



The
CHOSEN

An Interactive
Bible Study

Season 1

What Does It Mean to Be **Chosen**?

Amanda Jenkins, Dallas Jenkins, & Douglas S. Huffman

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE CHOSEN?

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PREFACE

We're guessing this Bible study will be unlike others you've encountered. Most studies that include video content are lecture based with teaching centered on a specific topic or portion of Scripture. This Bible study, however, is designed to be used in conjunction with *The Chosen*, the groundbreaking streaming television series about the life of Jesus. Each session works in tandem with an episode from the show, bringing the Old and New Testaments to life in a fresh way.

To get the most out of the show and the content we've compiled, we have a few suggestions and some people for you to meet. These characters will function as our proxies, pulling us into the story of Jesus and helping us uncover more of our own stories.

But more on that in a minute.

Who Is This Study For?

You.

And us.

Because whether you're just starting out on the Jesus road or you're decades along, being chosen has far-reaching ramifications and endless applications—especially in a day and age when issues of identity are at the forefront of culture, and insecurity, confusion, and a desire for purpose seem to reign supreme.

How Should It Be Used?

Both/And

This study has been designed for small groups who want unique content and good discussion, but it works just as well for individual study. In either case, each lesson's corresponding episode should be viewed *before* going through the material.

Wrap-up

You will end each lesson with a "Prayer Focus" as well as "Further Study" suggestions that can be used throughout the week to go even deeper into Scripture.

Discussion Questions

Each lesson features ten questions that will take you from an introductory level, to an exploratory level, to an engagement level, to an application level.

So many levels.

Scripture Citations

The Bible verses in this study are taken from the English Standard Version. The ESV is an up-to-date translation aiming at word-for-word formal equivalency—which is a fancy way of saying it's an excellent resource for carefully studying the words of Scripture. But regardless of the Bible translation you use, we encourage you to gain more context by looking up the recommended verses for yourself.

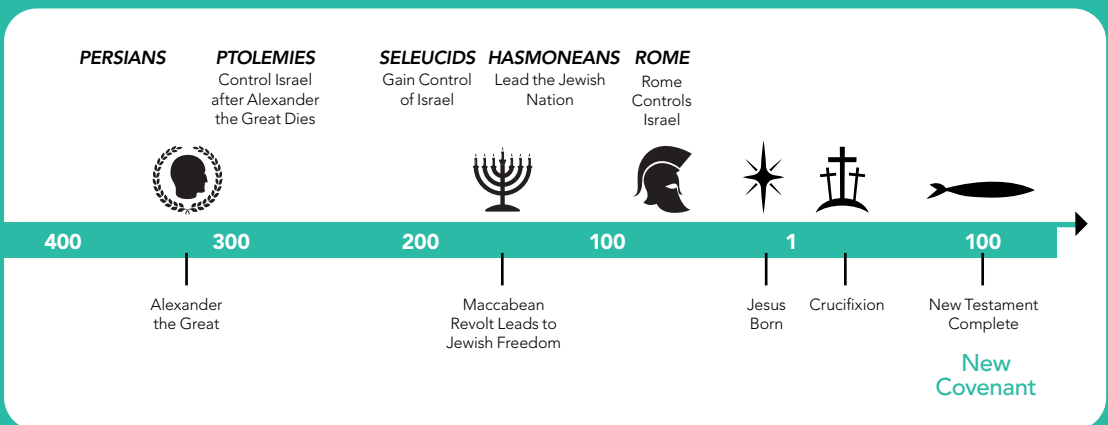
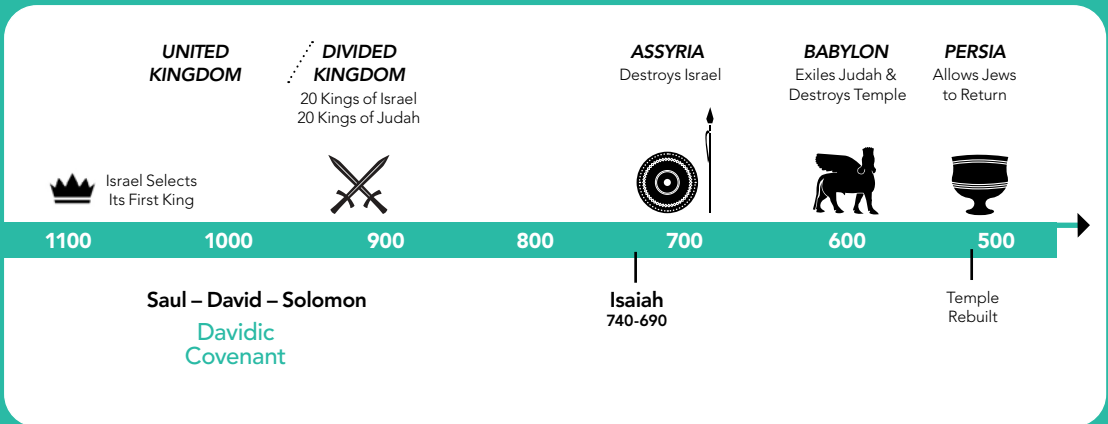
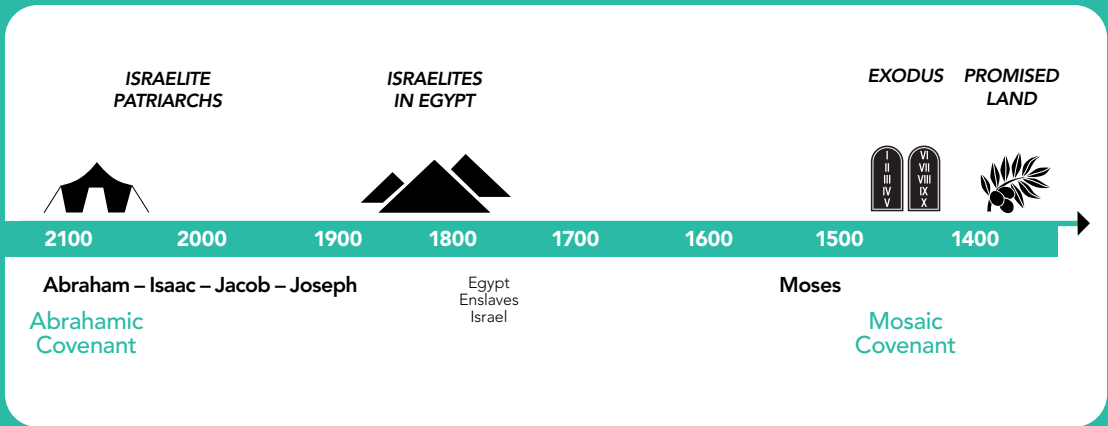
Helpful Stuff to Know

