

HOW WILL CHRISTIAN KNIGHTHOOD BE PORTRAYED IN THE MOVIE – THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

By Reverend Doctor Sir Terry Stair

The Movie kingdom of heaven is set in between the second and third crusade, a time leading up to the **Battle of Hattin** in 1187 when Jerusalem was taken back by Salahadin. In the extended four hour version that will come out in the future, there is an ecumenical group called "**the Brotherhood of Muslims, Jews and Christian,**" that is introduced, promoting an image of cross-faith kinship. The movie version accurately takes place in **1185**. To lend drama to the plot, it follows Sir Ridley Scott's embellishment of **Balian**, an alleged blacksmith in rural France, who is supposedly claimed as the illegitimate son of a Crusader knight, **Godfrey of Ibelin**, who has temporarily left the Holy Land in search of him, and who is subsequently taken to his father's estate in Jerusalem. This is not factual, but admittedly the result of Sir Scott's taking license with the story and character to give the movie dramatic flair. Balian has lost his faith after the suicide of his wife, and his murdering of a cruel Catholic Priest, which has left him feeling abandoned by God. Balian seems to slowly regain it at the court of saintly **Baldwin IV, the King of Jerusalem** (who actually died at the young age of 22 before the events in the movie take place), who practices and preaches tolerance between Christians and Muslims. However, zealots on both sides destroy Baldwin's 'kingdom of heaven' and when his brother-in-law **Guy de Lusignan** succeeds him, the scene is set for a confrontation with the **Saracen general Salahadin (Saladin)** which leads to Balian's heroic leadership in defending the people in the siege of Jerusalem.

The hero of Sir Scott's version of this historical event is this young man – Balian. He is a common man who is knighted by his dying father, and who, after his father's death, becomes the lord of Ibelin. This is set at the time when the battle over Jerusalem is hotly contested. The king of Jerusalem (King Baldwin IV, 1161-1185), is depicted in the movie as kind and God-fearing. He is dying of leprosy. His ambitious and power hungry brother-in-law (**Guy of Lusignan**) is in line to be his successor due to his marriage to the king's sister. Sir Guy, of the Order of the Knights Templar, either cannot control his underling, **Sir Raynaud of Châtillon**, another Templar, or, as the movie portrays it, is in league with Raynaud. They secretly conspire to incite a war between the Christians and Muslims, which will ultimately, hopes Sir Guy, bring him glory and reknown when he succeeds Baldwin as the king of Jerusalem. A triumph over Salahadin would do this for him. Ridley Scott's script depicts Raynaud and Guy de Lusignan, as "the arch-villains" in the movie. This is the part you need to understand to follow the movie.

There is an accord or peaceful covenant between the King of Jerusalem and Salahadin, the allegedly kind and gracious leader of a Muslim army of 200,000 strong. The two leaders were on friendly terms and both honored one another and desired peace in the region. In fact, in the movie if any of the **Templars** broke the treaty by wreaking violence on any Muslims, they were executed by the King of Jerusalem, to the ire of many zealous knights who believe they are under orders from the Pope to destroy all Muslims. The knights oft repeated motto “**God wills it**” which seemed to justify the violent acts of both Christian knights and Muslim warriors, was first used by **Pope Urban II** in his speech that called for the first crusade. The sense of his speech followed this line of reasoning:

- The infidel Turks are advancing into the heart of Eastern Christendom; Christians are being oppressed and attacked; churches and holy places are being defiled. Jerusalem is groaning under the Saracen yoke. The Holy Sepulchre is in Moslem hands and has been turned into a mosque. Pilgrims are harassed and even prevented from access to the Holy Land.
- The noble race of Franks must come to the aid their fellow Christians in the East.
- The West must march to the defense of the East; rich and poor alike. The Franks must stop their internal wars and squabbles and go instead against the infidel and fight a righteous war. To do so would be to take up the cross of Christ.
- God himself would lead them, for they would be doing His work. There will be absolution and remission of sins for all who die in the service of Christ.
- Here they are poor and miserable sinners; there they will be rich and happy. Let none hesitate; they must march next summer. God wills it!
- **Deus lo volt! (God wills it)** became the battle cry of the Crusaders.

Urban II’s speech continued to set the spirit of each successive crusade, and was exploited to justify many horrific acts of violence against both Muslims and Jews. Not all Christian knights behaved badly, but the fact of history is that too many did. The same could be said about Muslims. Many were indeed savage and barbaric beyond comprehension, and had been so for 1500 years before the first crusade was ever fought. But not all were, as was supposedly the case for Salahadin. Sir Ridley Scott depicts him as a compassionate, caring and gracious ruler among both Muslims and Christians (according to Muslim revisionist historians). Muslim legend says that during the third crusade, when he was battling King Richard, the news came to him that Richard had become ill. Salahadin is said to have had a caravan of his men bring ice down from the mountain and offered it to the king in an act of honor and kindness.

