

Transcript 132

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. We are receiving a lot of questions about something that a lot of other Youtubers are talking about, a lot of podcasters, and that's The Chosen. The Chosen is a TV series I guess, a streaming TV series that portrays the life of Christ. One of the things that's maybe a little more unique about The Chosen is that they spend a lot of time kind of filling in the blanks. Going behind the scenes of what may have happened in some of these biblical scenes that the Bible doesn't tell us about, and for a lot of people they really don't like that. I'd say the vast majority of questions we receive about The Chosen are a negative bent. So we published an article on it I think after season one released. And joining me today is Saraah. She is the author of the article, one of our Got Questions writers and also Jeff. He's the administrator for bibleref.com. So we're just gonna have a discussion about the chosen about what it is, what it isn't, and how to think through some of the issues that a series like the chosen raises in our minds. So artistic license can be a difficult issue. Some people are watching the chosen almost claiming that the editors, the writers, the producers, whoever are saying that these things definitely happened, are kind of like adding to scripture. Well, it's definitely not their intent. So Saraah why don't you start us off from what in your mind is the appropriate use of artistic license in a movie, a TV show that portrays biblical events.

Saraah

Sure, uhm. I believe that God gave us our imagination. He made some people really creative and gave them artistic talent and that using our imagination when we're reading Scripture can actually be helpful. Now we do have to differentiate between our imagination and something we're making up and using fiction versus scripture. Scripture is the word of God. It is absolute truth, but adding our imagination can really help us feel what those characters might have been feeling, to understand what those people may have been going through, and to help us relate in a really personal, practical way to the scripture that we have. And we see Jesus using parables, which are made-up stories to teach biblical truth in the Bible. So I really do feel that it's appropriate for Christians to use fictional made-up stories to help us better understand Biblical truth.

Jeff Laird

Artistic license is definitely controversial for some people, and I think it's also good to distinguish the difference between artistic license that's fair and reasonable versus artistic license that goes too far. If you demonstrate something that is completely contrary to other statements in the Bible or to Jesus nature, or his attitude, or his morals. Then you're definitely in a position where it's not artistic license anymore. Now you're changing things. But I do think that we we can distinguish between fair artistic license and artistic license that isn't acceptable. I do think it's good for us to acknowledge that there's there's a little danger in artistic license, and it's not because there's something wrong with it. It's just because it's something that we we sometimes are a little bit lazy with.

Jeff Laird

On this podcast we've talked before about how popular culture representations sometimes turn into traditions and stereotypes and assumptions. The one I harp on all the time is the idea of Moses not

knowing that he was Hebrew. That's not something that's in Scripture, but people talk about that like it's just the way it was, and that's not necessarily a good thing, but that's not that there's anything necessarily wrong with using that as an element of a story. So for me, when I see things like The Chosen, I'm not offended by the idea of artistic license. I'm always just careful about the question of what am I seeing and how does that relate to the truths that are in the Bible. Is this compatible with what I'm reading in Scripture? Is this fair to what I'm seeing in the Bible? And if it is, then I agree with you. I think we've got an ability to go through and use our own creativity and our own minds in order to fill in some of those blanks to make the story engaging for an audience.

Saraah

Yeah, this idea of is it plausible? Could that have happened given what we do know to be truth, and I think that does make the story kind of easier to watch or go along with when we know that what is happening in the storyline really is possible.

Shea Houdmann

Exactly the if I would say the two specific scenes and episodes of the chosen that we've received questions about, I think both were in season 2, but hopefully that doesn't matter. First one was there is an episode where Mary Magdalene has a traumatic experience with a passing Roman guard and it causes her to temporarily go back to her old way of life, not the demon possession part, but whatever. It doesn't really matter. And that's obviously not in the Bible. I mean, could it have happened? Yes it could. The Bible no where says that Mary Magdalene was absolutely faithful to everything following Christ for entire life after she started following him. So I think it portrays some powerful things that you know. It's all in Christ is not always easy. There are going to be temptations through fall away. To go back to old way of life and but for me the powerful thing about that is that when Mary Magdalene returns, the disciples actually go and bring her back, she feels extremely guilty about it and she's kind of like Jesus, why would you take me back? And Jesus says something to the effect of it wouldn't be much of a redemption if you could lose it in a day. And so again complete scenes not explicitly biblical, but conveying a very important truth that I firmly believe we cannot lose our redemption. Not in that day. Not not ever. And that Jesus understands the difficulties we face and there's no unforgivable sin in the sense of having a difficulty having doubts, having struggles that Jesus understands. Obviously we still need to seek his forgiveness, confess those sins to him, but it's not as if sinning causes us to lose our relationship with Christ. So I think the scene portrays it powerfully, but almost the entire set, the entire episode is artistic license, but I think it portrays a powerful biblical point. It just doesn't use explicit scenes that are in the Bible.

