



ISSUE

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Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN OF
THE OL-
SEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter

Brady McAlister

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ryan Ferguson

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Walker McAnear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Justin Smiley

Kevin Wise

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

The Chosen (Season One): A Review

By Kyle Pope

If you are a user of any type of social media or streaming service most likely you have seen ads for a series called *The Chosen*. Perhaps, if you are like me, you are cautious of any film portrayals of biblical events—especially when they seek to illustrate the life of Jesus. At the suggestion of our son, my wife and I recently watched all eight episodes of the first season. Please allow me to offer some thoughts and impressions about it for any who are considering watching it or may have already seen it.

What Is It? Unlike a movie you can rent or go see at the theater, this is actually a series that focuses on the life of Christ. Reportedly, it is the first multi-episode and (according to all plans) multi-season production addressing the life of Jesus. It is accessible through an app that can be downloaded for free from app providers on different platforms available to smartphones and tablets. The episodes are free, but the production is “crowd-funded”—that is, they can only make them as they receive viewer contributions to fund upcoming episodes. While those who wish can purchase DVDs, most watch the series on their mobile devices or “cast” it to a large screen television through a number of different methods.

Who Made It? The series is the creation of a young film maker named Dallas Jenkins, who is the director and co-writer of the series. Jenkins is the son of religious writer Jerry B. Jenkins, co-author of the thirteen books in the *Left Behind* series which popularized Premillennialism in modern culture for the last few decades. While Jenkins identifies himself as an “Evangelical,” so far, I have seen no overt attempts to promote Premillennial concepts in the first eight episodes. The app offers a separate section from the actual episodes called “Deep Dive.” This features extended interviews in which

Jenkins discusses each episode with an Evangelical professor, a Catholic priest, and a Messianic Jewish rabbi. During these interviews he explores “what did we get wrong and what did we do right?” While I cannot agree with everything that is said in these interviews, it is clear that Jenkins believes in the absolute inspiration of the biblical text. Any creative artistic coloring he has provided in the series was done cautiously striving to avoid anything contrary to biblical principles and our knowledge of first-century culture and conditions. In light of what we can usually expect these days from Hollywood, I appreciate that.

What They Got Right.

Let me start with the positives. Unlike many modern religious films, the portrayal of Jesus in this series does not shy away from the tough stuff. Like the Jesus of Scripture, the series has Jesus teaching of the coming of final judgment and warn-

ing of eternal punishment. He tells the Parable of the Dragnet (Matt. 13:47-50) and the discussion about those who died when the tower in Siloam fell, which concludes, **“unless you repent you will all likewise perish”** (Luke 13:2-5).

The series has a powerful way of making familiar stories come alive in a way that many may relate to as never before. Peter, a hardened fisherman whom Scripture records first telling Jesus, **“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”** (Luke 5:8)—sees his life transformed when he recognizes that Jesus truly is the Messiah, who can fill his empty boats with fish (see Luke 5:1-7) and make him a fisher of men. Nicodemus, a Pharisee committed to the **“tradition of the elders”** (cf. Mark 7:3) and a respected member of the Jewish council (see John 3:1-21; 7:50-51)—confronts the life-changing consequences of what he learns from his night meeting with Jesus about being **“born again”** (John 3:3, 7). Matthew, whom the film portrays as a gifted fastidious young man with Asperger’s syndrome—ostracized from his family and countrymen because of his career as a tax-collector (cf. Matt. 9:9-13)—leaves behind all that he understands to follow One who is like no one he has ever seen before (cf. John 7:46). According to Jenkins, who identifies himself as being on the Autism Spectrum, this portrayal of Matthew has received more positive feedback than anything else in the series. Those with similar conditions can relate to one of Jesus’s disciples in a way they never imagined before.

These types of touching portrayals of a Jesus that smiles, laughs, and becomes deeply involved in the lives of those He calls to follow Him is quite powerful. The healings of the leper (Luke 5:12-14), the paralytic lowered through the roof (Mark 2:1-12), and the casting out of demons from Mary Magdalene (cf. Mark 16:9) are moving scenes that may bring tears to the eyes of the viewer. Old and New Testament Scriptures runs



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throughout the series offering the viewer Old Testament background for many New Testament events. *The Chosen* takes these accounts off the two-dimensions of the written page and allows the viewer to see a three-dimensional Savior and His disciples in ways they may not have been able to in the past.

