

How 'The Chosen' Is Taking the Gospel to Millions

The wildly popular TV series "The Chosen," now in its fourth season, is likely to break records this week in terms of its audience. The show, which began as a low-budget project in 2017, has already been streamed by 600 million people. The first three episodes of Season 4 will be shown in theaters this week. My prediction is that Hollywood executives won't be able to ignore its success.

Who would have ever imagined a few years ago that a crowdfunded TV show about the life of Jesus—spread out over seven seasons—would become a global phenomenon? Media observers expect "The Chosen" to gross more than \$300 million when all episodes of Season 4 are shown on the big screen during the month of February. After that, the season will be aired on the Chosen app and on various streaming services including Netflix, Amazon and Peacock.

But the most exciting development is that "The Chosen" is beginning to gain big audiences overseas. The BBC ran a feature on the show's popularity on Jan. 24, just before the London premiere of Season 4—and word on the street is that a sizable British fanbase is developing. Meanwhile in Brazil, "The Chosen" is now the fourth most-watched TV show on Netflix—and it's in the top 10 throughout all of Latin America.

This has always been producer Dallas Jenkins' plan. In a video on the show's website, he says: "We want 'The Chosen' to be in every country in the world, and we want it translated into every language. And we want at least a billion people to see it." Season 1 and 2 are already available in more than 70 languages—with subtitles—and those seasons are available in dubbed audio in 20 languages. Viewers are donating the funds

to make these translations possible.

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If the show continues to gain traction, it's likely that Jenkins will surpass his own goal by 2027, when the seventh season airs. That's the year the show will culminate with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. It's possible that more than a billion people could view that season.

Thankfully "The Chosen" isn't in a hurry to rush Jesus to the cross. This is not your grandmother's biblical epic, and it's not an Easter-week miniseries. The narrative takes many detours, giving us the imagined backstory on multiple biblical characters and including flashbacks from Old Testament scenes. We get the opportunity to imagine why Nicodemus the Pharisee was so curious about Jesus, why Peter was so impetuous and why Mary Magdalene was at one time tormented by demons.

"The Chosen" also presents Jesus (played perfectly by actor Jonathan Roumie) as authentic and relational. He is not the staid, one-dimensional character of 1960s Hollywood movies. In "The Chosen" Jesus dances with his disciples after the wedding at Cana and roughhouses with them during a swim in the Sea of Galilee.

Of course I wasn't surprised when I learned that a segment of the Christian community is dead-set against "The Chosen." Some fundamentalists have blacklisted the show because they believe Jenkins is supposedly "adding to Scripture" (their words) or distorting the gospel. Some armchair critics on YouTube have dissected every scene of the show, and they warn people not to support it.

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It's true that "The Chosen" uses creative license to explore the biblical narrative. That doesn't bother me. No dramatic depiction of the story of Jesus can rely on the Bible alone, because we don't know all the disciples' previous occupations, how many of them were married or what Nathaniel was doing when he was under the sycamore tree.

"The Chosen" isn't trying to be a substitute for the Bible; its creative storytelling makes the gospel relatable for a generation that is unfamiliar with it. I'm convinced the show is making unbelievers more curious about the gospel—at a time when so many people are overwhelmed and traumatized by inflation, political tensions and global conflicts.

I will be in the theater this week watching the first three episodes of Season 4, along with millions of other fans. I'm supporting this project because it's probably the most creative evangelistic outreach in our generation. "The Chosen" will present the story of Jesus to a larger audience than a thousand Billy Grahams could reach in stadiums.

Please pray for success of this project, and for Dallas Jenkins and the cast of the show. "The Chosen" could trigger the greatest spiritual harvest in our lifetime.

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