If there's an abbreviation, word, or phrase you don't understand, take a look in the margins where we've translated most of our Christianese.

Helpful Stuff to See

We've included an Old Testament Timeline as well as a few maps to help you visualize the big picture. They're really cool.

Timeline of Biblical Events in World History Context







MEET THE MAINS

Mary Magdalene



“... Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out ...”

Luke 8:2

With so many women in the Bible named Mary, this one was distinguished by her hometown of Magdala—one of several fishing villages on the Sea of Galilee. What we know of her from the

New Testament (NT) is that prior to meeting Jesus, she was a tormented woman, possessed by seven demons. Side note: “Lilith” was Mary’s alias in episode 1, which derives from an ancient Middle Eastern term for “female demons” or “wind spirits.” Only Jesus was able to drive them out, and Mary of Magdala became one of His devoted followers.

In a culture that viewed women as less valuable than men, Mary became a significant member of the team.

1. She was among the female disciples who traveled with Jesus and financially supported His ministry (Luke 8:1–3).
2. She was present at His crucifixion and burial (Matt. 27:56–61).
3. She was the first to witness the empty tomb (John 20:1) and meet the resurrected Jesus (John 20:11–18; Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1–6).

And she got to tell the boys.

Nicodemus



“Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.”

John 3:1

Nicodemus was a leading Pharisee in first-century Judaism and a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews (John 3:1). As a spiritual leader, he had influence in all areas of

There were different factions within Judaism:

Pharisees:

scholars who interpreted the law to the masses, along with oral traditions. Connected to the local synagogues and highly respected by the common people. Believed in the afterlife.

Sadducees:

the professional religious aristocracy connected to the temple, committed to the written law alone. They were resigned to submit to Roman rule. Did not believe in the afterlife.

Essenes:

separatists who lived in various communes that were focused on prayer, holy living, and the future. Not directly mentioned in the New Testament.

Zealots:

political activists organized to rebel against Rome and against Jewish leaders who cooperated with Rome.

society since Israel’s religious system determined the laws of the land politically, culturally, and socially. Pharisees were well-respected, theologically conservative believers in God and His Word, often laypeople devoted to pure living and worship in the local synagogue. On the other hand, priests who were connected to the official worship practices of the Jerusalem temple were more likely to be members of the Sadducee party and were typically in league with Roman rule—which is why Quintus (the fictional Roman leader who interacts with Nicodemus in episode 1) commented on the Sadducees being the enemies of the Pharisees (Acts 23:1–10).