“What They Got Wrong.” As mentioned above, this was something Jenkins repeatedly asked the religious consultants he interviewed (and apparently regularly consulted during production). Actually, I would probably address this a bit differently. *The Chosen* attempts to do something that Jenkins himself recognizes is difficult to do carefully—establish character background in order to understand what we read in the biblical text. Some will see this as adding to Scripture (cf. Rev. 22:18-19), but Jenkins is emphatic that he is not trying to do that. Certainly, many characters in Scripture had experiences that shaped them before they were introduced into the biblical text. Is there a careful way to portray this background? Jenkins tries to establish plausible backgrounds (keeping within what is known) to lead into the biblical events.

This is tricky business, fraught numerous pitfalls and dangers. For example, Scripture records that Jesus cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9), but it does not tell us when and how this happened. *The Chosen* imagines that Mary was a troubled, demon-possessed woman whom even Nicodemus could not help with her condition. Yes, some Jewish leaders cast out demons (Matt. 12:27). Could Nicodemus have tried and failed? Perhaps, but the Bible doesn't say that. In *The Chosen* Jesus first confronts Mary in a drinking establishment—which Jenkins's Jewish consultant advised him would likely not have existed first-century Palestine. Yes, Jesus went to sinners, but Scripture never describes Him being present as sin was taking place. *The Chosen* imagines that Simon Peter gets behind on taxes, leading him to fish on the Sabbath (another choice Jenkins Jewish consultant advised him against) and then conspires with the Romans to betray other Jewish fisherman. Yes, Peter was a **“sinful man”** (Luke 5:8), but none of these things are recorded in Scripture. In *The Chosen*, a repentant Mary Magdalene leads the Sabbath celebration meal in a home with Jesus present. This likely reflects the pressures of our culture to allow women to exercise leadership in religious matters—something Scripture prohibits (cf. 1 Tim. 2:10-11). Jenkins's Jewish consul-

tant advised him yet again that this would not have happened.

The Evangelical consultant was troubled by some dates used in Old Testament flashbacks and New Testament events he felt were inaccurate. Apparently, some of this was accidental and some of it was the result of loosely trying to choose between disputed dates. Those familiar with Scripture will note that the miracle at the wedding feast in Cana (John 2:1-11), described as **“the beginning of signs”** (John 2:11), is not the first miracle *The Chosen* portrays Jesus performing. This reflects a question scholars have over whether the changing of the water to wine was the *first* miracle or the *first public miracle* (cf. Matt. 4:23; John 21:25)—a discussion portrayed as taking place among His disciples. Scripture does not record such a discussion. *The Chosen* speculates about details of the past marriage conditions of the Samaritan women at the well, which are not in Scripture (John 4:1-42). *The Chosen* imagines that Thomas was one of those who provided the wine at the feast in Cana when it ran out (John 2:1-11). Scripture doesn't say that.

An episode Jenkins acknowledged was the most speculative portrays Jesus (before His public ministry began) finding Himself surrounded by children who begin flocking to Him as He works



as a carpenter (cf. Mark 6:3). He is playful with the children, encouraging them to serve God faithfully, be obedient to their parents, and teaches them things that will later be part of His public ministry. At one point, He asks them to say the *Shema* (pronounced “shmah”), the Jewish prayer still repeated by modern Jews—“**Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength**” (Deut. 6:4-5;

cf. Mark 12:29-30)—tearing up as He hears them say these words. Undoubtedly, this is a very touching episode! Yes, Jesus welcomed children (cf. Matt. 11:16; 18:3; 19:13-14; Mark 9:36; 10:16). Yes, undoubtedly things like this must have happened, but the particulars of this as portrayed in *The Chosen* are not in Scripture.

Conclusion. So, should you watch *The Chosen*? Do I recommend it? That depends. Compared to other movies and television shows we are now offered it is definitely a breath of fresh air. There is no foul language. There is no immodesty. Scripture and faith are not mocked but embraced! However, the danger comes in the areas where artistic license is taken. Because something *could* have happened doesn’t mean we should let our minds paint it as a fact that it did happen. Will viewers distinguish biblical fact from creative imagination? That’s the danger!

To his credit, Jenkins’s hope is that *The Chosen* will move people to open their Bibles and read the inspired accounts in order to compare (and test) what the Holy Spirit records with what has been portrayed in the series. If you and your family will do that, watching *The Chosen* may well be a good way to encourage further discussion and study.



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