

# Jesus TV series

# The CHOSEN

## Why so popular?

by Rusty Wright

**S**o, why would an online television series about Jesus be breaking popularity records? It has no big-name stars or producers. The stories are ancient. Are viewers looking for hope amid pandemic uncertainty? Are they bored with working from home and turning to diversions their bosses cannot monitor? What did TMZ think?

Maybe personal connection is driving all this. Surprised by *The Chosen* series' popularity, I decided to check it out. The episodes portray Jesus' life with believable dialogue and characters whose genuine, heartfelt emotions—pain, confusion, fear, exhilaration, contentment, awe—help viewers relate these stories to their own struggles and joys.

### Unique distribution method

*The Chosen* producers also selected a unique distribution method: free of charge via online streaming.<sup>1</sup> As of this writing, over

300 million views have occurred<sup>2</sup> in over 190 countries. Translations include 50 languages.

Supported by the most successful crowd-funded campaign in history (16,000 people invested \$11 million for Season One), the show is still going strong, with producers now inviting fans to contribute to production costs and “pay it forward”.<sup>3</sup>

### Warts and all

The series' popularity prompted<sup>4</sup> a special Christmas 2021 episode including contemporary musical artists. The special was originally slated to screen in US theatres for two days last December. The theatre launch announcement spawned \$1.5 million in ticket sales in 12 hours, a record for short-run theatre specialists Fathom Events, stimulating an expanded theatre run to what became 23 days.

Screenwriters have succeeded in depicting real life—warts and all—with authentic human interaction.

*The Chosen's* Jesus enjoys relating to children, and they take to him. He

loves hanging with his followers and friends; the affection is mutual. He encourages the dejected, accepts and gently corrects his sometimes clueless and boisterous disciples, and warmly welcomes society's rejects. He touches a loathed leper, dines with social outcasts.

We see tender, playful, spousal communication involving Simon (later called Peter) and his wife, plus their own marital conflict and Simon's anger with God.

### Race, gender, religion

One story—Jesus' encounter<sup>5</sup> with a Samaritan woman—particularly moved me. Its themes of race,<sup>6</sup> gender, and religion evoke today's headlines.

First-century Jews and Samaritans were locked in a blood feud. Divided by geography, religion, and race, the two groups spewed venom. Jesus, a Jew choosing to travel through Samaria, encountered a Samaritan woman at a well.

Surprised at first that a Jewish man would talk with her, she



*Women were among Jesus' most devoted followers.*

later accepted his offer of “living water” (personal faith)<sup>7</sup> and enthusiastically told everyone she could about the wonderful person she'd met. In the series, her joy is contagious. I suspect some/many viewers will share my appreciation of her life transformation.

Producers sought<sup>8</sup> faithfulness to long-respected biblical texts plus effective cinematic communication. They combined and condensed “some locations and timelines” and added “backstories and some characters or dialogue”, aiming “to support the truth and intention of the biblical accounts”, which they encourage viewers to read.<sup>9</sup>

### TMZ's take

TMZ Live television interviewed<sup>10</sup> series director/creator Dallas Jenkins about the challenges of shooting during the pandemic, especially about gathering and filming 2,000 extras in a field in Texas to replicate Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.<sup>11</sup> “A remarkable—even divine—undertaking...really impressive”, noted TMZ host Charles Latibeaudiere.

Jenkins explained that this scene required two months of planning. His team tested all 2,000 people for COVID and had to send several home due to positive tests.

Could they have used CGI (computer generated imagery) instead? “The most famous sermon in the history of the world” required the passion of a real audience, Jenkins decided, and “it was for sure worth it”.

“Congratulations. I think it's just incredible”, remarked TMZ founder and host Harvey Levin.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> <https://watch.angelstudios.com/thechosen> .
- <sup>2</sup> <https://religionnews.com/2021/11/16/the->

[chosen-christmas-special-hits-theaters-breaks-records/](https://watch.angelstudios.com/thechosen/pif) .

<sup>3</sup> <https://watch.angelstudios.com/thechosen/pif> .

<sup>4</sup> <https://religionnews.com/2021/11/16/the-chosen-christmas-special-hits-theaters-breaks-records/> .

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%204&version=NLT> .

<sup>6</sup> <https://probe.org/christianity-and-racism/> .

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.everyperson.com/features/know-God.html> .

<sup>8</sup> <https://watch.angelstudios.com/thechosen/watch?vid=S1:E1&ap=true> .

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%201&version=NLT> .

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/CLU7dQ-ksa3/?utm\\_source=ig\\_embed&utm\\_campaign=embed\\_video\\_watch\\_again](https://www.instagram.com/p/CLU7dQ-ksa3/?utm_source=ig_embed&utm_campaign=embed_video_watch_again) .

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%205-7&version=NLT> .

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*Jesus and his followers walked and talked a lot.*