Sir Ridley Scott's version of this event borrowed heavily from Sir Walter Scott as well as Muslim historians. In fact, Salahadin was not well known by Muslims for a long time until he was dug out of the archives and reinvented and cast as a Muslim hero. Now he has become such a revered historical figure in the Middle East that former Iraqi president **Saddam Hussein** had portraits of him put up in his palaces, and **Al-Qaeda** leader **Osama Bin Laden** (who has gone so far as to declare himself a descendent of Salahadin), has cast himself as a leader in the mold of Salahadin (see below under - **Was Ridley Scott's Version of this Event Historically Accurate?**)

In the movie, Sir Raynaud refuses to honor the accord between his king and Salahadin, and so repeatedly attacks Muslim pilgrims until he attacks one who is a family member of Salahadin (in the movie, it is his sister). This obviously enrages Salahadin, who retaliates by mustering an army of 200,000 to conquer Jerusalem and reclaim it. King Guy leads his army of 1200 knights and 20,000 foot men out to meet them. This became the **Battle of Hattin** in 1187. It took place, interestingly, on July the 4th. Unfortunately, the crusader army was destroyed and the true cross was taken by Salahadin's Muslim army. Many knights were beheaded. **Raynaud of Châtillon** was beheaded by Salahadin himself.

Let me say something about this period and the men who were supposed to be Christians. After the battle was over, and terms of surrender were negotiated, the city was surrendered. Those Christians could pay for their freedom were to leave Jerusalem and go back the way they came. Seven thousand of the poor were freed for a lump sum payment. The rest were sold into slavery because they could not afford to pay their ransom. The Christian Patriarch Heraclius and his priests each paid for their own ransom, then left the city laden with gold and silver and relics of the church by the cartload. They could have paid for everyone, but did not. Saladin's brother al-Adil was so moved by the sight that he asked for a thousand captives as a reward for his services. Saladin granted this, and al-Adil immediately set them free. To his credit, Salahadin in his turn freed all the aged. What a shame that Christians did not show as much charity as the heathen did, not even to their own brethren. And these were leaders of the Christian Church!

Sir Ridley Scott shows his PC bias in this movie by projecting on Balian, who is the closest thing to a true and honorable knight you are going to get, committing adultery with a married woman. He admittedly created Balian for sheer drama. There was nothing factual about this scene at all. So why tarnish the character of the moral hero of the story with a moral failure that adds nothing to the story whatsoever? Why create in him a crisis of faith? Knights were sworn to uphold a Biblically endorsable chivalry based upon a strong and abiding faith. These kinds of things do not reflect an accurate and historical portrayal of history, but the cynicism that dwells in the hearts of the Hollywood elites.

After watching *The Kingdom of Heaven*, I came away wondering how the world will view Christianity, and Christian knights in particular, from how these were depicted in the movie. Knighthood in general, was characterized as largely cruel, ambitious, merciless and immoral, with virtually no Biblical faith whatsoever. Such stereotyping of Christian men, many of whom were steadfast and upright, and who were, for all intents and reasons, going to deliver their brethren and Christianity's most holy sites, will incite a certain cynical bias against knighthood and chivalry, two things I believe are badly needed in our morally relativistic culture today. The oath of a knight in the movie trailer (Be without fear in the face of your enemies. Safeguard the helpless, even if it leads to your death; that is your oath. Rise a knight... rise a knight!) has been gutted of anything that would or could be construed as... religious or godly. The actual oath was: *Be without fear in the face of your enemies. Be brave and upright that God may love thee. Speak the truth always even if it leads to your death. Safeguard the helpless and do no wrong. That is your oath. Rise a Knight!*

The orthodox Christian faith was the very cornerstone of true knighthood and the code of chivalry. In one scene our hero says - "If this is the Kingdom of Heaven, let God have it!" Well any good knight would know that a knight swore an oath to God, the King, and the church, so this depiction of a good knight (as if holding to a steadfast faith in the midst of trial is optional to being a good knight) is again filled with the bias of Scott's cynicism. It should not surprise us that Hollywood would produce a film that would not be favorable to God or Christianity, let alone be in the least bit accurate as far as history goes.

Was Ridley Scott's Version of this Event Historically Accurate?

Scott's own claim was that *The Kingdom of Heaven* would be "historically accurate" and designed to be "a fascinating history lesson". However, Prof Riley-Smith, who is Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Cambridge University, said the plot was "complete and utter nonsense". He said that it relied on the romanticized view of the Crusades propagated by Sir Walter Scott in his book *The Talisman*, published in 1825 and now discredited by academics. Riley-Smith said,

"It sounds absolute balls. It's rubbish. It's not historically accurate at all. They refer to The Talisman, which depicts the Muslims as sophisticated and civilised, and the Crusaders are all brutes and barbarians. It has nothing to do with reality."

Prof Riley-Smith added:

"Guy of Lusignan lost the Battle of Hattin against Saladin, yes, but he wasn't any badder or better than anyone else. There was never a confraternity of Muslims, Jews and Christians. That is utter nonsense."

Dr Jonathan Philips, a lecturer in history at London University and author of *The Fourth Crusade and the Sack of Constantinople*, agreed that the film relied on an outdated portrayal of the Crusades and could not be described as "a history lesson". He continued –

"The Templars as 'baddies' is only sustainable from the Muslim perspective, and 'baddies' is the wrong way to show it anyway. They are the biggest threat to the Muslims and many end up being killed because their sworn vocation is to defend the Holy Land."

Dr Philips said that by venerating Salahadin, who was largely ignored by Arab history until he was reinvented by romantic historians in the 19th century, Sir Ridley was following both Saddam Hussein and Hafez Assad, the former Syrian dictator. Both leaders commissioned huge portraits and statues of Saladin, who was actually a Kurd, to bolster Arab Muslim pride. Prof Riley-Smith added that Sir Ridley's efforts were misguided and pandered to Islamic fundamentalism. "It's Osama bin Laden's version of history. It will fuel the Islamic fundamentalists."¹

¹ These comments came from an article by Charlotte Edwardes entitled Ridley Scott's new Crusades film 'panders to Osama bin Laden'