While most of the religious leaders denied Jesus’s claim to be the Son of God, Nicodemus was among the few men of influence to admit what His miracles and otherworldly teaching meant: Jesus came from God (John 3:2).

Matthew



“As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth.”

Matthew 9:9

Matthew was also known by his Hebrew name, Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). He collected taxes on behalf of the Roman Empire, which made him a traitor to his fellow Jews. He seemed indifferent to their suffering as well as to the demise of his relationships and his reputation.

Matthew’s collection booth was located in the Galilean town of Capernaum, which was the birthplace of Jesus’s ministry. Coming face to face with the miracle-man-preacher obliterated Matthew’s loyalty to Rome and his apathy toward others. He subsequently became one of Jesus’s disciples, author of the first book of the New Testament, and a faithful follower for the rest of his life (Matt. 10:3).

Simon (a.k.a., Simon Peter)



“While walking by the Sea of Galilee, [Jesus] saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.”

Matthew 4:18

We know that Simon Peter lived in Capernaum (Mark 1:21–29), where he was a fisherman with his brother

Andrew (Matt. 4:18; Mark 1:16), and that he was married (Matt. 8:14; Mark 1:30; Luke 4:38). Simon is described in the New Testament as being an overly confident man who seemed to think he could earn his worth and who sometimes spoke with little forethought (Matt. 16:21–23; 26:31–35, 69–75). Luke’s gospel actually makes note of one such moment, remarking after a statement made by Simon, “not knowing what he said” (Luke 9:33).

Regardless, Jesus still called this man to follow Him (Luke 5:1–11) and was patient with him (Luke 22:31–32). Simon Peter became a key leader among the twelve apostles (Acts 1–12), bedrock preacher of the early church (Matt. 16:18), writer of two New Testament books of the Bible (1 and 2 Pet.), healer of the sick and lame (Acts 5:15), and fearless unto death (John 21:15–19).

While intimately connected to *The Chosen* TV series, we hope our character-based approach in this Bible study will get readers more deeply connected to Jesus. After all, Jesus—the One foretold in the Old Testament and affirmed in the New—is the One doing the choosing. And when we see Him through the eyes of those who actually met Him—the people He called while ministering on earth—we can be changed and impacted in the same way they were.

Which begs the question: What does it mean to be chosen?

Amanda Jenkins, Dallas Jenkins, and Doug Huffman

INTRODUCTION

Old and New

Why study a passage from the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament when the life of Jesus is covered in the New Testament? Good question. **Because what we call “Old” was the only Bible Jesus ever used!** In fact, the New Testament hadn’t even been written when Jesus was on earth, because it’s the testimony of His life—and the lives of His chosen followers.

Naturally, the television series *The Chosen* draws from the four Gospels of the New Testament. But it’s noteworthy how often the show makes reference to the Old—in quotes, allusions, or flashbacks—because the story of Jesus and humanity’s deep-seated need for Him began at creation (Gen. 3:15). And so, the intertwining story threads from the Old Testament to the New Testament are intricate and profound—and also cool.

In fact, God’s chosen nation of Israel is important Old Testament background for what Jesus was doing when He chose His followers in the New Testament. For example, out of His many followers called “disciples,” Jesus selected twelve to be leaders, whom He called “apostles” (Luke

Old Testament (OT):
the first major section of the Bible, it is the testimony of God’s relationship with the nation of Israel and His preparation of salvation for all humanity, written by His representatives among the ancient people of God.

New Testament (NT):
the second major section of the Bible, it is the testimony of Jesus’s life and its implications for all humanity, written by those who knew Him best.

“Disciples” of Jesus are people devoted to following Him, and Jesus had crowds of disciples during His earthly ministry (and millions of them since!).

“Apostles” were twelve of Jesus’s disciples whom He selected to be leaders among the rest of His disciples.

6:12–17). The number *twelve* echoes the twelve tribes of Old Testament Israel and serves as a clear indication of Jesus’s intentions to reestablish the people of God.

And there’s plenty more where that came from—**countless points of continuity** between the Old Testament and the New Testament. But let’s not get ahead of ourselves.

