

# The Adjustment Bureau (2011)

Rated PG-13. Our Ratings: V -3; L -1; S/N -2. Running time: 1 hour, 45 min.

*Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15*

The Lord of hosts has sworn: David meets Elise the girl he will not forget in a hotel Men  
As I have designed, so shall it be; s Room., despite the  
opposition of powerful forces  
and as I have planned, so shall it come to pass: 2011 Universal Pictures

I will break the Assyrian in my land,  
and on my mountains trample him under foot;  
his yoke shall be removed from them,  
and his burden from their shoulders.

This is the plan that is planned  
concerning the whole earth;  
and this is the hand that is stretched out  
over all the nations.

For the Lord of hosts has planned,  
and who will annul it?

His hand is stretched out,

and who will turn it back?

Isaiah 14:24-27

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:7-14 (Also see 3:7-13)

Once again sci-fi writer Philip K. Dick provides the source for the work of a filmmaker, and this time director George Nolfi makes the most of it. Those who enjoy films that wrestle with big ideas while having their thirst for adventure and romance satisfied will enjoy this tale of a man desperately wanting to connect with the lovely woman he meets in the Men's Room of the Waldorf Astoria.

David Norris (Matt Damon) has just learned that he has lost a close race for one of New York's seats in the U.S. Senate. He goes into the Men's Room to refresh himself before facing his crowd of supporters and giving his concession speech. As he stands at the sink and pours out his thoughts aloud, he hears something, and discovers a woman (Emily Blunt) hiding in one of the stalls. She explains herself, and they are so drawn to

each other that they kiss. Then his campaign manager interrupts, telling him that he must speak to the crowd. Very reluctant to leave the woman, he asks her to write her name and telephone number on a slip of paper so that he can call her later.

However, their getting together is not to be. A group of men, all conspicuous in that they wear hats, are determined to keep the two apart. Their leader, known only as Thompson (Clarence Stamp), says that they must be kept apart if each is to keep to the Plan for their lives—the man to eventually become President of the United States, and the woman to be a great dancer and choreographer. The team strives mightily throughout the film to prevent David from ever contacting the woman.

David is so inspired by his encounter that he goes out and gives a memorable concession speech, one that many are convinced marks him as a potent future contender. Usually the team—we wonder for a while whether they are angels or demons—keeps their presence hidden from public view by operating at such lightning speed that no one can detect them. However, when David arrives at the office on his first day at his new job, he catches sight of the team working on the board members, erasing certain memories that might interfere with the Plan. David tries to run from them, but they catch him, taking the slip of paper with the girl's name and phone number and telling David about the Plan, as well as threatening that they will wipe out everything in his brain that makes him David if he tells anyone of their existence. The film then jumps to three years later as he continues, despite the Team's orders, to catch sight of the woman and reconnect with her. In a city of 9 million souls this will prove to be a daunting task, especially because he does not even know her full name.

What happens when he at last does spot her from the bus he is riding in makes for exciting watching because then the chase genre takes over, with the possibility of dire consequences should David reconnect with her. This is partly because he is

contemplating a run for the other seat now up for grabs in the U.S. Senate—and who knows what beyond that? Well, Thompson does, and he intends to make sure that the Plan for David and Elise Sellas (yes, we and David do at last learn the name of the dancer played so fetchingly by Emily Blunt).

Christians and others have long debated the issue of free will versus determinism, Fate and Chance, or Predestination and Choice. George Nolfi (and Philip Dick) plop the debate down into the midst of an exciting action/thriller romance, thus bringing the issue before a large audience. Judging by the positive reaction of the large preview audience of which my friend and I were a part, the film will be intriguing, even provocative for many discerning viewers wanting to think about their film fare.

## **For Reflection/Discussion**

1. How can this film be seen as a variation of the conspiracy theory genre?
2. What did you think about Thompson and his team when they first confront David? That they were demons, perhaps (as my companion and I did)? Compare Thompson's dangling the possibility of the Presidency and its power before David to the gospel story of the Temptation of Christ. Also, C.S. Lewis in his Screwtape Letters depicts demons as tempters who implant ideas and thoughts into their assigned persons' minds to dissuade them from following in the Christian way. (Shades of Inception!)
3. At what point did you come to realize that the above is not correct? Yet how does David conceive them? What do you think of their devotion to the Plan and the "Chairman" ?
4. If the Plan and those who seek to enforce it are benevolent, then what about David's resistance to it? Do you

think that plans for our own good should be forced upon us? If so, then is there such a thing as moral choice? In your theology, which seems dominant—the sovereignty of God or the free choice of human beings?

5. What do you think of the way in which the plot is resolved, and thus the dilemma of Plan and choice is dealt with? Christians knowledgeable of their history might recall the long controversy between Arminians and Predestinarians, the most notable example of this being the Methodists versus the Presbyterians, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries. (If you are a member of the latter denomination, how did the church's General Assembly try to square predestination with free will in their 1903 "Declarative Statement" dealing with the teaching in Ch. III of the Westminster Statement of Faith?)

6. If using this in a group, make two columns on a sheet of newsprint or a chalkboard under the headings: "Plan/Predestination" and "Free Will/Choice." With Bibles to refer to, ask the group to search the Scriptures and list as many Scripture passages as they can find that support one or the other. (Each group should have at least one concordance so that they can look up such words as "choose," "plan," "predestine," "decide," and such.) How do some theologians see this as the paradox of biblical teaching, comparable to that of the divinity and humanity of Jesus?

7. When defining God in Aristotelian terms the word "Unchanging" or "Unchangeable" is often used. How does the film contradict this? And Scripture, especially the O.T.? (See Jeremiah 18:5-10; Joel 2:12-14; Hosea 10; Jonah 3:8 vs. Malachi 3:6 among others.)

8. Compare this film's viewpoint with that of *Invictus* (and the poem that gives the film its name). What do you believe about a master plan and free will: do you think the film deals

with both extremes correctly?