

NAXOS
AudioBooks

**CLASSIC
FICTION**

Lew Wallace
Ben Hur

Read by **Jeff Harding**



NA237512D

1	Ben Hur and Messala meet and part	9:47
2	The fateful tile falls	10:16
3	The road to the galleys	3:36
4	In the galley	4:40
5	On board the galley	8:44
6	The sea battle	6:53
7	In the water	8:35
8	Ben Hur – citizen	5:54
9	The house of Simonides	11:35
10	Messala again	9:19
11	Preparations	11:26
12	The chariot race begins	8:46
13	The race is won	9:00
14	The hidden cell	12:32
15	Discovery and shock!	7:11
16	Return to the house	5:30
17	Ben Hur knows the truth	7:36
18	The Nazarene approaches	6:27
19	Healing and reunion	6:02
20	Full circle	4:00

Total time: 2:38:14

Lew Wallace

Ben Hur

Lew(is) Wallace was born in Brookville, Indiana, on April 10 1827. During the Civil War, he rose to the rank of major-general. He practised law, was elected to the state senate and was appointed governor of New Mexico in 1878. He was minister to Turkey from 1881–1885, and also served as governor of Indiana.

But it is as a novelist that Lew Wallace is best remembered. As early as 1843 he had begun, under the influence of Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*, to write a novel set in Mexico, which was finally published in 1873 as *The Fair God*. Later books included *The Boyhood of Christ* (1888); *The Prince of India* (1893) and *The Wooing of Malkatoon* (poem, 1898).

Ben Hur: A Tale of the Christ was published in 1880. It was an instant success and brought Wallace huge popularity, selling over two million copies – making it, perhaps, the first American blockbuster. It combines the sweep of an epic work with fast-moving, gripping scenes of action and subtle, totally convincing characterisations.

The descriptions of life as a galley slave and, of course, the famous chariot race, are as immediate today as when they were

written. The struggle of the early Christians is mirrored by Ben Hur's struggle for personal growth and fulfilment, but the book is above all an action story that shifts and moves swiftly, with drama and pathos. Who can forget the description of Ben Hur's mother and sister being found, incarcerated in their leprous cell? The horrors of leprosy are described in graphic detail, at a time when there was as yet no cure.

Wallace's authoritative and grandiose prose set the seal on this popular classic. This was the book that Anne of Green Gables was admonished for reading, under her desk at school.

Two spectacular motion pictures were made of *Ben Hur*: in 1925 and, perhaps most famously, in 1959 with Charlton Heston in the title role. It is also interesting to note that the chariot race was, for many years, a staple of Barnum and Bailey's Circus.

Notes by Lesley Young

The music on this recording is taken from the NAXOS catalogue

LISZT TASSO/LES PRELUDES
Polish Radio National Symphony Orchestra/Halász

8.550487

Cover picture: *The Chariot Race*, Alexander von Wagner.
Courtesy Manchester City Art Galleries.

Lew Wallace

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Ben Hur could be said to be the first American blockbuster. When it was published in 1880, it sold over two million copies and was translated into numerous languages. It combines all the best elements of popular classic, epic and action story against a background of authoritative historical detail. The pace and immediacy of *Ben Hur* was the basis of its appeal to film-makers – Charlton Heston's portrayal of the title role became one of the classics of the cinema. Wallace's original novel has been largely forgotten now, but as this vivid reading shows, the story, together with the sweeping rhythm of the writer's prose, make it ideally suited to the audiobook.



Jeff Harding is one of the most active American actors based in Britain. He is regularly seen in film and TV but he maintains an interest in fringe theatre. He is particularly active in voice-over and radio. Having competed in rowing for many years, he still lives by the Thames and rows regularly – an appropriate sport for the reader of *Ben Hur*.

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