of *The Day After Tomorrow*, "The science is bad, but perhaps it's an opportunity to crank up the dialogue on our role in climate change."<sup>2</sup> Politicians including Al Gore hoped so. They timed speeches on global warming to coincide with the movie's 2004 release. One advocacy group even recruited 8,000 volunteers to stand outside theaters and hand out brochures to moviegoers drawn in by the blockbuster's action, suspense and eye-popping special effects.

## Before You Watch

Arm yourselves with pads and pens. Then view the film with one eye focused on its environmental agenda. Note scenes and lines of dialogue that illustrate the filmmakers' attempt to portray global warming as a crisis demanding immediate attention, as well as their desire to vilify politicians who don't consider it a life-and-death priority.

*continued* ➤



**Bible Bookmarks** Gen. 1:28; Psalm 8; Is. 50:10-11; Matt. 5:16, 25:31-40; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 19:10; John 15:13; 1 Cor. 1:18-21

### Talking Points

**1** How does the story mix science fact and fiction to elicit a reaction about a real-life issue? Be specific. Refer to the notes you took during the movie. Help your teen realize that this motion picture wears its ambitions on its sleeve more than most, but that all films communicate the beliefs and values of the people behind them, sometimes in an attempt to affect our attitudes and behavior.

**2** Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-21. In the library, Sam possesses life-saving knowledge. When he shares it, some reject the truth and follow an authority figure to their doom. Others believe him and are saved. Draw as many parallels as you can to a Christian's need to share the gospel. What "authority figures" in our culture can lead people astray?

**3** Ask, "Knowing only what the people in the library knew, what choice about leaving would you have made had you been there? Why?"

**4** Catastrophe is a great equalizer. Discuss how wealth, gender, education, social status, etc., became less important amid tragedy. Then note how the homeless man, disrespected by society, made unique contributions to the group. Does your teenager know someone being treated as a second-class citizen? Challenge your teen to identify that person's assets: "What can you do to make him/her feel more valuable?"

**5** Talk about Lucy's decision to stay behind and comfort Peter—as well as Frank's self-sacrifice in order to spare his friends' lives—in light of John 15:13. What other acts of heroism impressed you?

**6** Reflecting on her priorities and expectations for life, Laura sadly concludes, "Everything I've ever cared about, everything I've worked for has all been preparation for a future that no longer exists." Many people at the end of life have a similar epiphany. As Solomon reported in Ecclesiastes, most of what men pursue is "meaningless, a chasing after the wind." Help teens see the eternal significance in bringing God glory by evangelizing and serving others (Matt. 5:16 and 25:31-40, Mark 16:15-16).

**7** Jack embarks on a fantastic mission to save his child. No sacrifice is too great to restore their bond. Compare this with God's quest to redeem mankind (Luke 19:10). Note Sam's obedience to his father's words (taking a stand, not following the crowd), and his faith in Dad's ability to keep his promise ("He'll make it").

**8** Sam recalls a vacation gone bad with fondness because it gave him quality time with his dad. Has your family had a similar experience? If so, reminisce a little. If not, keep this in mind should it ever happen. Let it be a bonding experience rather than a source of frustration.

**9** What character in the film did you admire most? Why?

**10** Replay scene 24 on the DVD ("The Age of Reason") and dissect the conversation about the Gutenberg Bible. What can we conclude about each person's faith? Then note: The humanistic Nietzsche fan reveres mankind's accumulated wisdom.



Similarly, Jack later says, "Mankind survived the last Ice Age. We're certainly capable of surviving this one. It all depends on whether or not we're able to learn from our mistakes." What does Isaiah 50:10-11 say about people who place trust in things this way?

### Follow-Up Activity

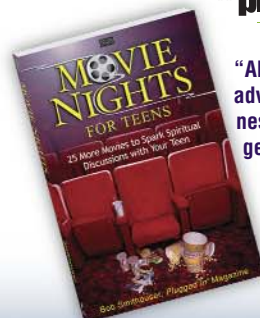
- The Bible calls us to be stewards of the Earth and its resources (Gen. 1:28, Psalm 8). Plan another date with your teen that involves a simple journey into God's creation, be it a hike in the woods, a day on the lake or a trek into the mountains. As you interact with nature, ponder a Christian's environmental duty. What does "subduing" the earth really mean? Might your family help by planting trees, recycling or taking part in a highway cleanup program? Also, consider how believers should respond to radical environmentalists, or pantheists who believe spirits indwell rocks, trees and animals.
- If you're curious about global warming, research the issue from different perspectives. Go online at [epa.gov](http://epa.gov) and search "global warming" for the stance of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Some websites or blogs may express an alarmist view. Still others contend that it isn't nearly the crisis people make it out to be. One of those experts is climatologist Patrick Michaels, who wrote the book *Meltdown: The Predictable Exaggeration of Global Warming by Scientists, Politicians and the Media*.

### Just for Fun

Writer/director Roland Emmerich—a vocal critic of George W. Bush's global warming policies—admitted that he intentionally cast actor Kenneth Welsh as the stubborn vice president because of his resemblance to President Bush's second-in-command, Dick Cheney. —by Bob Smithouser

<sup>1</sup> "Apocalypse Soon? No, But This Movie (and Democrats) Hope You'll Think So" by Patrick J. Michaels, *The Washington Post*, 5/16/04  
<sup>2</sup> *USA Today*, 5/4/04

A **plugged** Resource  
online



"Along with the 'cautions,' reviewing a film in advance helps you discern its age-appropriateness, prepare for any questionable scenes and get a leg up on the discussion material."

—*Movie Nights for Teens*

You can request this resource by contacting Focus on the Family at 800-232-6459 (in Canada, 800-661-9800).