

The Book of Eli movie points out a truth about America

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One of my favorite movies is *The Book of Eli*, starring Denzel Washington. Whether or not the writer of the story intended it or not, it speaks to me about a problem I see within the church at large in America.

The movie has been out long enough and is being replayed enough on television that I hope I don't spoil it for those who haven't seen it yet. If you haven't seen it yet, come back to this article after you have.

The story centers around Eli (Denzel Washington) in a post-apocalyptic era of time in which those who are still alive live in a chaotic, lawless world. Thirty years prior, there was a "flash" that changed everything, presumably a nuclear war.

Since that time, Eli has been walking west from one end of the country to the other, carrying a Bible. In one scene he explains how God spoke to him and led him to this Bible under a pile of rubble, the only one left in existence, and how God told him to travel west until he came to a place where God would direct him to take the Bible where it would be safe.

Eli is much like an Old Testament prophet anointed by God, given special powers as a fighter and an inner voice from God to lead him where to go. Along the way he kills many men, always in self-defense, as he protects the last remaining copy of the Bible. Later he explains that after the war, every copy of the Bible was destroyed, and some believed that the war was fought for the purpose of doing so.

The villain of the story is a small-time thug despot who wants a copy of the Bible because he believes it will give him special powers to expand his territory and control people. Eventually he shoots Eli and takes the Bible from him, only to discover that it is written in Braille, which by that time is a lost language.

Despite his wounds, Eli continues to travel west until he reaches the island of Alcatraz, where a well-defended group of good guys are rebuilding the lost library of the world so that society can regain the good things of the past, but they have not been able to find a copy of the Bible.

When Eli arrives, they ask if he has a copy of the Bible with him, and he assures them he does, asking them for a stack of blank paper. With a man sitting next to him with pen and paper, Eli begins to recite the Bible from memory, from the first verse of Genesis to the last verse of Revelation. When he finishes, the Bible goes to the printing presses, and Eli succumbs to his wounds.

To me, the allegory of this story paints a picture of where America is going, not only among the secular of society, but even among Christians – knowledge of the Bible is being lost. Secular society openly rejects the Bible as being the Word of God, but Christians are becoming so caught up in other functions of the church that they are losing that hunger for scripture that used to drive them to study and absorb God’s Word.

Not long ago a friend told me about a mission trip he had taken to Uganda, and about the poverty he saw. His heart went out to those people because he saw how they lived, and how many of the things that we take for granted – like a pair of shoes – is not owned by everyone. When he offered to come back to America and send them the things that they needed, they declined all of them, saying, “just send us Bibles.” There was nothing they would treasure or use more. They were hungry to learn all they could about their new-found faith.

In America, Christians are being dumbed down in their knowledge of scripture, and while there may be reasons it is happening, there is no excuse for it. It has been going on for a long time, and we are beginning to pay a price for it.

First, we allowed the Bible to be forced out of our schools, creating a knowledge desert among the generation of the sixties. When those children grew up, if they did not attend a church with a strong education ethic, they had nothing to pass on to the next generation. Now one of the commonest complaints about teaching Bible classes in church is that good and knowledgeable teachers are difficult to find. Another is that even if they could be found, few people are willing to put the effort into learning.

What a tragedy, and it is all occurring without the “flash” war. And while our churches are still leading many people to Christ, they are giving comparatively little guidance to new converts. We are creating a new generation of Christians in America whose roots are too shallow to pass the knowledge and understanding of scripture on to the next generation, and who are ill-equipped to defend the faith that made this country exceptional in the first place.

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