The story of Israel is one of great drama that includes adventures and explorations, successes and failures, romances and rebellions, wars and disasters, devastations and rescues. Consider this speech from Simon in episode 4. While it comes from a place of anger, frustration, and desperation—and the blame is misplaced—he isn’t wrong on the history:

“And I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens . . .” And then what, huh? Make the chosen as many as the stars, only to let Egypt enslave us for generations? Bring us out of Egypt, part the Red Sea, only to let us wander in the desert for forty years? Give us the land only to exile us in Babylon? Bring us back only to be crushed by Rome? This is the God I’ve served faithfully my whole life?! You’re the God I’m supposed to thank? If I didn’t know any better, I’d say You enjoy yanking us around like goats and can’t decide whether we’re chosen or not. Which is it, huh?!

A more accurate way to put it? God rescued Israel again and again, in spite of their constant rebellion against Him. They sinned their way into slavery (Egypt) and suffering (the wilderness) and exile (Babylon). And each time, God’s rescue served as a reminder that they were His beloved, chosen people. They were repeatedly forgiven and restored, set apart and protected, provided for and loved, daily led on earth and assured of spending eternity with Him in heaven.

They were **chosen**.

What Simon didn't realize was that he and his people were about to be rescued again. Not in the way they expected, but in a way that would radically and permanently change their lives—along with the whole wide world. Because bound up in God's proven faithfulness to Israel are prophecies and promises about a coming Messiah that would extend the status of "chosen" to all who respond to His call.

Messiah:
the promised
deliverer of the
Jewish nation
(i.e., "Savior").

That's us. **We're the chosen people of God.**

The series title, *The Chosen*, refers to multiple things, including God's chosen nation of Israel and all those whom Jesus chooses. But what does it *actually* mean to be chosen? To answer that question, we're going Old school—Testament, that is. Which will lead us back to the New.

Which will lead us directly to Jesus.

Your Turn

1. How familiar are you with the Bible and its two major divisions: the Old Testament and the New Testament? What, if anything, do you think of or expect from them?

2. What do you know about the connections between the Old and New Testaments? How does Jesus factor into those connections? (Spoiler alert: read Luke 24:44.)

3. How much of the Bible have you actually read? What part(s) are you most attracted to, and why? What part(s) do you avoid, and why?

4. What comes to mind when you hear the words “chosen by God”? Do you find the notion comforting? Confusing? Merciful? Unfair? Life-giving?

How about all of the above and then some?

OT Context

The well-known story of Moses, the Israelites, and their exodus from Egypt is actually one that's been on repeat since the beginning of time. Not the plagues part. Or the parting of the Red Sea part. Or the walking through the wilderness for forty years part. Those mind-blowing details are unique to that time and place in history. But mankind's propensity to choose sin over God's purpose and plan has remained firmly in place since the Garden of Eden.

It goes like this:

The Sin Cycle



And on it goes. In story after story from the Old Testament, we see that pattern play out, and the circumstances around the writing of the book of Isaiah were no different. Once again, the Israelites were in a sin cycle. God rescued their ancestors from Pharaoh and led them through the wilderness with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21)—which meant He was the map. He fed them; every day food appeared on the ground, and also water came from rocks (Ex. 16:4–5; Num. 20:7–8). God conquered armies that stood in Israel’s way and established them in the land He’d promised them (Josh. 1–24). All the while, generation after generation grumbled and complained and disobeyed the God who chose them. They made demands and changed God’s plans, and everything got progressively worse.

Enter Isaiah.

We don’t actually know a ton about the prophet Isaiah. The OT book that bears his name begins with this introduction: “The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah ...” (Isa. 1:1)—which tells us a few things about him.

-
- He was the son of Amoz (Isa. 1:1), about whom we know nothing else for certain. Jewish tradition suggests Amoz was the brother of Amaziah, king of Judah (ca. 798–769 BC), which would put Isaiah in the royal bloodline.
-

ca.:
an abbreviation
of the Latin word
circa, meaning
“approximately.”

But don’t quote us on that.

- He was a prophet for the southern Israelite kingdom of Judah (Isa. 1:1).

Side note: In 930 BC, after the reign of King Solomon, the nation of Israel separated into two kingdoms when northern tribes refused to accept Rehoboam (son of Solomon) as their king. The two kingdoms persisted as separate nations for the remainder of their histories, and both suffered under corrupt kings—which shouldn’t have been

a surprise. When God established the nation of Israel in the Promised Land, He told them that He would be their King. But they demanded an earthly one anyway. So He warned that if they established a monarchy in spite of His plan, they would suffer for their disobedience—because humans are sinful, including and especially powerful humans like the rulers who made life very difficult for the nation of Israel.

