

Blu-Ray Review: 50th Anniversary Ultimate Collector's Edition of Beloved 'Ben-Hur'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 6, 2011 - 3:26pm

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CHICAGO – It may not even be Halloween yet, but Warner Brothers is in full holiday gift set mode, hoping that one of their lavish packages will make its way on to your wish list. Will it be the glorious seventh anniversary edition of “Citizen Kane”? Or perhaps the upcoming gift set of “Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory” with collectibles and a 144-page booklet? For many, the choice will be simple — a film with an iconic actor that set records at the 1959 Oscars as any in history — “Ben-Hur,” strikingly transferred in 1080p and available in a Limited Edition box set that will look fantastic on any hardcore movie fan’s shelf.



We were lucky enough to get our hands on the Ultimate Collector's Edition of “Ben-Hur” and while some of these WB holiday releases often feel perfunctory (another release for “Christmas Vacation”?), this one seems perfectly in line with the scope of one of the most beloved epic adventures of all time. Like the film it basically serves as tribute to, it’s enormous with three discs, hours of special features, and noteworthy physical collectibles inside the giant box set. “Ben-Hur” is one of the first movies that most people consider when one thinks of the word “epic.” It makes sense that the Blu-ray release would be epic as well.



Ben-Hur: 50th Anniversary Ultimate Collector's Edition was released on Blu-ray on September 27th, 2011
Photo credit: Walt Warner Bros.

Of course, it's always about the actual movie for most fans and so the key question is how the HD transfer for “Ben-Hur” turned out. I'll admit to having a few issues here and there with overly-polished WB catalog releases in the past but that's not the case here. “Ben-Hur” looks beautiful with a restored and remastered picture that was painstakingly transferred frame by frame from the original 65mm camera negative. The film looks and sounds amazing, spread over two Blu-ray discs to minimize compression and present the film in a way that you truly have never seen before.





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Photo credit: Walt Warner Bros.

Box sets this massive are bound to come with a wide selection of special features but it's always impressive when a studio includes never-before-seen material and the kind physical items that don't seem like mere afterthoughts but actual collectibles for true fans of the product. Such is the case with "Ben-Hur," which not includes a feature-length documentary about the making of the film ("Charlton Heston & Ben-Hur: A Personal Journey") but a replica of the never-before-seen personal journal of Heston himself that chronicles the entire production of the film over 128 pages.

And that's just the beginning. A 64-page hardcover book with production photography rounds out the physical box set but the third disc of special features is where fans will spend most of their time. Hold on tight — the third disc comes with an entire other film, and not just the documentary: The 142-minute, 1925, black & white, silent version of "Ben-Hur." It also includes vintage documentaries, newsreels, and highlights from the 1960 Oscar telecast that truly made "Ben-Hur" a legend. That's right. This is one of the few films that could be called legendary. And it's been given the legendary Blu-ray treatment it deserves.

Synopsis:

High-definition Blu-ray hits greater heights with the arrival of the visual splendor, thundering action and towering drama of this record-setting winner of 11 Academy Awards® including Best Picture. Charlton Heston brings a muscular physical and moral presence to his Best Actor Oscar®-winning role of Judah Ben-Hur, a Jewish nobleman in Palestine whose heroic odyssey includes enslavement by the Romans, vengeance against his tormentors during a furious arena chariot race and fateful encounters with Jesus Christ. Best Director Oscar® winner William Wyler masterfully grips the reins of an enduring and spellbinding spectacular.

Special Features:

Disc 1&2:

- o Commentary by Film Historian T. Gene Hatcher and Charlton Heston
- o Music-Only Track Showcasing Miklos Rozsa's Award-Winning Score
- o Theatrical Trailers

Disc 3:

- o New Feature-Length Documentary Charlton Heston & Ben-Hur: A Personal Journey
- o 1925 Silent Version - Thames Television Restoration with Stereophonic Orchestral Score by Carl Davis
- o 2005 Documentary: Ben-Hur: The Epic That Changed Cinema
- o 1994 Documentary Ben-Hur: The Making Of An Epic
- o Ben-Hur: A Journey Through Pictures - Audiovisual Re-creation via Stills, Storyboards, Sketches, Music and Dialogue
- o Screen Tests
- o Highlights from the 1960 Academy Awards Telecast
- o Newsreels

"Ben-Hur" stars Charlton Heston, Jack Hawkins, Haya Harareet, Stephen Boyd, Hugh Griffith, Martha Scott, Cathy O'Donnell, and Sam Jaffe. It was released on Blu-ray on September 27th, 2011.



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