

Preserved for Us

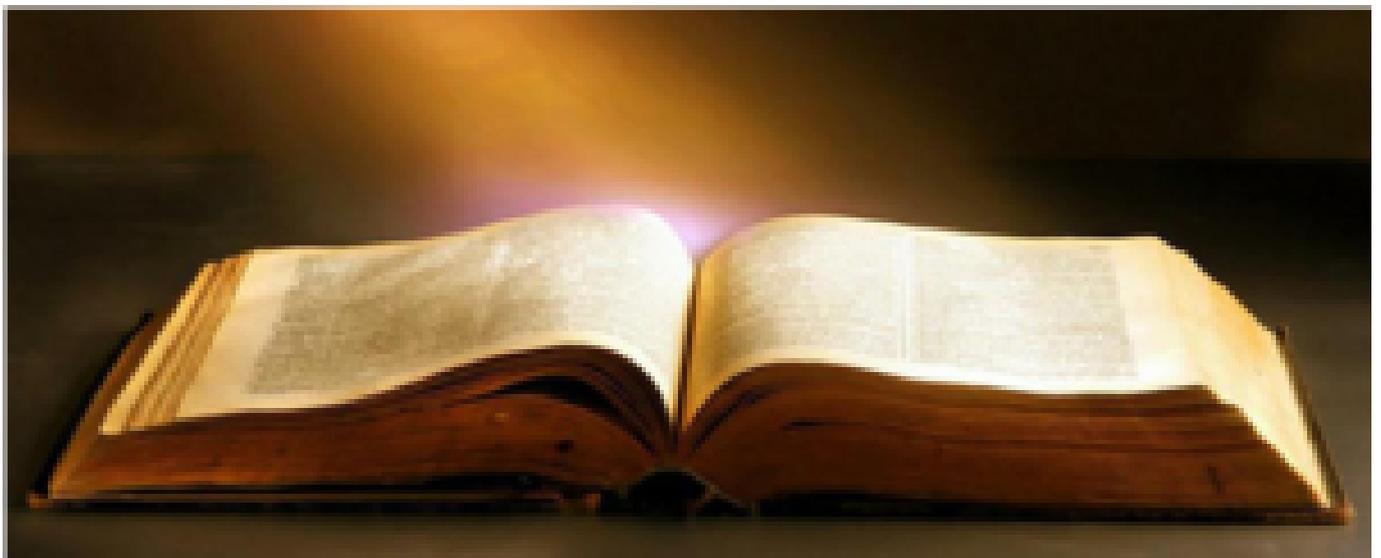
by Rolaant McKenzie



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The Book of Eli (2010) is an American post-apocalyptic action film that tells the story of Eli, a nomad wearing sunglasses and ragged clothes, traveling on foot across the wasteland of the former United States for 30 years after a nuclear war with a special, powerful book holding the secret to humanity's salvation.

On his long journey, Eli is blessed with uncanny survival and fighting skills that allow him to hunt wildlife, scavenge for supplies, and defeat highway bandits he encounters. Searching for water, he comes upon a dilapidated town ruled by Carnegie, the local warlord, who dreams of controlling people and building more towns using the power of a certain book, for which he has his henchmen search the desolate landscape daily to no avail.



Carnegie discovers that Eli has the book he has been seeking after overhearing Solara, the daughter of his mistress Claudia, repeating a prayer she learned from Eli. He orders his men to shoot Eli after he refuses to surrender the book, but the bullets miraculously do not harm him while Eli's amazing shooting accuracy killed many of Carnegie's men, with Carnegie himself being shot in the leg.

Eli escapes the town and is joined by Solara, who has also fled. She leads him to the town's water source so that he can refill his water supply and continue his journey. Eli explains his mission to Solara. He is carrying the last remaining copy of the Bible. All other copies were deliberately destroyed following the nuclear war. He was led to the book by a voice and directed to travel west to a place where it would be safe, being assured that he would be guided and protected on his journey.

