

On a mission with the last copy of KJV Bible: In a film starring Denzel Washington

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The Bible plays a starring role in *The Book of Eli*, a postapocalyptic action film starring Denzel Washington that opened in mid-January. A two-time Academy Award winner known in Hollywood for his Christian beliefs, Washington portrays a lone warrior making his way across a desolate American landscape defending the world's last copy of the King James Version of the Bible.

"This is a story about a man named Eli, who's been sent a message, who hears voices from God that told him to take this book, the Bible, across the country and to deliver it out West," says Washington in a movie trailer posted on ScreenVue.com, which provides movie clips for churches and ministries to use in their teachings.

Though in the vein of films like *2012*, a blockbuster about the end of the world as supposedly predicted by the Mayan calendar, evangelical movie buffs are touting *The Book of Eli* as a rare major studio release where the protagonist is unabashedly a Christian.

"How far are we willing to go in response to God's call?" Craig Detweiler, director of Pepperdine University's Center for Entertainment, Media and Culture, writes in a study guide written for Christian viewers of the film. "What kind of sacrifices would we make to defend the Word of God?"

The movie, which has Washington's character facing down villains who try to stop him, earned an "R" rating for graphic violence and coarse language.

"In following his mission he's been given by God, he becomes more and more violent in order to get the job done," Washington explains in the trailer. "This man, Eli, has a very difficult task, but he has faith. And he makes mistakes, as we all do. Someone said there's no testimony without a test."

The movie's hard edge may give some religious moviegoers pause. Angela Walker, director of producer relations for ChristianCinema.com, wrote that she pondered the movie's objectionable content for a month after seeing an advance screening before deciding the film's spiritual themes were its redeeming qualities.

"Personally, I want to support filmmakers who explore questions of faith in their films," she wrote. "For me, choosing to see this film is casting a vote for Hollywood filmmakers to keep making films about faith. It is telling them I will buy tickets to films they create about topics I'm interested in."

Detweiler pointed out that no words of profanity come from Washington's mouth. "He is clearly set apart as a holy character on a godly mission," he said. "So he acts as one would hope a man of God would act."

While Washington's character does resort to violence, Detweiler said, it is always in self-defense. "It seems comparable to the situation most of us find ourselves in—trying to follow God in a fallen world where profanity, violence and temptation is all around us," he said.

Screenwriter Gary Whitta told ChristianCinema.com that he spent a lot of time going through the Bible to find passages that Eli could quote at appropriate moments in the film.

Washington is the son of a Pentecostal preacher and attends the West Angeles Church of God in Christ in Los Angeles. The church's pastor is Charles Blake, who is presiding bishop of that denomination and served last year on the President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

The actor described *The Book of Eli* as both "a story about faith" and "a story about good and evil" with parallels to real life. "We're all a work in progress," he said in the trailer. "I think we're all on a journey on this earth to be better human beings and to hopefully follow the Word of God. That's about all any of us can ask for is to do the best we can with what we're given." -Bob Allen, *Associated Baptist Press*