

Iron Man 2 (2010)

Rated PG-13. Our Ratings: V-6; L-1; S/N-2. Length: 2 hours 4 min.

*Pride goes before destruction,
and a haughty spirit before a fall.
Proverbs 16:18*

*Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please.
Luke 4:5-6*

Director Jon Favreau begins this Tony Stark works on his Iron sequel six months after the end of the first film. Tony Stark/Iron Man (Robert Downey) has brought peace to the world. Since going public the billionaire has become very popular with the people, but not with Senator Stern (Gary Shandling). The Senator summons Stark to a hearing at which he demands that the industrialist/hero turn over his technology to the military. Stark refuses, pointing out all that he has done for the world. At the same time he shames his rival Justin Hammer (Sam Rockwell) by pointing out his many failures to keep up with Stark.

Stark's resistance to the Senator is a triumph, but his private life is troubled. The arc reactor that is embedded in his chest keeps his damaged heart beating, but its palladium fuel is poisoning his body. Each day an indicator shows that he does not have long to live. Thus Tony appoints his loyal and smart assistant Pepper Potts (Gwyneth Paltrow) as the CEO of Stark Industries, assuring that the company and his legacy will be in good hands regardless of what happens to him. He fills the now vacant position of personal assistant with Natalie Rushman (Scarlett Johansson), a woman with a mysterious background that includes training in martial arts.

Meanwhile in Russia Ivan Vanko (Mickey Rourke) is working on a version of Tony's invention that will enable him to challenge the billionaire. We later learn that Ivan's father had worked with Stark's father and thus had access to the technology of the Iron Man suit. Believing that Stark had wronged his father, Ivan wants revenge. His first try at vengeance takes place during the race at Monaco where Tony is driving his own car. Chaos develops when Ivan attacks and wrecks Tony's racer. Ivan has added to the suit a device that allows him to harness electricity into two whip-like extensions. The battle between the two is at first uneven until Pepper can deliver to Tony the suitcase containing his Iron Man suit. He finally subdues Ivan, but the Russian will not remain in prison long. Smarting from his humiliation by Tony, Justin Hammer breaks Ivan out of prison and establishes him in his corporate laboratory after reaching an agreement that they work together. This will lead to their developing a line of super weapons that will eclipse Stark Industries and lead to an ultimate clash between Ivan and Iron Man.

This sequel could serve as a Midrash of Proverb's "pride goes before a fall." The first Iron Man film depicted the redemption of wealthy war profiteer Tony Stark (Robert Downey) as he uses his wealth and power to become the peace-enforcing Iron Man. What happens to a man when he sits at the pinnacle

of power, presuming to retain it for himself and become the sole arbitrator of law and order? It should not be surprising to Christians that such a man would become boastful and a bit arrogant, or that someone like Justin Hammer would strive mightily to topple him, Lots of sparking computer-enhanced combat (enough cars are destroyed to re-invigorate Detroit, were they real!), with some humor and a hint of a son still living in the shadow of his dead father and trying to come to terms with the latter's seeming neglect. We should mention that the stellar cast also includes Don Cheadle in the important role of Lt. Col. James "Rhodey" Rhodes, a loyal ally and friend who, at what Tony thinks will be his last birthday party, saves him from his own drunken folly; and Samuel L. Jackson as Nick Fury, who heads an agency called S.H.I.E.L.D and provides Tony with a box of artifacts from his father that will prove crucial.

Stan Lee of Marvel Comics has long provided us with a room full of super heroes who prove vulnerable to their human emotions and failings. In Tony Stark he has come up with a hero with no super powers but blessed with a powerful brain enabling him to develop the technology to become a super hero. As with all comic book tales, this one requires a great amount of suspension of belief—how in the world can any human body withstand all the bashing and heat of combat, no matter how strong the iron skin is—and fit such a suit of armor into a small suitcase? Now really! Nonetheless, this sequel is a good opportunity to think about and discuss what might happen to a person who attains great physical power and adulation usually enjoyed only by rock stars.

For Reflection/Discussion

1. What apparently has happened to Tony, judging by his boasts and claims? How is this a very human development?

2. Although he is depicted unfavorably, how is Senator Stern at least partly right in his concern over a private person holding such great power? Think of the famous dictum by Lord Acton, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Do you see this as an issue in the temptations faced by Christ in the wilderness, especially the last two? How is the division of powers (which can be traced back to the Calvinist tradition and its understanding of the Fall and Original Sin) in church and government an answer to the human tendency to abuse power?

3. How is what happens to Tony at Monaco similar to the warning in the proverb above?

4. How do the various characters around Tony show that they are good friends? Have you ever been saved from some folly by a friend, as was Tony by Lt. Col. Rhodes?

5. What do you think of the way in which Tony's issues with his father are handled in the film? Why does he need to hear his father's words "You are my best creation?" Why do you think that we so often fail to say these words to one another? If you have seen the recent film Remember Me, compare the two father-son situations and why the sons are so resentful of their fathers. How has your own relationship with parents affected you?