

A man in a dark trench coat and sunglasses is shown in profile, looking down at his hands which are clasped together. He is standing over a city that has been completely destroyed, with only the skeletal remains of skyscrapers visible against a cloudy, hazy sky. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

THE BOOK OF ELI

STUDY GUIDE
BY CRAIG DETWEILER

BELIEVE

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THE BOOK OF ELI

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How far are we willing to go in response to God's call? What kinds of sacrifices would we make to defend the word of God? And how can we develop a greater appreciation for the gifts God has given us? This study guide offers a way to connect a riveting new movie with the timeless truths of Scripture.

The Book of Eli begins with a barren landscape. One determined man (Denzel Washington) walks across a post-apocalyptic wasteland. He is a man on a mission, protecting the last Bible on earth. Eli reads and recites from the Book every day.

Unfortunately, Eli is caught between competing forces. A few survivors struggle to rebuild society. Others rob and steal from innocent people. Will order emerge? Or will raw power prevail? What might form the foundation of a new civilization?

Denzel Washington stars as Eli, a righteous warrior, uncompromising in his commitment to truth, justice, and mercy. But will his narrow path be diverted by temptations along the way? What about those who seek to hoard knowledge, to hijack God's Word for their own selfish purposes? Eli reluctantly takes up arms to guard the precious Bible.

How do we protect and preserve the most precious things in life—our families, our food, our freedoms? Eli doesn't want trouble. Unfortunately, he must resist Carnegie (Gary Oldman) and his band of marauders. Carnegie rules a frontier town via threats and intimidation. He controls the local water supply. Claudia (Jennifer Beals) and her daughter Solara (Mila Kunis) try to live peacefully, but they are out-numbered by outlaws--until Eli arrives. He offers new-found hope.

Eli is wiser than those born after the nuclear annihilation. He can read. And he offers thanks for the gift

of life. Solara is drawn to Eli, intrigued by what he reads, how he dines, the poetic knowledge that pours forth from his mouth. How does Eli resist temptation and refuse to buckle under Carnegie's threats? What is the source of his almost supernatural power?

The Book of Eli provides thrilling action scenes with deep philosophical reflections. The movie earns its R-rating through swift and graphic violence. Yet, it also upholds the Bible as the font of wisdom and truth. It demonstrates how some might twist and distort that same Bible for personal profit.

As Eli, Denzel Washington embodies a different kind of hero, driven by divine calling. Directors Albert and Allen Hughes have created a distinctive look for The Book of Eli. The stirring script by Gary Whitta combines elements from classic westerns and sci-fi in surprising ways. The Book of Eli is thrilling and deep.





WHAT MATTERS MOST

OPEN

If a fire swept through your neighborhood and you had only minutes to leave your house or apartment, what would you grab? Of course, you would protect your family. Secure your pets. But what things would you try to take? What possessions are most precious to you?

Imagine a bleak future. What would be the most valuable commodities following a nuclear holocaust? The basic necessities rise in prominence—food, shelter, and clothing. Eli navigates that kind of scarce landscape, struggling to survive. Where would you turn for ongoing inspiration and encouragement? If our economic system collapsed, how would we reassign values to things? What matters the most?

READ: Romans 12:17-21

¹⁷*Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.*

¹⁸*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*

¹⁹*Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*

²⁰*Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.*

²¹*Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Jesus upset the economic system of his day. He upheld the notion of sharing with those in need,

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responding to their requests with gracious gifts. To those who lacked clothes, he offered his cloak. To his enemies, he offered another cheek. He questioned our investments, suggesting an alternative way to secure a future:

READ: Matthew 6:19-21

¹⁹Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

²⁰But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

²¹For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

APPLY:

What are your most precious possessions? What kind of treasures have you stored up? How can you invest in your eternal future?

DUSTED AND BUSTED

OPEN

Have you ever been overwhelmed? Suffered a crushing defeat? Perhaps you got dusted in a race or busted on the court. How did you respond to a humbling situation? Our character is often revealed amidst adversity.

It is far too easy to get inflated or puffed up. Young men can start to feel cocky or even indestructible. Athletes may feel they can accomplish anything. But as we've seen, one major mistake can unravel a life—via injury, hardship, or catastrophe.

What kinds of trials are you facing? We may discover how much we don't know about our job, about parenting, about balancing a bank account. God may send people or challenges our way that overwhelm us. We can respond to humbling situations by pausing, reflecting, and repenting. Or we can double down on self-reliance. The Book of Eli suggests that such self-confidence is not always wise. Particularly when a powerful man of God like Eli is involved. Judgment and humility may follow.