Jeff Laird

Well, I think it's OK, there's I see the same thing in songs that we sang. There's a lot of songs that we use in churches that help to sort of explore further ideas that are in the Bible and put them in more words or put them in different words. I've liked some of the things I've seen in the chosen in that sense that they're taking ideas that are not stated in explicit verbal syllables in the Bible. But they are part of the teaching of the Bible that are being explained in there. One that I know that some people struggle with, but I think is very reasonable is one that talks about the idea of Jesus growing, Jesus learning as a person. And that's something that the Bible does say. It said that he grew in wisdom and stature and there's even a scene, I remember it struck me as being interesting because I thought to myself that's

going to get people's attention where Jesus is talking to John the Baptist and he makes a comment and then says maybe not the best example when he's talking about it. I remember thinking, oh, that's that's going to bother somebody, but to me that that doesn't strike me as being a problem because Jesus, being sinless for example, didn't mean that he was a perfect student at math or that he was born knowing how to carve a chair correctly and that his father never needed to teach him those things. So the idea that we're explicitly separating human error from sin is an important thing. And I think in that sense that artistic license and things like that chosen actually sort of gives us an opportunity to explore those issues when we talk to people.

Saraah

I found the chosen to be very good at bringing up conversations about could that have really happened? Or what does the Bible actually say and is this plausible? Is this biblical and I found it actually has pointed a lot of people back to scripture and gotten a lot of conversations started and helped people to think deeper about the gospel. Been a great conversation starter.

Shea Houdmann

Maybe the other scene that we've received a lot of questions about is the scene where Jesus is practicing the sermon on the mount. That he has, he has Matthew with him. Matthews taking notes, writing down the different words he says, and some people said, well, Jesus wouldn't need to practice the sermon. It's like, well, Jesus, as God, wouldn't need to practice. But Jesus as God also wouldn't need to eat or sleep, or drink or nap. But yet the Bible describes him doing all of those things. So we have to remember Jesus is fully God and fully human. So could Jesus have downloaded the perfect sermon straight from heaven into his brain and not practice it? Of course he could, but in him living as a human being, there's no reason to think he wouldn't need to practice a sermon or have someone give him feedback on it. Maybe, maybe you could say it this way instead of this way well. But that scene is probably of all the scenes so far, my favorite scene in the whole chosen is when Jesus is practicing the sermon and he turns to Matthew and just previous to this, the other disciples were giving Matthew a really hard time about him being a tax collector and you shouldn't even be here. I don't know why Jesus chose you and all that, so Matthew is going into this kind of depressed or hurt and when Jesus is saying blessed are you when people persecute you and say all sorts of false things about you, he actually is looking directly at Matthew, saying those words to Matthew and to me that was that was powerful, that was completely artistic license in terms of we don't know if Jesus practiced it. If Matthew was there. If he's taking notes or anything, but just to make that scene so personal to me was like wow, I loved that particular scene even though it was entirely artistic license.

Jeff Laird

I'm definitely comfortable with with those aspects. I do like the idea of exploring different concepts. The whole idea of Matthew and his anxiety, his personality, and those sorts of things. Now again, just because of the way I'm wired, I look at that and wonder if 35 or 40 years from now I'm going to hear somebody expositing on Scripture and saying, well, because we know that Matthew was autistic or because of his aspergers or whatever. Just like we get with other things, somebody somewhere is going to pick up and run with that, and that's where we do need to be careful. But I like the idea of presenting this that God isn't kidding around when he says he uses all people in all circumstances for his glory. It's it's not reasonable to assume that every single one of the 12 apostles was a very intelligent, very

articulate, very normal in quotes, kind of a person. It makes more sense that people would look at this group that Jesus put together and say what fishermen and and tax collectors and people like this. So to extend that to saying here are people who have perspectives and personalities. They're not exactly what the world looks like. Again, discernment's important.

