



THE

Rediscovering the Bible with

THE CHOSEN

SEASON TWO

FORGOTTEN

TEACHINGS

OF JESUS



Brandon Robbins

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150 YEARS STRONG
DAVID COOK

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THE FORGOTTEN TEACHINGS OF JESUS:
REDISCOVERING THE BIBLE WITH THE CHOSEN: SEASON TWO

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Episode 1

**WE'VE GOT A
JOB TO DO—
AND FAST!**

Big James is dead!¹

Season 2 of *The Chosen* opens with a scene that takes place more than a decade after Jesus' death and resurrection. The remaining disciples have come together to "sit *shiva*," a Jewish practice of mourning for seven days in the wake of someone's death.² According to Acts 12, James was executed by Herod Agrippa as part of a mass persecution of Christians. His death represents the danger that all the disciples have been facing since Jesus left.

But for two of these disciples, there is another reason to be distressed. James's death is a reminder that even those who were closest to Jesus will eventually die, and when they do, so will their memories. Who will recount the stories of Jesus then? If Jesus doesn't return in the next few months or years, who will keep believers from straying too far from what Jesus truly said and meant?

As far as they are concerned, there is only one solution: These things must be written down. The gospel must be preserved for future generations. Those generations must hear and understand who Jesus was, the message he preached, and why this is something that will transform their lives.

The Messiah has come. God put on flesh. Salvation is available to all. And because of this, the world will never be the same. But unless these things are recorded for perpetuity, they could be forgotten.

While the show depicts John urgent to record his gospel, in reality he probably didn't complete his until decades after the other gospels. Many scholars believe it was actually written by his disciples. It may have been delayed by his imprisonment or by theological controversies; or John may have waited to see what the other gospel writers included so he could offer a unique perspective and fill in gaps.

Chapter 1

WHO REMEMBERS JESUS?

Do you remember what you got for Christmas last year? What about the year before? How about ten, twenty, or thirty years ago?

It is amazing how quickly memories fade, isn't it? When my daughters were little, I remember rocking them to sleep, staring at their small, beautiful faces, hands, and toes, intentionally memorizing every feature. Today, I have to look at pictures to recall these details.

When I think back to my first trip to the Holy Land, I can remember every single thing we did for the first two or three days. But after that, it's a blur.

For some reason, our minds just don't have the ability to remember all the things we've done. Details become fuzzy, and pieces of the story go missing. Some moments are ingrained forever, but most are lost. If we truly sat down to think about it, we could recall only a few key moments of each day, a few important events throughout the year. And do we actually remember those events and places, or do we remember only the photos of them? The rest is forgotten history.

Imagine that you had spent three years of your life following the Savior of the world. God had been in your midst for this brief but incredible period of time, but already things are starting to blur together in your memory. How would you make sure that none of it was lost to history?

Thankfully, the disciples of Jesus had a few advantages that most of us don't. For one, they had been raised in a culture built around memorization. Since Torah scrolls had to be copied by the hands of men trained in this process, they were produced slowly, and most synagogues had only a few books of the Torah available. As a result, in order to have access to Scripture, the people had to memorize it.

From the time their children were small, parents would teach them whole passages of Scripture. *Bet Sefer*, the earliest level of formal education for Jewish boys, required students to memorize large portions of Genesis, Deuteronomy, and the Psalms. In some instances, these boys would memorize the entirety of the Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy) between the ages of six and ten.

So, as the disciples received the teachings of Jesus over the course of his ministry, it was much easier for them to commit his words to memory.

In addition, they had another tool at their disposal: collective memory. What Matthew couldn't remember, John might recall. If James had forgotten parts of a story, Thaddeus could possibly fill in the gaps. And if anyone ever tried to introduce something that wasn't true or accurate, the group as a whole would correct or reject it.

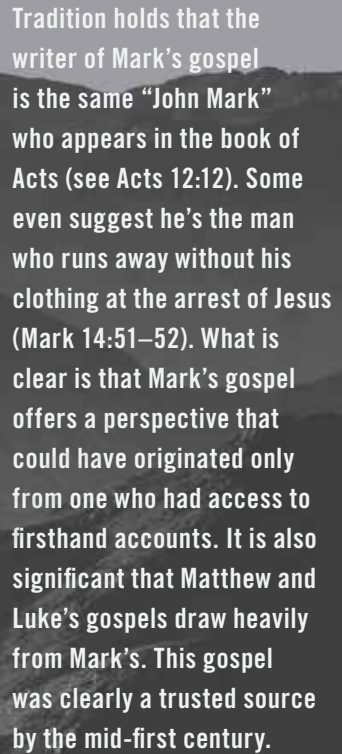
As a result, when the disciples finally began to record their stories decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus, they weren't simply playing a dangerous game of telephone—their culture had prepared them for this moment.

According to early Christian writings, the gospel of Mark is based on the account of Peter, who dictated his memories to his disciple, Mark.¹ Most scholars believe it was written twenty to thirty years after the death of Jesus.

