

## Movie discussion resource

*Engage with culture without disengaging your faith.*

## The Revenant



**Genre:** Drama, Action & Adventure

**Rating:** MA15+ (for strong frontier combat and violence including gory images, a sexual assault, language and brief nudity)

**Length:** 156 minutes

**Starring:** Leonardo Di Caprio, Tom Hardy, Domhnall Gleeson, Will Poulter, Forrest Goodluck, Arthur Redcloud

**Director:** Alejandro G. Iñárritu

**Screenplay:** Mark L Smith and Alejandro G. Iñárritu

### Brief synopsis

Hugh Glass (Leonardo Di Caprio) is part of a large hunting expedition into the wilds of the northern United States seeking furs. The movie opens with him and his half-Pawnee son Hawk (Forrest Goodluck), moving through the wilderness with their flintlock muskets at the ready. It is 1823 and the wild and frozen vistas are the magnificent backdrop to the film. The main body of the hunters are busily skinning animals and bailing up the pelts, a raw bloody business, when attacked by a party of Arikara Native Americans seeking their chief's daughter, Powaqa, who has been abducted by an unknown group of

hunters. The battle scene is graphic and brutal. Glass, Hawk and a small group manage to escape the slaughter in their boat which they later abandon. Carrying as many pelts as they can they abandon the boat and strike out on land depending on Glass to guide them. Glass is separated from the party and attacked by a bear defending its cub. Glass is savaged by the bear but manages to kill it, but not before being seriously wounded and near death. Captain Andrew Henry (Domhnall Gleeson), the leader of the group, does rudimentary first aid and sews up Glass's many wounds. The group then attempts to carry Glass on a stretcher but find it seriously hampering their progress. There is an argument that Glass, being so far gone, be put out of his misery but the Henry can't follow through. He promises money to those volunteering to stay and provide a Christian burial when Glass must inevitably die. Hawk and two others volunteer to care for Glass while the rest press on. One of those left is John Fitzgerald (Tom Hardy) who had initially wanted to kill Glass. When alone, he attempts to smother Glass. Hawk comes to the rescue and is killed by Fitzgerald who drags his body away. When the other member of the party, Jim Bridger (Will Poulter), returns Fitzgerald convinces him that Hawk has wandered off and Glass is as good as dead. They put him in a shallow grave and half cover him. When Fitzgerald and Bridger return they report Glass's death to Henry after Fitzgerald warns Bridger not to talk. Bridger refuses to take his part of the money for looking after Glass.

Revenant means a person who has returned, supposedly from the dead. The rest of the movie depicts Glass's return; his raw survival efforts, crawling painfully along the ground, cleaning his wounds, scavenging for food, catching fish, evading the Arikara hunting party and removing the entrails of a dead horse so he can weather a storm inside its carcass. In passing, the vast vistas of the un-spoilt wilderness are portrayed in all their frigid glory.

### Questions for discussion

*Some general questions might provide enough framework to get started:*

- ❖ What stood out as the main points/highlights in the movie?
- ❖ What themes are explored?
- ❖ What assumptions were embedded in the story?
- ❖ What challenged you? What questions did it raise for you?
- ❖ Are there aspects of the story that resonated with your own experience or with the experience of others in a similar situation?
- ❖ Are there biblical or theological themes or characters that come to mind?

### Revenge or Justice

Revenge and survival are the themes running all through this film. The desire for revenge is what keeps Glass alive and spurs him on through incredible hardship. Blood vendettas and honour killings keep the cycle of violence alive in today's world. The most graphic violence in the film was the bear mauling Glass. But human beings are different from bears. The bear will fight to protect its cubs but will not seek revenge if the cubs are killed. Human beings innately seek justice for wrongs done to them or their kin. When Glass and Hikuc, the Pawnee Native American (Arthur Redcloud), meet they swap stories. Glass is bent on revenge for the killing of his son. Hikuc recounts that he also has lost his family to

marauding Sioux. He tells Glass, "Revenge is in the hands of the creator".  
*'Never take revenge, my friends, but instead let God's anger do it. For the scripture says, "I will take revenge, I will pay back, says the Lord".'* Romans 12:19 GNT What does this mean?  
*To what extent are the wars and conflicts around the world part of the revenge cycle? Should governments take revenge? What conflicts might have been avoided if governments sought justice instead? What might this have looked like?*

### **Fitzgerald**

Fitzgerald is made out to be the villain of the piece. He is certainly out for number one and antagonises Glass from the beginning. He volunteers to stay with the near dead Glass only because he has lost his pelts which he blames Glass for and takes the offer of money as some form of compensation for his troubles. He expects Glass to die quickly and digs a shallow grave. When Glass doesn't succumb he construes a way to finish him off as he is supposedly worried about the Arikara chasing them. He abandons Glass, and lies to Henry that he gave Glass a proper burial. When Glass finally makes it back Henry finds that Fitzgerald has absconded with the contents of the safe. Henry and Glass pursue him.  
*Is Fitzgerald the only villain? Is he all bad?*

In real life Fitzgerald did not kill Glass's son. Glass pursued him mainly because he was left to die. And in real life he didn't get his revenge and kill him.

See <http://www.historyvshollywood.com/reelfaces/revenant/>

*Comment?*

### **Visions**

There are flash backs to earlier times with Glass living in a Native American village with his Pawnee wife and young son. He sees soldiers killing his wife. His visions recur throughout the film. These visions appear to give him advice and strength to carry on. At the end of the film Glass, badly wounded, sees his wife again, who finally walks away from him.

*What role did you see these visions taking? Have you had any similar experiences? Do you think visions contain spiritual messages?*

### **Inside the ruined church**

Glass happens upon a ruined church, unbelievably built with stone and containing still visible icons on the walls. Glass has a vision of his dead son and embraces him. He is left hugging a tree.

*Why do you think this image was inserted into the film? What does this image imply about Christianity and its place in the landscape?*

### **Meeting Hikuc**

Near to starving, Glass comes upon Hikuc, a Pawnee Native American, feasting on raw buffalo meat. After an initial stand off they share the meat and camp together. Hikuc invites Glass to travel with him and shares his horse. The Pawnee observes Glass's wounds and opines that Glass will die from them if not treated so then proceeds to apply Native American remedies. When hit by a sudden blizzard Hikuc builds a shelter for Glass and heats it with rocks from the fire.

*What role do you see Hikuc playing in the movie? Are there any parallels to scripture?*

### **Savagery**

Glass survives only to discover a group of French trappers camped nearby. The body of Hikuc is hung from a tree with sign hung from his neck saying. "On est tous des sauvages" ("We are all savages").

*Are we all savages? Who are the real savages in this story? What makes the difference?*

*Savagery (violence) still abounds in our world today. Reflect on why this is so. What can be done?*

### **Salvation?**

Glass infiltrates the French trappers' camp and sees a trapper raping Powaga. He could easily have taken Hikuc's horse and got away but he intervenes and saves Powaga first. At the end Glass battles Fitzgerald and they are both severely wounded. Glass has his chance to kill Fitzgerald but remembers Hikuc's words and refuses to finally despatch his enemy. Instead he slides Fitzgerald into the river, where he floats downstream to the Arikara hunting party who kill him. Too weak to move, Glass watches the Arikara come towards him. He watches them pass by and sees Powaga with them.

*You will know them by what they do. Matt 7:16 Discuss.*

*How does this movie treat Native Americans?*

*What final messages are you left with?*

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