And suffer they did.

- Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of kings Uzziah (ca. 792–740 BC), Jotham (ca. 750–731 BC; Isa. 7:1), Ahaz (ca. 735–715 BC), and Hezekiah (ca. 715–686 BC).

Fun fact: the overlap of reigning dates is because sometimes a king would begin to co-reign with his father. #welovehistoryandcontext #bibleners

More things we know:

- Isaiah was married and was a father (Isa. 7:3; 8:3, 18).
- He apparently lived in Jerusalem (Isa. 7:3 names a couple of Jerusalem locations).
- He wrote some records that are not part of Scripture (2 Chron. 26:22).
- A Jewish pseudepigraphical work dating back to first century BC reports that Isaiah was killed by being sawed in two at the order of Manasseh, king of Judah (*Martyrdom of Isaiah* 5:1–14; Heb. 11:37); the first-century work *The Lives of the Prophets* (1:1) and the Jewish Talmud (*Yevamot* 49b) refer to this as well.

Pseudepigraphical: writings that aren't in the Bible but claim to be biblical in nature.

So ... that's horrific.

- The book of Isaiah is actually a collection of Isaiah's sermons and visions, given over the decades he was in ministry, between 740–680 BC.

And here's the point: Isaiah spent the better part of his life warning a rebellious, faithless generation of people to turn back to the God who loved them—which should sound familiar, because despite the almost three thousand years that have passed since Isaiah preached to the nation of Israel, like them, we have an unfortunate propensity to choose sin over God and His plan for our lives.

—————
Gentile:
not Jewish.
—————

But thankfully, Isaiah didn't just point out the problem. He also pointed to the One through whom Jews and Gentiles alike would (1) be reconciled to God, and (2) be made faithful.

Your Turn

5. In what ways is your pattern of behavior like that of the Old Testament nation of Israel?

6. Isaiah was tasked by God to be a mouthpiece of truth at a time when the people didn't really want to hear it. In what ways are you like Isaiah? In what ways are you not?

7. What thoughts and feelings does the phrase “God’s plan” evoke in you?

Jesus Is

The first thirty-nine chapters in the book of Isaiah deal mainly with scathing condemnation and woe for Israel’s tremendous sin and hardness of heart, and the resulting consequences they faced. But then it takes a turn, because after making a powerful case against God’s chosen people, Isaiah began to speak words of comfort.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,

and cry to her

that her warfare is ended,

that her iniquity is pardoned,

that she has received from the LORD’s hand

double for all her sins.

A voice cries:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;

make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,

and every mountain and hill be made low;

the uneven ground shall become level,

and the rough places a plain.

And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” (Isa. 40:1–5)

Through Isaiah, God spoke words of love over Israel during a time of their rebellion—during a time of idol worship, wandering hearts, and intense callousness to sin, not to mention all the painful consequences they were experiencing as a result of their choices. He delivered God’s message of hope before their repentance.

And just so we’re all on the same page, the “voice in the wilderness” that Isaiah spoke of hundreds of years before turned out to be NT John the Baptist. Like Isaiah, John preached a message of repentance but also of hope, since he told anyone who had ears to hear that the Messiah—the Savior of the world—was coming (Matt. 3).

Enter Jesus.

Jesus is the hope spoken of in the Old Testament (the Messiah) and revealed in all His glory in the New Testament—the One through whom we all have hope. Hope that our sin cycle can be broken. Hope that this world, with all its disappointment and heartache, isn’t all there is. Hope that our relationship with God can be restored—and can thrive. Hope that as we follow Jesus, He’ll change us from the inside out, making us joy-filled, faith-filled, and faithful.

Jesus is the **whole** point of the **whole** of Scripture—because mankind needs saving and He’s it. But how does that salvation work itself out in our lives? Well, that’s what we’ll be covering in the coming weeks, because like those who have gone before us, **in Jesus** we find our true identity, purpose, and hope.

Your Turn

8. What do you think of Jesus? Was He a good man? A teacher of nice and pleasant things? Or something more? What is your opinion of Jesus based on?

9. Make a list of what the Bible says about Jesus in Hebrews 1:1–3:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

10. To what degree are you prepared to have your view of Jesus challenged? Are you willing to *adjust* your view of (or your response to) Him as a result?

