

Ben-Hur Remake in Progress in Matera

Emily Hayes (February 13, 2015)



Matera, famous city in southeastern Italy, attracted more tourists Monday as a month long shooting began for the remake of the historical film Ben-Hur. Most of the filming takes place in the Sassi, famous ancient cave dwellings in the center of the city.

[Matera](#) [2], city in southeastern Italy famous location of The Sassi, attracted more tourists Monday as a month long shooting began for the remake of the historical drama film Ben-Hur. The director, [Timur Bekmambetov](#) [3], chose Matera because of the famous ancient cave dwellings in the historical center.

This setting has been used for other famous films, such as Pier Paolo Pasolini's [The Gospel According to St. Matthew](#) [4] and more recently the 2004 film [The Passion of the Christ](#) [5] by Mel Gibson. Sassi is also recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



The ancient stones in Sassi create the atmosphere of ancient Jerusalem and the time of Christ, where the earlier scenes of the story take place. Residents in Matera were chosen as some of the extras. Another staggering 1,000 extras were picked to play Roman soldiers.

[Morgan Freeman](#) [6] was cast as Ildarim, the man who teaches Ben-Hur how to become a champion of chariot racing. Boardwalk Empire's [Jack Huston](#) [7] was cast as the lead.

This remake of Ben-Hur is based more on the novel Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ by Lew Wallace, which was published in 1880, than the 1959 film version, which starred Charlton Heston and Jack Hawkins.

The film follows the story of a Jewish prince, Judah Ben-Hur, and Messala, the son of a Roman tax collector, with the story of Jesus Christ unraveling in the background. Messala travels to Rome to be educated for five years, and returns as the Roman Empire is invading Jerusalem. His beliefs and attitude have changed to reflect the Roman Empire, and he laughs at Judah and his religion.

A procession passes by Judah's house, and a roof tile falls and strikes the governor. Messala then betrays Judah by manipulating the accident so that he is sold into slavery, and possibly death, on a Roman warship. Even worse, his mother and sister are thrown into prison for life. Judah vows revenge, which leads to his participation in the chariot races.

The script was originally written by Keith Clarke, and rewritten by John Ridley, known for 12 Years a Slave. Mark Burnett, Sean Daniel, and Joni Levin worked as producers on the film, along with Keith Clarke, Jason Brown, and Roma Downey as the executive producers.

The expected release date of the film is February 26, 2016.

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- [2] http://www.tripadvisor.com/Tourism-g187772-Matera_Province_of_Matera_Basilicata-Vacations.html
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- [4] <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0058715/>
- [5] <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0335345/>
- [6] <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000151/bio>
- [7] <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1658935/>