

# Kingdom of heaven | summary | analysis



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Kingdom of Heaven by Ridley Scott is a modern film about the Crusades, set in 1184 centered on Balian of Ibelin. The film is presented as a conscious piece of historical fiction and the majority of the film follows closely with historical records. (Wikipedia) William Monahan, the film's writer, has included several fictional characters and dramatized the relationships between characters to increase the film's artistic and commercial appeal. Ridley Scott makes an effort to promote Christian/Muslim peace in the Holy Land and downplays traditional Religious viewpoints. The film's cinematography is visually stunning and the battle scenes are intense. (Radcliffe) Overall, the film is enjoyable to watch, although it is quite long. The Directors Cut Edition has a running time of 189 Minutes. Kingdom of Heaven is a fictional historical action film with the main theme of promoting peaceful coexistence between religions.

The film begins in a remote French village as Balian, a blacksmith, is devastated over his wife's suicide. Balian meets a group of Crusaders led by Baron Godfrey of Ibelin, who reveals himself to be Balian's father. This part of the storyline deviates from historical records because Baron Godfrey is a fictional character and Balian is from Ibelin. (Wikipedia Balian de Ibelin) After killing the town priest, Balian joins Baron Godfrey on his Crusade to Jerusalem with hope of redemption and forgiveness for his sins. During Balian's quest to Jerusalem he is knighted and after his father Godfrey's death, is recognized as Baron of Ibelin in Jerusalem.

Scott depicts Jerusalem as a city where Christians and Saracens live in peace under King Baldwin IV. King Baldwin IV the Leper ruled Jerusalem from 1174-1185. Jerusalem's political arena is complex, as the Knights Templar, led by

Guy de Lusignan and Raynald of Châtillon, Tiberius, the Marshal of Jerusalem, and Princess Sybilla all are seeking to increase their own power. The Knights Templar led by the films Arch-Villain, Guy de Lusignan are the primary Villains and portrayed by Scott as mercenaries, seeking profit and attacking Muslims because “ God wills it.” (Kingdom of Heaven 2005)

Princess Sybilla and Balian begin a relationship when she visits Ibelin. This part of the story is fictional and my feeling is that Scott intended to make the film more appealing to women by adding a romantic affair between the main characters.

The Knights Templar attack a Muslim trade caravan that is under protection of Saladin, the leader of the Muslim army. Saladin is a Muslim historical figure that led the Muslim Army in opposition to the Crusaders and ruled over Egypt, Syria, and Damascus. (Maalouf 1984) This attack sets into motion a course of events that ends with Saladin gaining control of Jerusalem in the film’s final scenes. Saladin attacks Kerak, Raynald’s castle as retribution for his crimes. During the battle, Balian and his men are captured while trying to defend the villagers. Because Balian had displayed mercy by releasing one of Saladin’s servants earlier in the film, Saladin releases Balian and a temporary truce is negotiated between the Muslims and Christians. This is an example of the film’s main theme and prominent sub-theme of doing good deeds for others. Shortly after the battle, King Baldwin passes away, leaving Sybilla’s son, Baldwin V King of Jerusalem. Historical records indicate that Saladin did attack Kerak in 1183 and 1184, but was repelled by the Crusaders. (Wikipedia Siege of Kerak) In addition, King Baldwin IV did not pass away immediately after the Siege of Kerak, he passed away in 1185.

Scott indicates a bias toward the Muslims in this part of the film; he depicts the Knights Templar and Raynald as warmongers and the film's villains.

Raynald and Guy are against peace between the Christians and Muslims.

King Baldwin V's reign over Jerusalem is temporary because Princess Sybilla euthanizes her son out of compassion, as she finds that he is also a Leper.

This part of the film is fictional, King Baldwin V was not a Leper, but he did pass away in 1186, just one year after becoming King. (Wikipedia King

Baldwin V) Sybilla crowns Guy de Lusignan as King and he immediately

instructs Raynald to wage war against Saladin. Raynald and Guy lead the

Knights Templar to battle against Balian's advice. Saladin massacres the

Raynald's Army at the Battle of Hattin and personally beheads Raynald. This

was Saladin's plan all along; he knew Guy and the Knights Templar would attack first. After Balian survives an assassination attempt ordered by Guy,

he joins Tiberius in Jerusalem which is now virtually defenseless against

Saladin's Army. By showing the aftermath of the Battle of Hattin, that God has punished an evil man and his followers' belligerent actions with death,

Scott reinforces the film's primary theme of encouraging peaceful

coexistence between religions and sub-theme, that doing good deeds for others is being religious.

Tiberius and his men abandon Balian and the people of Jerusalem, leaving no

Knights to defend the city. This part of the film shows how Balian's values

have changed during the film. Before Balian left on his Crusade, he had lost

faith in religion and himself, and now he is a confident and selfless leader,

who stays in Jerusalem only to "defend the city's people." (Kingdom of

Heaven 2005) Scott shows a bias toward the Christian point of view in the

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film's final scenes and audience should feel a strong sympathy to the Christians as they are defending innocent people. In preparation for the battle with Saladin, Balian Knights many of the villagers to improve morale. Balian is outnumbered by Saladin's men and his only hope is to protect the city long enough to force Saladin to make a deal to protect the people of Jerusalem.

Balian and his men successfully withstand a barrage of bombs from Saladin's Trebuchets and attacks from his Army for three days. During the battle, Balian is a successful Commander, although he is injured while fighting with a Muslim. On the third day, Saladin is able to breach Jerusalem's walls overpower Balian's men. Balian is able to negotiate the peaceful surrender of Jerusalem with Saladin only because he threatens to destroy the city and all religious artifacts, both Muslim and Christian if the battle continues. This scene is based in fact as records indicate that Balian de Ibelin did negotiate the surrender of Jerusalem to Saladin, but that Saladin was offered a ransom for all Christians to leave Jerusalem unharmed. (Wikipedia Balian de Ibelin)

The film ends with Balian and Sybilla in the remote French Village where the story began. King Richard of England and his men ride along searching for the "defender of Jerusalem" and Balian replies, "I am a blacksmith."  
(Kingdom of Heaven 2005)

Ridley Scott conveys his primary theme with his final message that "Nearly a thousand years later, peace in the Kingdom of Heaven remains elusive." Throughout the film we see evidence that Scott is promoting peaceful coexistence between religions. King Baldwin IV states, "A man must choose to do good deeds instead of evil" and "Your Soul is in control of your own."

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Balian consistently supports this theme by resisting violence, by refusing to fight over his horse, releasing Guy de Langston after the final duel and many other times during the film. Ridley Scott has disguised Kingdom of Heaven as a visually pleasing historical action film; Scott wants his audience to realize the futility of war and the value of peaceful coexistence between all religions.

<http://blogcritics.org/video/article/movie-review-kingdom-of-heaven1/>

Maalouf, Amin. 1984. *Crusades Through Arab Eyes*. Online E-Reserve Edition. London: Al Saqi Books.

*Kingdom of Heaven: Directors Cut Edition*. 2005. Directed by Ridley Scott. 189 Min. Century City, CA: 20th Century Fox. Blu-Ray.