Prayer Focus

Thank God for His intimate involvement in the lives of the people we read about in Scripture, and that He desires to be intimately involved in your life as well. **Thank** Him for choosing to communicate with you through the Bible. **Thank** Him for sending His Son, Jesus. **Ask** for His help both to understand His Word and to know Jesus more.

Further Study

Here are a few suggestions for investigating some additional connections between OT Isaiah and the NT life of Jesus.

- In Luke 2:22–35, Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the Jerusalem temple. There they met a man named Simeon, who spoke a word of praise over Jesus (2:29–32) using words from Isaiah 49:6, which means God declared things through prophets like Isaiah *before* they happened so we wouldn't miss them when they happened.

I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness;

I will take you by the hand and keep you;

I will give you as a covenant for the people,

a light for the nations,

to open the eyes that are blind,

to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,

from the prison those who sit in darkness.

I am the LORD; that is my name;

my glory I give to no other,

nor my praise to carved idols.

Behold, the former things have come to pass,

and new things I now declare;

before they spring forth

I tell you of them. (Isa. 42:6–9)

- Luke 4:16–21 recounts one of Jesus’s earliest sermons when He selected Isaiah 61:1–2 as His main text—a passage in which Isaiah prophesied about the coming Messiah. After reading, Jesus sat down and declared to the room full of people, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

In other words, “The long-foretold Messiah you’ve been preaching about in your synagogues for centuries? I’m Him.”

Needless to say, hearing a man they’d grown up with claim to be the Savior of the world didn’t go over too well (Luke 4:22–30).

- Luke 7:18–23 describes a time when John the Baptist sent messengers to Jesus because he was experiencing doubt that Jesus was actually the Messiah. Instead of answering with a simple “Tell John that I AM indeed the Messiah,” Jesus said:

Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. (Luke 7:22)

Jesus’s actions proved His identity—actions that had been described in Isaiah 29:18; 35:5–6; 42:18; and 61:1, just to name a few. Jesus asked John to draw the proper conclusion about His identity based on the physical evidence of fulfilled scripture.

Lesson 1

What Does It Mean to Be Chosen?

YOU ARE CALLED

OMAR: Why can't you sleep?

MARY: I'm scared.

OMAR: Of what?

MARY: I don't know.

OMAR (*giving Mary a big squeeze*): Hey. What do we do when we are scared?

MARY: We say The Words.

OMAR: Adonai's Words. From the prophet ...

MARY: Isaiah.

OMAR: From the prophet Isaiah, right. "Thus says the Lord who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: Fear not ..." Come now, I want to hear you say it. I want to hear your pretty voice. Come.

MARY: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine."

OMAR: You are mine. That's right.

Redeem:
to purchase back; to
ransom; to deliver
from chains; to
rescue and restore.

Fear Not

Fear can be like a blob monster—always on the move, always taking ground—because the list of things we fear is long. We fear loss. We fear failure. We fear not being loved. We

fear disease. We fear loneliness, darkness, neediness, natural disasters, and bad guys—the list goes on into oblivion.

“I Have Called You by Name” is a fitting title for season 1, episode 1 of the *The Chosen* because no other declaration, no other truth in this world, has the power to vaporize fear like knowing and being known by God.

Why is that?

Well, truth be told, we’re simple creatures in that we were made to be in relationship with God. We’re designed to commune, to know and be known by our Creator, to interact with the world alongside Him and under His care. Without Him, we’re at the mercy of the world around us and all the fear it brings. Without Him, there’s a significant and unfillable void in our souls, because contrary to the popular self-empowerment dogma of the day, on our own we are *not* enough.

But that’s okay; that’s the way it’s supposed to be. We’re incomplete by design so that nothing but knowing and communing with God will fulfill us—not really, not permanently or completely. We’re incomplete so we’ll come running when the One to whom we belong calls.

Your Turn

1. What do you fear, and why? How does Psalm 139:13–18 speak to your fear?

OT Context

The prophet Isaiah experienced fear too—and who could blame him?

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (Isa. 6:1–5)

Isaiah was doing whatever normal thing he was doing, when all at once, he was in the presence of the King of the Universe, along with angelic figures who were chanting praise in earth-shattering voices—and Isaiah hit the proverbial deck because not only was the experience terrifying to the senses in every possible way, it also made him acutely aware of his own moral failings. God is holy, and Isaiah felt despairingly unworthy in His presence. But at the same time, Isaiah’s repentant heart was acknowledged, forgiveness was extended, and Isaiah got off the proverbial floor (Isa. 6:6–8). Or maybe he got off the actual floor.

