

# White Paper The Chosen & Jesus.net

The Chosen is an exceptionally high-quality film series about the life of Jesus and His followers. The series was born from the desire to tell the story of the real Jesus in a way that is both authentic and relevant. What started as a crowdfunding project has now grown into a global phenomenon that has reached more than 150 million people and is inspired by the gospels. And the number of viewers is growing every day.



## Why does Jesus.net stand behind The Chosen?

As Jesus.net we like to work together with everyone who puts Jesus at the center and tries to make Him known in a relevant way. That is how we came into contact with the makers of The Chosen: The Come&See Foundation. This foundation aims to introduce 1 to 3 billion people to the authentic Jesus. Come&See guarantees the production of the series and its translation into hundreds of languages.

They also want people to take follow-up steps from the series. A consortium has been set up for this purpose. Jesus.net is part of this consortium together with 5 other organizations – YouVersion, Alpha, BibleProject, CRU and OneHope. Jesus.net offers appropriate follow-up steps for seekers to meet Jesus – from The Chosen – and end up

at His church. We are allowed to show the series via our website and with our additional content about Jesus, we reach and help people who want to know more about Jesus. We see up close how Come&See tries to work in a biblical way. We also see that many people are inspired by the series to follow Jesus.

## Critical questions about The Chosen

Sometimes we get questions about the reliability of the series. To start, we want to answer some of these questions to remove any doubts. Feel free to make your own choice after that in whether or not to watch The Chosen.

*Collaboration with different denominations, is that possible?*

- **Criticism:** Some criticize The Chosen's collaboration with different faith traditions, including Catholic and Mormon influences, fearing that this could dilute the biblical message.
- **Response:** Director Jenkins explains that the series is focused on sharing the message of Jesus with the broadest possible audience, without compromising the core values of the gospel. The goal is to give people an encounter with an authentic Jesus and to encourage them to follow Jesus and get to know the Bible. Together, we want to stay true to the core and not be tempted to promote a specific denomination.

*Is the series Biblical?*

- **Criticism:** It is said that approximately 95% of the content of the series is not taken literally from the Bible, meaning that much of what is depicted is fiction.
- **Response:** The Chosen is a fictionalized and dramatized depiction of the lives of Jesus' followers, based on and inspired by the Gospels. As such, it is never intended to follow the literal texts of the Bible. In fictionalized adaptations of Biblical events, creative interpretation is needed to make characters and stories more accessible to viewers. Director Jenkins explains that the storylines are designed to remain believable and plausible within the framework of Biblical history, while inviting viewers to learn more about Jesus. Instead, the series encourages people to investigate the Bible, and specifically the Gospels, for themselves.

*What is the influence of Jonathan Roumie – the actor who plays Jesus?*

- **Criticism:** Roumie's Catholic background and interest in certain spiritual practices could influence the way he portrays Jesus, which some viewers see as problematic.
- **Response:** An actor's personal religious beliefs do not necessarily have to influence the message of the work. There are several films about Jesus, where much can be said about the actors. In the Netherlands, something similar happened with the actors of The Passion. Shouldn't they be of impeccable behavior? Preferably so, in itself. But nobody is perfect – that's what the whole

gospel is about. We all need salvation. Even the Bible was written with, by and about people who made all kinds of mistakes. Roumie's role in *The Chosen* is based on the Bible and he strives to portray Jesus as authentically as possible. He himself is very aware of the influence that the role brings with it. He is a devout Christian. He has indicated that playing Jesus deepened his own faith and encouraged him to live more consciously according to Christian values. Roumie says that the role has brought him closer to God and that this is reflected in the way he portrays Jesus.

*Is the Slogan "Get Used to Different" confusing?*

- **Criticism:** This slogan is seen by some critics as a promotion of a "different" or "wrong" Jesus, which could lead to confusion.
- **Response:** The slogan "Get Used to Different" is meant to indicate that Jesus' message and way of life are different from what is considered "normal" in the world. This ties in with the Biblical image of Jesus: Jesus who was radically different from the religious and social norms of his time.

*Are there any spiritual New Age influences?*

- **Criticism:** Some critics suggest that the series is attempting to contribute to a global spiritual movement similar to New Age ideas, focusing on "healing" and "revival" without emphasizing the core of sin and repentance.
- **Response:** *The Chosen* focuses on telling the story of Jesus as described in the Gospels and seeks to inspire viewers to have an authentic relationship with Jesus. Emphasizing Jesus' call for forgiveness, love, and healing is consistent with the biblical message. The series does not claim to start a revival, but hopes to encourage people to follow Jesus and change their lives.

## Challenges in Making *The Chosen*

After highlighting a number of criticisms, we would like to take you through a number of challenges that the makers of *The Chosen* have chosen to tackle.

The challenge of translation

True to the Bible... This is where it gets tricky. Because when are you faithful to the Bible? When you follow it exclusively to the letter, or when you also allow for some interpretation and filling in? And when you try to follow and hold on to the heart of the story? And what are the criteria then?

