

Ben hur and gladiator

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



Ben Hur and Gladiator both portray Rome as a vast, ever expanding Empire. However, each film's Christian story tendencies pulls the depiction of Rome into slightly different lights. Ben-Hur is clearly an explicit Christian tale with a legitimate portrayal of Christ (although he appears infrequently) and uses obvious Christian symbols and concepts.

The story is told through the eyes of an outsider, a Jewish prince in a territory overcome by Roman invasion, who gradually assimilates to Christianity after Rome failed him and Jesus saved his family from leprosy. The narrative structure, and the title of the book the film was based on, Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ, are about as Christian as literature/film can get without explicitly quoting the bible. I believe the explicit Christian tale taints the audience's view of Rome, after all (historically) the Romans persecuted early Christians.

Romans are an assimilated force that are good to their own and extremely harsh towards 'others'. In early days, Christianity was composed largely of 'others' who did not wish to join the polytheistic Roman religion for a variety of reasons. This historical context presses on the narrative and is perhaps why the Romans are portrayed so negatively.

Gladiator doesn't contain any of the explicit religious imagery present in Ben-Hur, however it is still arguably an implicit Christian tale. In this story, the protagonist is not such an extreme outsider as in Ben-Hur, but Maximus is still a Spaniard. This creates distance between other senior officers and Maximus and is what ultimately allows him to be our story's hero.

The Roman Empire is still portrayed as flawed, at least from a modern perspective, but it is not as harsh a portrayal as in Ben-Hur. Maximus gives

<https://assignbuster.com/ben-hur-and-gladiator/>

the ultimate sacrifice for the people and is declared “ a soldier of Rome” which arguably lightens the audience’s opinions on Rome. Marcus wanted Maximus to rule instead of his son because he believed that Commodus was not fit for the role since, he was corrupted by politics, which is evident throughout the film.

Maximus was advanced in sword fighting which helped with the fights they had to do. As we saw in one scene, when Maximus won the sword fight, Commodus asked who was behind the mask and once he said it was him. Commodus was surprised. Commodus didn't kill him because the crowd was having Maximus's back. This showed that Maximus was not fighting for money or wealth but for the people of Rome and himself. As Marcus said Maximus was a leader and protector.

At the end Maximus killed Commodus which is what everyone in Rome including the rulers wanted. The ending gave Rome the peace and freedom it needed, so that it could thrive and become a better place. Maximus also ended up dying but he found peace and reunited with his family in heaven. The Roman Empire was treated more as a faith than a governing body, and both Messala and Commodus had power trips over ruling Judea and Rome.

Each character had their own hubris; Commodus killed his father in exchange for the throne, and Messala threatened then severed his relationship with his childhood friend for power. This power-hungry trait is shared between both characters, and it seems to be their downfall. Perhaps the power that Messala thought he possessed outweighed that of God, hence why he would mock the Jewish who believed in a God and an afterlife.

Hence why I lean towards the perspective that the Roman Empire was more than the governing body at that time, it was more like a faith or religion, and those who did not follow were punished. Messala took matters into his own hands, like he was playing God and determined the fate of Miriam and Tirzah after accidentally injuring Gratus. He imprisoned the women until they are plagued with leprosy, all because he wanted to use them as an example to demonstrate his power.

Messala threatens Judah that if he reveals that Messala knows the truth behind this accident and tries to kill him, he would force Judah to witness his mother and sister's crucifixion. It seems that a trend is occurring, with Messala's threats and only his interests in mind, and the Romans are represented by this selfish antagonist.

In my opinion, the purpose of the crucifixion scene was likely to run parallels between the Christianity in the variation of the story of Jesus as Ben-Hur, and it would make sense because most Americans in the 50's was Protestant. The lower-class citizens were all seated closer to the arena, as the risk of getting sprayed with blood was a common thing. Also, I found that Gladiator showed a good amount of realism in terms of how violent the games could be.

However, they were even more gruesome than what was depicted in the films. You can see online that some of the weapons and tools used did insane amounts of damage. Romans were masters of torture and weaponry and were highly advanced for their time period Gladiator highlights Rome

through the Emperor who wants the best for his state and chooses Maximus as his successor over his son.

Maximus, a martyr for the Roman empire in ways, dedicates his life to avenging the deaths of his loved ones and restores the Roman Dream, as the Emperor wanted. Even the undefeated gladiator lost to Maximus. Though the Romans were depicted as powerful and victorious, when they choose to be, the Romans can be merciful. Maximus frees the gladiator instead of killing them and is deemed “ Maximus the Merciful.” They are undefeated, powerful, and heroic.

Maximus does not seem to support these bloody battles though; he and the late Emperor shared similar thoughts in that Marcus had these fights banned. Whereas Ben-Hur depicts Romans as controlling and governing state and empire that made inhabitants assimilate to their lifestyle and beliefs, like when Messala chooses his empire and controlling the rebellion of Judea over his friendship with Judah. He declared war with his childhood friend after Judah hesitates to reveal strong Jewish figures behind the rebellion, as Messala demanded Judah to essentially betray his own people.

Messala both commits this selfish and unsympathetic act to a childhood friend he just connected with through beautiful memories of their childhood, which highlights how unkind the Romans are and their “ means to an end” attitude. Even Commodus from Gladiator had a power trip, he too thinks he can have whatever he wants, even if it means killing his father, Maximus’ wife, and son to get what he wants. Such a crazy time period to live in. In conclusion, this film had always emphasized the repetition of a theme while

rendering individual heroism, that is, Freedom. The person who truly gave freedom is not someone else but lies in ourselves.