Jeff Laird

And I guess one thing we should probably keep emphasizing is that the the purpose of talking about something like the chosen is not to try to tell people you should absolutely watch this without any reservation, without any thought, without any concern. Just just let it wash over you and but the opposite is also not true. You don't want to watch or refuse to watch it because you just insist on saying there is no possible room. Discernments important. We need to remember when I look at a painting of somebody representation of Jesus, I got to remember that's not a photograph I'm, I'm looking at somebody's interpretation. If I'm going to watch The Chosen, I have to remember that somebody's interpretation, so in that sense it's not really different from a lot of other medium.

Shea Houdmann

It just maybe to conclude our talk about artistic license. Anytime you're taking scripture and events that happen in scripture and portraying them in video, you're using artistic license. If you use any words other than direct quotes of Scripture, that's artistic license. If you portray anything about what they looked at look like. What the scenery look like, what the buildings look like. All of that is artistic license because Scripture does not give those sorts of details. So before you criticize artistic license, maybe you need to consider how impossible would be to portray anything in the Bible on video without using a significant amount of it.

Shea Houdmann

Moving to maybe Part 2. Maybe the second most common concern that people have about the chosen is the fact that the production company is owned by Mormons. And some people want to search every square inch of the chosen, the episodes to try to find some evidence of Mormon influence and so Saraah why don't you address that well in your research and looking at this some what have you found about the relationship between the chosen and Mormonism, and whether or not there's any sort of influence over the content of the chosen.

Saraah

Sure, so their distribution company Angel Studios was started by two Mormon guys. So their distribution studios are Mormon organization. But one would argue, is your mailman a Christian? Like this is just the delivery system for the content that's created. They did film their first set was in Utah on a set that was owned by the Church of Latter Day Saints of Jesus Christ, the Mormon Church, and they are the first non Mormon production to gain access to that set and be allowed to use it. And I think that's why people were concerned that, like oh, in order to get on that set, you must have had to change what you were going to film or what you were going to teach and the answer is no. There were no strings attached. There are three writers of the show, Dallas Jenkins who created it and then two Co writers with him. They all three are evangelicals and they use a consulting group. They've got three people, biblical consultants 1 is a Catholic priest, one is a Messianic Jewish rabbi, and one is a professor of New Testament who's an evangelical. So out of the three people who are writing the content, they're all

evangelical. Out of the three people who consult on the show, one is an evangelical. And they go to that consulting table for information and not for approval, so the writers can choose not to be influenced by their consulting group. They are simply seeking information when they ask the consultants, and so in none of those situations where we're actually talking about the content of the show or what is written, what's going to be portrayed onscreen. Nowhere in that line of production is there any Mormon influence. It's just at the very end, how it's delivered and if you're OK with a mailman who might be a Buddhist or an atheist delivering your mail, then I think it would be OK for a Mormon to deliver a show.

Jeff Laird

I think it's a fair thing to remember that just because a non believer as somebody would define them who's involved in something doesn't mean it's invalid. There are, there are plenty of people who build churches and pulpits and work at Bible printing companies and so on and so forth who have no meaningful faith whatsoever. That that if the effect in and of itself is a good thing then it's a good thing. I am the kind of person who's cautious when I know, or I suspect that there could be some sort of influence from a source that I might not necessarily agree with. So for me I'm I'm able to watch something like the chosen where I'm aware that that's the case and I find myself being sensitive to it, not in a sense that I'm paranoid, but I recognize the source. And to be honest, I do exactly the same thing when I'm watching the news or when I'm reading something on the Internet. I recognize the source that it's coming from and I'm just I keep it on my radar to be aware of where there could be some sort of a bias. I don't have to do that in some sort of predatory or cynical way. And I think it's also very important for people to remember, and I'm going to choose my words very, very carefully. Is that some fades that do not align with the gospel that do not align with biblical truth deviate from biblical truth in subtle ways. They are not necessarily catastrophically different in every major category, so it is entirely reasonable for example, for somebody who is evangelical, Catholic, Jehovah's Witness, Mormon to watch something like the passion of the Christ and not see something in there that they would find objectionable. So I think there's a difference between something being theoretically compatible versus somebody inserting something in there that's dangerous. So as I've watched shows and I'm sensitive to that. But up until recently I haven't seen or heard anything that made me think somebody was, you know, doing anything that even had a hint of you know trying to insert Mormon doctrine in there.