WATCH:

Eli prepares for a bar fight

In The Book of Eli, a tavern serves as the social hub, dominated by Carnegie and his henchmen. They are on a mission to find (and destroy) as many books as possible. Carnegie aims to consolidate his power by wiping out knowledge. Ignorant people are much easier to rule. They will not think to fight for their rights or to rise up against their oppressors.

The Bible is a subversive book. It causes people to question injustice. It suggests that God sides with the



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poor, the downtrodden, and the outcast. The Word of God upsets the social strata, freeing people to live up to their potential. And to take on those who exploit others.

When Eli is pushed, he shoves back. He quotes scripture to those who have seemingly no moral compass. While they relish the opportunity to fight, Eli delivers a word of warning. He draws upon God's strong condemnation in Genesis 3. The same anger that God exhibited toward Adam and Eve will be unleashed on those who still refuse to acknowledge the sovereignty of God or the sacredness of each other. To a frontier town, Eli corrects their sense of frontier justice. Eli takes off his gloves. And delivers a biblical body blow.

READ: Genesis 3:17-19

¹⁷ *To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'*

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

¹⁸ *It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.*

¹⁹ *By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."*

Eli levels the field of combat by reminding his enemies

how fragile and fleeting life can be. For those who feel indestructible or incorruptible, Eli offers a clear corrective. Our time on earth is fleeting. And our deeds (since the time of Adam) have been judged. It is tough to walk through this life. Work is draining. Toil takes a toll. We must remember our modest roots, living humbly before God, lest we pour judgment upon ourselves.

How to retain perspective? The Apostle Paul offers an effective attitude adjustment.

READ: Romans 12:3

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

APPLY:

When have you thought more highly of yourself than you ought? In what ways have you been humbled—reduced to dust? What arrogance might need to be renounced? What do we need to let go of before God can redeem it?

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ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

OPEN

Is it easier to be grateful in times of blessing or periods of struggle? America lived large for so many years. We were blessed with “bling”—all kinds of ways to flaunt our new-found wealth. But now, during an economic downturn, comes the real test of character (and our wallet). Are we more thankful now, than we were then?

In a culture of plenty, we may not appreciate the gifts that God has given us. But when we have little in our possession, we notice each bit of divine provision.

Having survived a nuclear holocaust, Eli is grateful for the gift of life. Even amidst trying circumstances, (like being imprisoned in a shady town!), Eli pauses to express his attitude of gratitude.



WATCH: Eli introduces Solara to the power of prayer—the simple act of saying grace.

Solara is intrigued by Eli’s surprising values system. Why does he reject the opportunity to exploit her? In a world where everything has a price, Eli holds him-

self (and Solara) to a higher standard beyond bartering. She wonders, “What was it like?” What was life like before the nuclear meltdown? Eli recalls, “People had more than they needed.” It was a time and culture of abundance. Unfortunately, Eli adds, “We had no idea what was precious.”

How do we understand the word, “precious”? What do we need to grasp God’s values? Note out how God uses the word “precious” to bless Joseph.

READ: Deuteronomy 33:13-16

¹³ And of Joseph he said, Blessed of the Lord be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath,

¹⁴ And for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon,

¹⁵ And for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills,

¹⁶ And for the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof, and for the good will of him that dwelt in the bush, let the blessings come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren.

God reminded his people where their blessings came from. There are “precious things of heaven.” We can see such beauty in the gift of fruit. What color, what variety, what splendor! What about all the precious things of the earth like the beauty of nature and the power of the mountains? God initially trained his people to pause and reflect, to remember where their



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provisions came from. Now, we are often so removed from the land, from the harvest, from fruits and vegetables that we forget how amazing such tasty varieties can be.

It took a catastrophe to slow down the survivors in The Book of Eli. Yet, one leader shows them how to pause and pray. He passes on that precious gift to the next generation. Thanks to Eli, Solara learns to take her time, to dine as an act of divine respect, as an extension of community.

APPLY:

Do we share God's perspective on what's precious? Are we grateful for each day, thankful for our daily bread? Can we pray the Lord's Prayer with honesty and sincerity?

Close by reading and reciting the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:9-13:

⁹*Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*

¹⁰*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*

¹¹*Give us this day our daily bread.*

¹²*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

¹³*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.*

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