CHRISTIAN MOVIE REVIEW: Ben-Hur (2016)



- **GENRE:** Action / Adventure
- **ACTORS:** Jack Huston, Toby Kebbell, Rodrigo Santoro, Nazanin Boniadi, Ayelet Zurer, Morgan Freeman
- **RATING:** PG-13
- **LENGTH:** 2 hours, 5 minutes
- **PARENTAL NOTE:** *Not intended for children.* No bad language or questionable situations. But there is the violence. This film does not have extreme or gratuitous violence.[1. In my opinion, the violence is neither extreme or gratuitous. Of course, this is a subjective standard, with which others may disagree. There is no gore—disembowelments; lingering shots on dismemberments, or the like. This is an action / adventure film, not a horror film.] The violence will be too much for very young children or the squeamish of any age. What you might call "XTV" (Extreme Trampling Violence). That is, men and their horses get run over by horses in the chariot race. There is a sea battle scene in which men are killed—some set afire. Also, Rome's armies are shown battling the barbarians. Again, all disturbing images for the very young or squeamish.

- **INTENDED AUDIENCE:** *This movie is intended for older children and adults, because of the violence.*
  httpv://www.youtube.com/watch?v=df2VrzS1HCs

- **GENERAL PLOT:** (No spoilers) A wealthy Jew, Ben-Hur, from a prominant family grows up with an adopted brother—a Roman named Messala Severus. Messala goes away, fights in Rome's wars, gets promoted, and returns to Rome. Ben-Hur won't name the rebels who oppose Rome, and ends up being sentenced to serve as a slave in the galley of a Roman battle ship. He lives, returns, and rides a chariot in the new Jerusalem circus against Messala Severus, and several others. The time frame coincides with the latter days of Jesus Christ's life as a man on earth, leading to his crucifixion.
- **REVIEW:** First and most importantly, this is NOT the classic 1959 version of Ben Hur, staring Charlton Heston.[1. Both films are based on the 1880 novel by Lew Wallace, *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ.* The 1959 film was at the time of its release the second-highest-grossing film in history at the time after Gone with the Wind. It won a record 11 Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director (Wyler), Best Actor in a Leading Role (Heston), Best Actor in a Supporting Role (Griffith), and Best Cinematography – Color (Surtees). It was the first of three films to have won 11 Academy Awards, including the Best Picture Oscar. The second was *Titanic (1997)* and the third was The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King (2003). Several of the categories won by "Titanic" and "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" didn't exist in Ben-Hur's day, making its 11 wins that much more impressive. The chariot race required 15,000 extras on a set constructed on 18 acres of backlot at Cinecitta Studios outside Rome. Eighteen chariots were built, with half being used for practice. Shot over a period of nine months at Rome's Cinecitta studios. The outdoor set of the chariot race circus was the largest built for a film at the time. The chariot scene alone cost about four million dollars, or about a fourth of the entire budget, and took 10 weeks to shoot.] Any remake of a great film will necessarily face

comparisons to the "original."[2. The famous 1959 academy award winning version, staring Charlton Heston, was not the first film or only other film based on this story. Others include, *Ben Hur* (1907 film), a one-reel silent film adaptation; *Ben-Hur* (1925 film), an MGM silent film adaptation starring Ramon Novarro; *Ben Hur* (2003 film), an animated direct-to-video film adaptation featuring the voice of Charlton Heston; and *Ben Hur* (miniseries), a television miniseries that aired in 2010.] So although many will conclude the 2016 remake of Ben-Hur falls short of the 1959 classic, the more recent film is a great movie in its own right. It has plenty of action, adventure, and excitment.[3. I had assumed—aparently incorrectly—the action scenes were more computer-generated images (CGI) than real horses pulling chariots. The movie's cast and crew, including director Timur Bekmambetov, explained the steps they took to make the race look as realistic as possible. The actors were dragged by real horses at high speeds around the arena while a truck with a camera attached tracks their movements from the side. (SOURCE: CinemaBlend. http://www.cinemablend.com/news/1524049/the-new-ben-hur-doesnt-use-cgi-in-its-chariot-race-and-this-awesome-video-proves-it)] which intersect with a generally accurate historical and Biblical account of the days leading to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The movie character of Jesus Christ plays a limited, but important, role in the plot. His message of love and forgiveness are primary themes in the film. Although not really a "church movie," my church appropriately selected Ben-Hur (2016) for viewing by our youth group. Being almost an hour and a half shorter and 57 years younger than the academy award winning version, made the 2016 adaptation an easy choice.

- **RECOMMENDATION:** No one expected this rendition of Ben-Hur to win an academy award for Best Picture. But it is definately a good movie, and well worth watching.

- **RATING (out of 5 stars): ★★★★★**

MOVIE RATING SYSTEM:

Start with zero (0) out of five (5) possible STARS

- Add one STAR if it looks like the movie was made by professional film makers—not 4 or 5 guys with a camcorder.
- Add one STAR if the film has a story, theme or plot (optional for horror and/or zombie movies); or if the movie makes any sense.
- Add additional STARS for special effects, acting, good moral message(s), realistic zombies, scariness,
  interesting theme or plot and the like.
- Subtract STARS for extreme bad acting, COMPLETELY awful themes/messages, overall INCREDIBLE trashiness, graphic and persistent lewdness, and the like.