Shea Houdmann

Let's segue from there. The most recent issue. The trailer for season three was released and in the trailer, the actor who's portraying Jesus in a confrontation with I believe it's the Pharisees says I am the law of Moses, which is not a biblical quote. You can argue whether whether it's theologically accurate or not. I mean, Jesus is the Incarnate word of God. The law of Moses is part of the Word of God. So in that sense, yes, Jesus is the law of Moses, but several people have pointed out that this is close to a quote from the Book of Mormon. So Saraah, why don't you jump on that on in your research on this issue, what did you discover?

Saraah

Sure, so so people asked if that was, if Jesus was quoting the Book of Mormon in that scene, and Dallas Jenkins was quick to say, well, I've never read the Book of Mormon. And I wrote that line. So no, it was not meant to be a quote from the Book of Mormon. And one could argue that almost every line Jesus says in this episode are not from Scripture, they're just that idea of plausible. Is it plausible that Jesus

could have said this or something like this? And when he was thinking about the show and where the storyline was going, he felt that it was plausible that Jesus may respond in that way, and so that's how the line came to be. And they're receiving pushback, and I think it's fair for people to ask the questions and to be looking for those things but yeah, as you said earlier, like you can argue theologically that that is a plausible line that Jesus could have said something similar to that. And you can argue well, he didn't say it in Scripture, so they really should have chosen different words. I mean both sides.

Jeff Laird

I can see where it's, it's a sore spot because prior to this point, connections to LDS had already been something that wears on people concerned and radar. And then something happens where they point at it like oh, it's almost like a smoking gun. And they say I'll see now this is there. Giving people, the benefit of the doubt, more or less. I can understand that that that's entirely possible. I see something in in that trailer and it, you know, in transparency I look at that and that's something that makes me go, umm, that might be the first thing that I saw that I would say you know what? I don't know if I care for that phrasing. And then I have a choice to make. I got to decide what I want to do with that. Do I think that that's a big enough deal that I I just don't want anything to do with the series anymore. Everybody got to make their own decision. In my personal opinion, I think it just makes me want to go into season three and go well, let's see what the surrounding ideas and attitudes are around that, you know. Remember we're two seasons in about to start season three. I believe they said they're going to do so seven seasons something like this. So we have a lot of material to go through. Even people who watch secular shows have talked about how you know, sometimes things start off well and then dive off the cliff. I really hope that doesn't happen with this. But I don't. I don't have to right now commit myself to being completely in love with every episode that ever comes out or to you know, condemn people who go into it. I don't know that I would have chosen that particular line. I get the theological chain that a person can go through. Romans chapter 10 and other statements like that where you can. You can make the alignment. It's definitely cool. I think is the way Dallas Jensen Jensen put it for Jenkins. But I, cool was not necessarily my my main interest in something like that, but I can. I can understand where it's coming from.

Shea Houdmann

My first reaction to that is like, yeah, I wouldn't have said it that way. Something as simple as I am the fulfillment of the law or the law that you're trying to criticize me with actually points to me, which would have been more scriptural statements. But again and again it's a trailer. We don't know the context of what's actually going on. The rest of the conversation, which may clarify why he, the actor portraying Jesus, says it in that way.

Shea Houdmann

But I guess maybe let's conclude this episode with it surprises me how harshly negative some people are towards the chosen. I have no interest in promoting it. I have no interest in condemning it. I would say if you want to watch the series, use discernment. And don't allow the chosen or any other video of a Bible scene to influence how you understand the Bible. But the vitriol, the hatred, almost nitpicking, trying so hard to find anything possible that might be, can be used against it. I I don't I don't get it. I I don't see the reasoning for. It again 'cause I've just not agreed with every scene not agreed with every wording. I would have done some things differently, but overall I see a series of people trying to portray some like

behind the scenes things about the Bible or portraying how things could have happened that the Bible doesn't cover. Filling in some of the back story of some of the characters, and I've for the most part really enjoyed it. I just I don't understand the criticism in the sense of it being so angry, so harsh, and every motive of Dallas Jenkins and other people involved being questioned under the worst possible assumptions. I really don't get it. I mean if you two, I know you've witnessed the same thing, but what, maybe what are your feelings about why some people are being so negative about the chosen.