He responded by saying yes to God’s call.

And here's the takeaway: Isaiah wasn't called by God because he was worthy. He wasn't and he knew it. Moreover, God warned Isaiah that the message he would preach to the nation of Israel would fall on "deaf," unresponsive ears (Isa. 6:9–13)—but that God would persist, speaking love over His chosen people and declaring them His own before they agreed to be. In other words, Isaiah was sent to the nation of Israel while they were still sinning toward, rebelling against, and rejecting God. Which means God's message was delivered by unworthy Isaiah to unworthy people of God's own choosing.

Are you sensing a theme?

Your Turn

2. Reread Isaiah 6:3 and jot down the meanings of "holy," "Lord," and "glory." What do these words say about the One who calls us to Himself?

3. How do those words impact the way you view God? How does being in relationship with the One whom those words describe impact the things you fear?

4. Israel continued to rebel against God even as He continued calling them into relationship. What does that suggest about His character?

Worthy, Not Worthy

The notion of being called into relationship with God can bring with it some intrinsic hang-ups, like pride and insecurity that, as it turns out, are two sides of the same bad-theology coin.

Heads. Proud people tend to see themselves as being **already worthy of God's love and approval**. By their own system of measurement, they are “good” and deserving of the corresponding spiritual status. But having an over-inflated view of ourselves can keep us from repenting and responding to God's call with our whole hearts.

Tails. Insecure people struggle to believe God's love is big enough to wipe out their personal history of wrongdoing, causing them to **feel hopelessly unworthy** of His offer to redeem and restore. But having an under-inflated view of ourselves can keep us from accepting and responding to God's call with our whole hearts.

In either case, **the focus is on us instead of God.**

Truth be told, most of us vacillate between pride and insecurity—between feeling worthy already and hopelessly unworthy—depending on the day. But take heart. Just as it was for Isaiah and the nation of Israel, God's call on our lives has very little to do with us and everything to do with Him.

Same thing was true for the people Jesus called.

Mary Magdalene was called out of the most obvious kind of darkness. Being possessed by seven demons is like the plot line of a horror movie, which means Mary didn't earn the Savior's help with good behavior. Like OT Israel, the call on her life was

by divine initiative and executed by Jesus *in spite* of who she was and for the sake of who He created her to be.

Nicodemus, on the other hand, was pretty confident of his spiritual status. He was a Pharisee, set apart for the Lord's service and therefore considered by those around him to be worthy of the deference, respect, and privilege that came with his position. He likely believed he was worthy of God's calling already, which means his position and pride made him slow to see his own desperate need for reconciliation with God.

Matthew was likely too busy living for himself to care whether or not he was worthy. He was pursuing his own thing, mainly money. Regarding our coin illustration, he would've missed the lesson entirely and probably would've tossed the silver into his money bag instead! For a time, it seemed he was oblivious—or at least indifferent—to God's call on his life.

Simon wore his messy heart on his sleeve—his sometimes prideful, sometimes insecure heart on his rolled-up, gotta-earn-my-own-worth sleeve. His self-sufficiency would have been useful on a fishing boat, but it often delayed his understanding and the corresponding action when it came to following Jesus.

Incidentally, in episode 1 of *The Chosen*, Mary Magdalene serves as the ideal respondent to God's call through Jesus. Nicodemus would've been horrified by the notion: *A demonized woman from the red quarter is the model we're supposed to follow?* Matthew would've been bewildered: *What's all the fuss about? And can it be taxed?* Simon would've perhaps felt cheated: *How could she receive God's calling when I'm clearly trying harder?!*

But Mary, desperate Mary, was so hopeless that while being rescued was entirely outside the scope of her imagination, she responded at once. And with her whole heart.

To whatever degree we're prideful, insecure, or just plain desperate, God's calling happens when we aren't even aware we're broken versions of ourselves. Calling happens before God begins His transformative work of redemption, because He sees past our *before* to the *after* that He purposed and planned from the beginning. Just as He did with the nation of Israel, He

sees past our fear, past our messy hearts and lives, to the people He created and loves enough to call His own.

We're valuable to God because He made us and loves us. We're valuable because He says we are, and His Word is the be-all-end-all. But He calls us to Himself because of who He is, not because we're worthy—which actually means we can be confident in our calling since it's based on His goodness, His forgiveness, and His grace (just to name a few).

Your Turn

5. Which of the four flawed-but-still-called characters in *The Chosen* do you identify with most? Do you feel worthy of being called by Jesus? Why, or why not?