For example, consider the story of the Good Samaritan. It is one of the parables that Jesus told his listeners. A metaphor for what life with Jesus may look like, and a good example of a story that teaches us a deeper lesson without having to take it literally. In fact, if we were all to literally wait for an injured traveler on our way, we would miss the point of Jesus' story. He is concerned with our heart attitude on the road of life, with everyone we meet. In this way, we are faithful to His lessons. We do not take it too

literally, but interpret the meaning, based on what we know about Jesus, how we know Him and what He himself explains.

Something similar happens with Bible translations. Some are very faithful to the source text, such as the Statenvertaling, but also the Naardense Bijbel. Other translations are more faithful to the target text and are more in line with the spoken and understood language of the time, such as Het Boek and the Groot Nieuws Bijbel. There are also many variations between the two poles of translation approaches – closer to the source text or closer to the target text.

Whatever the approach, translators cannot avoid a certain degree of interpretation. Even if you want to be as faithful to the source text as possible, you will sometimes have to opt for a sentence structure or the interpretation of words that are better understood in our language. Simply because the structure of the original text is too alien to a modern readership.

#### *The challenge of dramatization*

Something similar is happening in the production of films or series about the life of Jesus. For example, the film *The Life of Jesus* is famous, which follows the Gospel of John (albeit in a translation) word for word. The American LUMO project has also recorded the gospels in a similar way.

The literal representation of the Bible text is its strength, but it must also be interpreted. Who ultimately knows with which emotion, intonation or intention a Bible text should be depicted or spoken? Even then, the makers must rely on their own insights and be able to account for the artistic choices they make. That is of course always a risk. But should we just leave it at that? After all, *The Life of Jesus* film has literally reached hundreds of millions of people – and changed them.

#### *Faithful to the heart of the story*

The makers of *The Chosen* hope to do the same with their series. But they do choose a different way of ‘translating’. A little more target-text-oriented, so to speak. Choosing a little more space for interpretation, for filling in open spaces. With the risk of missing the mark – whether they really do, or mainly in the eyes of critics.

Creator and inventor Dallas Jenkins has been questioned about this several times. Although *The Chosen* takes a certain creative space in developing characters and storylines around the biblical text, Jenkins strives for theological and spiritual fidelity to the heart of the gospels. Jenkins uses various strategies to do this:

##### *1. Consulting with Experts*

- Jenkins has assembled a panel of theological and historical advisors to review and advise on the scripts.
- The panel includes experts such as Messianic Rabbi Jason Sobel, Catholic priest Father David Guffey, and Biblical scholar Dr. Doug Huffman.



- These advisors check the scripts for historical accuracy and theological consistency.
- Season 4 also includes Orthodox Jewish scholar David Nekrutman to enhance cultural and religious authenticity.

Dr. Jesse Stone is the chair of the Global Theological Review Board for Come&See and a consultant on adapting Scripture for biblical fiction. In his blog about the choices made in developing *The Chosen*, he states, "It is essential to keep in mind what the show is and what it is not. It is not a historical documentary but a historical drama. Its primary purpose is not to educate but to entertain and engage the audience while remaining faithful to the source material." With that in mind, there are three dimensions to consider. Stone quotes colleague Douglas Huffman, another expert consultant on the scripts: "[He] reminds us that *The Chosen* often tries to balance three things: biblical fidelity, historical plausibility, and character reliability."

## *2. Script Process*

- The show's writing process begins with direct consultation with the Gospels.
- Is then carried through extensive prayer and reflection.
- Followed by identifying key Biblical events as the basis for episodes.
- And completed by developing additional storylines that are as likely to fit within the Biblical context as possible.

## *3. Balance between Accuracy and Creative Freedom*

- Jenkins acknowledges that *The Chosen* uses artistic interpretation, but also strives conscientiously.
- To capture the spirit and intent of the Gospels.
- To remain theologically consistent with evangelical Christian interpretations;
- and to use fictional elements primarily to make the story more accessible to modern audiences.

In all this, Jenkins also emphasizes that *The Chosen* is a dramatization and not a documentary. That viewers can use the series primarily as a starting point to further explore the Bible – so he does not pretend to want to supplement or replace the Bible. And that in the approach to the production of *The Chosen*, the intentions of the Bible writers are deeply respected. After all, the makers themselves were inspired, touched and shaped by the gospels.

## **More thoughts about *The Chosen***

In this [video](#), Dallas Jenkins, the director, shares his response to questions that more people have about the reliability. Wilkin van de Kamp, known for many Christian books in the Netherlands, also addresses this question. Regarding the Bible-truthfulness of *The Chosen*, he says: "It is partly fictional, but it helps us enormously to understand the time of that time and to understand the main character, in this case Jesus, much better."

There are and always will be different opinions about the room for interpretation that one may take when passing on the old stories of the gospel, which shape the world to this day. The makers of The Chosen choose an approach that they believe will on the one hand keep the series true to the heart of the gospel and on the other hand succeed in passing on the stories in such a way that it engages, appeals to and invites a contemporary audience to discover the gospel for themselves.

## **Finally**

With the above points, we hope to have clarified that The Chosen was created with the best intentions. What matters to us is the creators' intention and integrity, as well as how the series inspires people to explore the Bible for themselves. From this perspective, we wholeheartedly support our partnership and hope to help bring many more people closer to Jesus. Ultimately, the decision of whether or not to watch The Chosen is entirely yours.