Carnegie and his henchmen, in a caravan of still-functioning vehicles, catch up to Eli and Solara, and a fierce gunfight ensues that kills many of his men. But they manage to capture Eli and Solara and force them to yield the Bible. Carnegie then shoots him and leaves him for dead, taking Solara and his remaining men back to the town. But in transit, Solara manages to escape with one of the vehicles and returns to a seriously wounded Eli. Carnegie, with his remaining vehicles low on fuel, continues back to the town.

Later in his office, Carnegie opens the Bible and discovers to his dismay that he is unable to read it because it is written in Braille, revealing that Eli is blind. His leg wound has become septic, signaling impending death, and he is powerless against the people of the town, who rebel against his rule as they see that nearly all of his enforcers have been killed.

Solara and Eli drive west until they reach the Golden Gate Bridge, then they find a boat and row to Alcatraz Island, where they find a group of survivors who have dedicated

themselves to preserving what remains of literature and music. He tells the group's leader, Lombardi, that he has a copy of the Bible.

Eli amazingly dictates to Lombardi from memory the entire Bible, word for word, exactly, from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21. Some considerable time later, with this task done, Eli begins to succumb to his injuries. Before he breathed his last, he thanked the Lord Jesus for giving him the strength, guidance, protection, and conviction to complete the task He entrusted to him. Peacefully committing his soul to His care, his last words echoed those of the apostle Paul when the end of his time on earth was imminent:

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7)

Lombardi and his people, using his original transcription, are able to use the printing press at the facility to produce copies of the Bible. It was apparent that a world cataclysm and systematic destruction were unable to prevent God from preserving His word in the world, including the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Sadly, attempts to destroy the word of God are not limited to fictional stories or films. In history, there are examples of kings coming with conquering armies and authoritarian governments who sought to obliterate God's word from the face of the earth to direct worship to themselves and have absolute power over people.

Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes (215-164 BC), after a military campaign in Egypt, attacked and conquered Jerusalem in 168 BC, killing about 40,000 people, with the same number being sold into slavery, according to 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees, biblical apocryphal books.

Believing himself to be divine based on the title he ascribed to himself (Greek: Epiphanes, "God Manifest"), Antiochus IV

engaged in a massive campaign of repression against the Jews and their faith in God. He tried to force them to abandon their faith, adopt Greek customs, and worship Greek gods, including himself. He desecrated the Temple by erecting a statue of Zeus (who resembled himself) and sacrificing a pig on the altar. Furthermore, he commanded that anyone with a copy of the Scriptures turn them in to the authorities so that they could be destroyed. Many who were caught by the authorities adhering to Jewish customs such as circumcising their children, observing the Sabbath, or possessing the Scriptures were cruelly put to death.

The oppressive rule of Antiochus IV sparked a rebellion by Jewish fighters in 167 BC, led by Judas Maccabeus and his family. Later called the Maccabean Revolt, these vastly outnumbered fighters in three years, with God strengthening them, eventually defeated the king's forces and drove them out of the city and region. The Temple was cleansed, rededicated to the Lord, and returned to its proper function. The Jewish people to this day celebrate Hanukkah in commemoration of the victory and independence from Greek rule God granted them and the preservation of His word.

Diocletian was emperor of Rome from 284 to 305 AD. He believed in his own divinity, assuming the title of Lord and Master of the World, and demanded that his subjects worship not only the traditional Roman gods but the emperor himself. Perceiving Christians to be a threat to the stability of Rome and his rule because they refused to worship him or the Roman gods, he issued edicts forbidding Christians from assembling for worship, ordering the seizure and destruction of Christian property and places of worship, and demanding the confiscation of the Scriptures so that they could be burned. Christians who refused to comply with these edicts were put to death.

Near the end of his reign, Diocletian assumed that his drive to end Christianity was so successful that he erected a monument over a burned Bible inscribed with the words,

“Extincto nomine Christianorum” (“The name Christian is extinguished”). Diocletian even commissioned the creation of a medal with the engraving: “The Christian religion is destroyed, and the worship of the gods restored.”

However, after Diocletian’s reign, Constantine became the new Roman emperor in 306 AD. He attributed his ascension to the throne to a vision he had revealing that, under the sign of the cross of Jesus Christ, he would have victory. He declared himself to be a Christian, ended the persecution, and offered a sizable reward to anyone who would deliver a copy of the Scriptures to him. Despite Diocletian’s efforts, 50 copies of the word of God survived his purge, and they were offered to Constantine. He went on to commission the reproduction of the Bible.