6. What would you say to someone who feels unworthy of Jesus's love and call to follow Him (like Mary Magdalene)? What would you say to someone who is confident in their own goodness or self-sufficiency (like Nicodemus)?

7. Read Romans 3:10–12. Regardless of how we view our own performance record, how does the Bible say we all compare to a holy God?

Jesus Is Our Rescuer

God made the world and He loves what He made. But we humans—from the Old to the New to right now—have chosen to do our own thing, to go our own way, and to defy the laws of God’s creation, the boundaries He put in place that were meant for our good and His glory. Through sin, we’ve separated ourselves from the One who loves us. But *because* of His love, God made a way (1) for sin to be atoned for and its power in our lives defeated, and (2) for us to know our Creator the way He intended.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (John 3:16–18)

Jesus came to live among us; only He didn’t sin. He came to rescue us from the penalty of sin, which is death and eternal separation from a holy God. He came to rescue us from sin’s power over us and its daily stranglehold on our lives. And all we have to do to be forgiven and welcomed into communion with God is to believe in the One He sent.

That’s it.

But also, that's everything.

None of us is worthy of God's loving attention. To be called by Him and to accept His invitation through Jesus—to be chosen and rescued in spite of our absolute unworthiness—requires us to trust Him, which includes letting Him make whatever changes to our lives He deems best. And when we do, fear no longer has a place.

Fear not, God can redeem your choices and use them for good.

Fear not, God can heal your heart, your body, and your relationships.

Fear not, you were made for more than what you've experienced so far.

Fear not, the King of the Universe has called you by name.

(Lilith stumbles into the alleyway where she takes a quick swig. She looks back to see Jesus following her onto the street.)

LILITH: Leave me alone!

(Jesus stops. Then, with all authority—)

JESUS: Mary! *(She freezes.)* Mary of Magdala!

(Mary cannot speak. Her cup falls; clay and drink crash on the ground. She slowly turns to face Him.)

MARY: Who are You? How do You know my name?

JESUS *(walking toward her as He speaks)*: Thus says the Lord who created you ... and He who formed you: fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are Mine.

Trinity:
the state of being three.

"God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory" (Evangelical Theological Society).

Common analogies include an egg, which has three distinct parts (shell, white, yolk) but remains one egg, or an apple, which has three distinct parts (skin, flesh, core) but remains one apple.

Of course, all analogies eventually break down, and God is not an egg or an apple. Duh.

Each member of the Trinity is not a "part" of God; each is fully God. So while we can define the word in the best possible human terms, the Trinity is a concept we won't fully understand until we're in heaven.

Your Turn

8. What do you need to be rescued from?

- A difficult personal history and pain? Mary lost her family, her dignity, and her self-control; Matthew was shunned by his family and by everyone else.
- Financial hardship? Simon and Andrew felt the weight of Roman taxation and the struggle to provide.
- A worldview that says we must save ourselves? Many Pharisees were legalistic, constantly trying to impress God and one another; Simon often took matters into his own hands, relying on his own ability, wisdom, and strength.
- Darkness, addiction, or some other sin cycle? Demons plagued Mary, causing her to feel hopeless and chained to a sinful life; Matthew was ruled by his love of money and desire for security.

9. How might Isaiah 43:1 challenge you to think differently about your situation? And what might it be calling you to do differently?

10. What does Ephesians 2:8–10 say about God's rescue of people through Jesus?

Prayer Focus

Thank God for knowing you and for wanting to be in relationship with you. **Confess** your unworthiness to be called at all. If need be, confess any pride or ego-motivated attempts to become worthy of His love through your own effort. **Praise** God for calling you to Himself in spite of all the ways you get it wrong, and for sending Jesus to rescue you and to secure your calling.

Further Study

- Read the warning about not obeying God's law in Deuteronomy 27:26 (OT), and then read where the apostle Paul quoted Deuteronomy but also provided hope in Galatians 3:10–13 (NT). Although we're cursed by an inability to obey God's laws perfectly, perfect atonement and rescue have been provided through Jesus. Take particular notice of verse 13:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

- Notice too that in Galatians 3:14, Paul referenced God's promised blessings to the Israelite descendants of Abraham and the plan to expand those blessings to the whole world. Check out the promise in Genesis 12:1–3 to see, once again, that the rescue plan God initiated in the Old Testament was completed through Jesus in the New Testament.
- Titus 3:4–7 addresses God's unmerited rescue of believers. Take special notice of the changes that following Jesus brings to our lives.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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