Saraah

To give people the benefit of the doubt, I often think it comes from a place of their passionate about the truth of who God is, and they're worried that Jesus might be portrayed in a way that isn't true to scripture, and they're worried that people might be led astray. And I think that's a noble desire. To want people to know the truth, to want people to be in scripture, to want people to not be tricked or led astray, or believing in a fake Jesus. So I try to ascribe those positive intentions to people who have strong negative feelings toward the chosen. But I do end up with you Shea of the idea of like look, if you're watching it in a way where you understand this is not scripture. This is not some special revelation from God. The creators of the show are not claiming that these things actually happened and this is what Jesus did. Uhm, if you are watching it, understanding that it is a television show from the imagination of its creator, but that might add some context or some helpful ways to envision it when you're reading scripture for yourself, then I think it is appropriate that if you enjoy the show and you want to watch it and it's helpful to you, go ahead. But if you don't, and if it's scary and if you don't like it, then it's OK not to. You can find that in Scripture and scripture alone, if that's what you're comfortable.

Jeff Laird

I come down to the same similar conclusion for me. I think it can actually be in a strange way, Satan knows how to use our attempts at being pious to become distractions. There's places in the New Testament where Paul even says don't get involved in arguments about certain subjects, and he brings up things like genealogy and laws and stuff like that and those are factual things. It's not like those are things where there's no correct answer. Somebody right and somebody wrong on those, but not every argument is necessarily worth having and the New Testament also talks about not being judged by somebody else's conscience. I agree, I think a lot of people are coming from a sincere place. They're trying to do the right thing. They're trying to stay away from heresy. They're concerned about, you know, some sort of insidious influence. It's going to pull away from the truth of the gospel. I remind people frequently that we need to be careful that we're taking that same level of skepticism across the board. In other words, when I'm listening to my pastor preach, am I nitpicking his words to that level? When I listen to a song on the radio? Am I taking that level of skepticism? You can do what we call *Isa Jesus* or reading into. You can do that with anything, so I don't want to. I don't want to read into something something that's unfair. And then create controversy about it. Discernment is obviously the key. You shouldn't be watching anything listening to anything, talking about anything without some level of discernment. And I think that we can. We can establish a difference between somebody saying yeah, it's just not my thing. I'm not really comfortable with that level of artistic license so no. I don't. I'm not interested in watching it and I don't want to watch it. I, I think that's reasonable, but I think if we take that to a level of saying that this is. I have a hard time, you know, grasping the idea that this is an evil satanic attack that's meant to just drag everybody away from the faith. I think if you don't like it, you

don't watch it, and if you do like it, you do have to be careful not to take it too seriously because it is not actual scripture.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent points, both of you and I like how we're concluding here. Just this is not. This episode is not an endorsement or a condemnation of the chosen. I think we're all equally agree, and other members of the Got Questions staff who've watched it all agree that this is a matter of personal conviction about discernment whether you watch it or not. I think we've all found scenes that we found that, I really like how that was portrayed and we've each found ones I wouldn't have done it that way. But that's a matter of using discernment. And so if you've been encouraged in your faith, encouraged to study Scripture more through the chosen please continue watching. If it all bothers you, if it just turns you into wanting to nitpick, well, maybe there's something more productive you could be doing with your time. But it also is a lesson. Let's not in our seeking to uphold the truth and point people to Christ, let's not become so critical that we go to an outrageous level of finding a demon behind every stone. Not every mistake, artistic choice is Satan attempting to lead someone astray. So let's not take things too far even in being discerning.

Shea Houdmann

So this has been the Got Questions podcast discussing The Chosen season 3 coming out soon. So hope our conversation has been beneficial to you. So Saraah Jeff, thank you for joining me today. As always with anything, whether as Jeff is saying your pastor sermon, a book, you're reading a song listening to, always compare with Scripture. And only accept what is in full agreement with God's word. Got questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.