In spite of their best efforts, despotic rulers such as the Greek king Antiochus IV and Roman emperor Diocletian were unable to utterly destroy the word of God, and they died like men, bringing their boasts of divinity to naught. But threats to the Scriptures have not always come from systematic efforts to suppress or extinguish them, but from civilizational collapse.

Maewyn Succat (commonly known as Saint Patrick) was born at the end of Roman rule in Britain, starting in the late fourth century. While the exact dates of his birth and death are uncertain and subject to debate by historians, it is believed through his writings that his work as a Christian missionary and bishop in Ireland took place in the fifth century.

Succat was the son of Calpurnius, a senator, tax collector, and deacon at the local church in a Roman British city, and grandson of Potitus, a priest from Bannavem Taburniae. According to *The Confession of Saint Patrick* (5th century), he described himself as not being an active believer, though he grew up in a Christian home. That changed when, at the age of 16, he was captured by a group of Irish pirates near his home

and taken to Ireland, where he was a slave for six years.

During his captivity, Succat worked as a shepherd, and his relationship with God was strengthened through prayer. It was at this time that he truly came to faith in Jesus Christ. He was introduced to Irish culture and developed a love for the people.

After six years, Succat heard a voice telling him to return home and that his ship would be ready. He escaped his master and traveled to a port 200 miles away. There, after Succat prayed, the ship captain was eventually persuaded to transport him back home.

His parents were overjoyed to receive their son back and did not want him to go anywhere else away from them, but God's calling on his life remained. Reminiscent of the vision the apostle Paul received to go to the people of Macedonia to preach the gospel to them (Acts 16:9-12), the Lord revealed to Succat in a dream that he should return to Ireland to preach the gospel.

Succat traveled to France to study in Auxerre and was eventually ordained to the priesthood and commissioned to go to Ireland as a Christian missionary. He faced hardship, danger, and many other challenges, but God used his experience as a captive to bring him to genuine faith in Christ and to equip him for his mission.

Bishop Patrick's work brought Christianity to Ireland, helped to safeguard the written word (especially the Bible), established centers of learning through the many monasteries that were founded, and helped set the pattern of missionary service leading to the promotion of the gospel far beyond Ireland. He can rightly be considered not only the patron saint of Ireland but also of archivists, librarians, and other information professionals who are tasked with preserving knowledge and making it accessible for the building of

society.

Just as an external computer hard drive preserves critical programs and files from the primary computer in the event it suffers a catastrophic breakdown of its operating system, God used the ministry of Bishop Patrick and his successors to transform Ireland into an “external hard drive” as Europe, the “primary computer,” entered the Dark Ages (about 500-1000 AD) that followed the fall of the Roman Empire. The knowledge preserved eventually spread back to Europe through the preaching of the gospel and helped to restart its civilization, paving the way for the Renaissance (14th-17th centuries).

David expressed his confidence in the power of God to preserve His word:

“The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O LORD, You shall preserve them from this generation forever.” (Psalm 12:6-7)

God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, stated that His word would stand forever (Isaiah 40:8) and that it would never fail to fulfill His purpose on earth (Isaiah 55:10-11). Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.” (Matthew 24:35) The apostle Paul spoke of the word of God not being bound (2 Timothy 2:8-9).

No other book in history has been so attacked or attempts made to extinguish it as the Bible, yet like a mighty anvil, it has worn out the many hammers wielded against it by devils and men, despotic rulers and governments, false prophets and religions, natural and manmade cataclysms, and civilizational collapse.

Stories like *The Book of Eli* and historical accounts such as the Maccabean Revolt, the Great Persecution of Diocletian, and Bishop Patrick’s evangelism of Ireland illustrate God’s gift

of His word to humanity and His providential hand, sometimes using the unlikeliest means and people, in maintaining its existence and integrity through the centuries, an important reason to believe what it says and teaches.

God has preserved His word for us, especially the gospel message, which will not fail to accomplish His purpose of bringing forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God, and eternal salvation to all who believe in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

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