

Amid Hollywood's Christian Movie Revival, 'Jesus Film' Gets Total Makeover for New Generation

Film critics have declared 2014 as the "year of the Bible" with the success of films like *Son of God*, *Noah* and *Heaven Is for Real*.

These blockbusters scored millions at the box office. Upcoming films *Exodus* and *Mary, Mother of Christ* are also expected to do well when they hit theaters in December.

But it is a more than 35-year-old biblical film that has landed a place in *Guinness Book of World of Records*.

A Powerful History

Campus Crusade for Christ's *The Jesus Film* has been translated into more languages than any film in history. It's also helped lead more than 200 million people to Christ.

The 1979 production is based on the Gospel of Luke. CRU Executive Director Erick Schenkel recently spoke with CBN News to discuss the film's history and its future.

"At first it had a theater run in the United States. We thought, 'Great! People are getting to see the story of Jesus,' " Schenkel told CBN News.

"But then as we saw Him use it in language after language around the world and saw the potential and then began to build strategies around that, it has just been a big part of Campus Crusade's work globally," he added.

Before his rise to executive director, Schenkel spent 11 years

in Central Asia working with *The Jesus Film*.

“They didn’t think Jesus was for them, but when they saw *The Jesus Film* in their own language, all the Central Asian languages, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek and saw Jesus speaking their language, they understood that Jesus saw them and loved them,” Schenkel said, recalling that time.

“And so we saw movements of people coming to Christ in every one of these people groups,” he said.

Inside CRU’s Orlando, Florida, offices is a map that helps tell the story of *The Jesus Film*. It has been translated in more than 1,200 languages and viewed around the world more than 6 billion times.

“The amazing thing is there still places in the world where when we translate this film, it becomes the only film in the language of the people watching it—1,200 language translations,” he said.

“[For] a very large percentage for those people, it is the only film they have ever had in their language, where they see the people on the screen, speaking the words that they speak every day,” he added. “The words their mother spoke to them when they were sitting on their mother’s knee as a child.”

Re-Engineering From Scratch

There’s certainly no denying the power of the gospel message. But for some on the mission field, CRU’s 35-year-old mission tool was losing its luster in the age of high definition and surround sound.

Kary Hagen is a sound engineer with The Jesus Film Project.

“We have other products and there were other things that we could offer. But *The Jesus Film* is really the core. It’s the Gospel of Luke, condensed into two hours,” Hagen told CBN News.

"It has the most Scripture of any product we have and it's kind of near and dear to my heart, so it has been disappointing to hear that in places in Europe or Asia, we are not really using this film anymore. It doesn't really work for us," he said.

Hagen and film engineers have been working for more than 10 years to restore the entire film.

He described the process as a "tedious effort. And the sound effects, layer upon layer. The birds, the wind, the cloth noises, crowd noises."

"It is like painting a picture, really, with sound. Layer upon layer of sound that you take for granted when you watch a movie," Hagen explained.

"It is just like of course the outdoors is going to sound like that. The people are going to sound like that. But we built the sound from nothing," he added. "We built all the sound from scratch. And then a new musical score, which is unique. You just don't see that in Hollywood or in restoration projects."

Unbelievable Reach

It's a labor of love, completed just in time for the film's 35th anniversary.

"Thirty-five years, there have 6 billion viewings of *The Jesus Film*. Now some of the people that viewed it have passed on and some people have seen it more than once," Schenkel told CBN News.

"But 6 billion viewings of the film and over 200 million people have indicated they wanted to become followers of Jesus after seeing the film," he said.

"So the reach is just more than we could have asked and it really has been a privilege to see how God has used this

tool," he said.