Matthew's gospel comes from the disciple Matthew himself and was written probably ten to twenty years after Mark's gospel. According to a church father named Papias, Matthew's gospel was originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic to reach a Jewish audience.²

Luke's gospel, on the other hand, was written to a Gentile audience. A physician and companion of Paul, the author Luke, himself a Gentile, is also credited with writing the book of Acts. According to scholars, Luke's gospel was written roughly at the same time as the gospel of Matthew.

One thing that Matthew and Luke have in common is that both appear to draw heavily upon Mark's gospel.³ Matthew includes or duplicates about 90 percent of Mark's gospel, adding his own accounts of Jesus' ministry and teachings. Luke's gospel replicates only about 50 percent of Mark's, but its influence is still obvious and abundant. This "Markan" influence is what leads most scholars to conclude that Mark's gospel was written first and was already circulating at the time Matthew and Luke wrote their gospels.



Tradition holds that the writer of Mark's gospel is the same "John Mark" who appears in the book of Acts (see Acts 12:12). Some even suggest he's the man who runs away without his clothing at the arrest of Jesus (Mark 14:51–52). What is clear is that Mark's gospel offers a perspective that could have originated only from one who had access to firsthand accounts. It is also significant that Matthew and Luke's gospels draw heavily from Mark's. This gospel was clearly a trusted source by the mid-first century.

Finally, John's gospel is unique among the Gospels. Aside from his account of the final week of Jesus' life (which varies significantly from the other gospels at certain points), John includes only a few of the stories—and none of the parables—found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Most scholars believe this is because John's gospel was written much later, toward the end of the first century, and was dictated by John to his disciples while he was in his final years. They would have been familiar with the other three gospels, and perhaps John's purpose was to fill in some of what those three had left out.

If you're anything like me, you're finding these facts fascinating. It is exciting to piece together where the gospel accounts came from and how they were put together. But what I think is even more important is *why* they were put together in the first place.

These aren't merely fun stories that the disciples thought future generations would find interesting. They didn't believe that Jesus was just some wise sage whose parables and platitudes might be helpful for others to hear. For these disciples, the story of Jesus was good news of such earth-shattering consequence that they were willing to sacrifice their lives to preserve and proliferate it.

The first verse of Mark's gospel makes this powerfully clear: "The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God" (NIV). Each word in this verse is meticulously planned to convey the importance of what is to come.

The Greek word for "good news" is *euangelion*. It is the root of our word *evangelism* and a word that can also be translated "gospel." It is an announcement of good news that will transform people's lives. At the time of Jesus, the Roman emperor's birthday was designated *euangelion*, declaring that this event had changed history and everyone's lives would now be better.⁴ This is what Mark is saying about Jesus.

In fact, Mark is saying this with every word of his opening line. The Greek word for Jesus, *iesous*, is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *yeshua*, which means “God saves.” “Christ” is the Greek word *christos*, which is a translation of the Hebrew word *mashiach*, meaning “messiah.” And “Son of God” is not just a description of Jesus’ parentage but also a rebuttal to Emperor Augustus’s claims of divinity when he declared himself a “son of a god” after Caesar (his father) had been deified.

Taken together, Mark is boldly proclaiming, “This is why I wrote this gospel! And this is why you must listen. You have been told that the emperor is the one who brings you good news, that his is the life that will change yours for the better. But I am here to declare actual good news to you! Your Messiah is here to save you! He is the true Son of God. His name is Jesus. And this is his story!”

Today, we still live in a world filled with false gods. They might not be emperors claiming divinity, but they are people and products that falsely promise that they alone can save us. Sometimes their message is so compelling, or so subtle, that we don’t even realize we have begun to believe it. We buy this product, vote for this politician, or ascribe to this trend because somewhere inside of us we believe they can provide the things for which we have been longing.

Did you know that Jesus’ first name wasn’t Jesus? Nor was his last name Christ. The word we translate “Jesus” is the last step in a journey of translation and transliteration that began with our Savior’s actual name: Yeshua. The Greek language didn’t have a great way to make an equivalent of Yeshua. The closest it could get was *lēsoûs* (Ἰησοῦς). This was influenced by the fact that the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) had rendered Yehoshua (Joshua) as *lēsoûs* (Ἰησοῦς). In Latin, *lēsoûs* became *Iesus*. English pronounced this as Jesus.

It is for this very reason that Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John wrote their gospels. And the good news they recorded is just as relevant today as it was centuries ago. We long for salvation, and our Savior has come. He is the true Son of God. And because he has come, things will never be the same.

While there are many similarities between the “synoptic” gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), each also records events unique from the others. Luke, for example, begins his gospel with the mention of eyewitness accounts and his own investigation into the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This has led many scholars to conclude that in addition to the Gospels themselves, there were many oral traditions circulating about Jesus.

If this is the case, then it is logical to conclude that each gospel is not meant to be a standalone, comprehensive account, but perhaps each writer was more focused and purposeful in his method, picking and choosing which stories fit into the greater narrative he was weaving and that would best communicate to the audience he had in mind.

I certainly see evidence of this in Mark’s gospel. Mark appears to have no desire to tell us every story he has ever heard about Jesus. He skips his birth entirely, for example. Is it really likely that Peter had never heard this account or that he thought it too unimportant to share with Mark? Rather, Mark’s gospel is a fast-paced, high-intensity record of events, all driving toward one purpose: “Jesus is the Messiah. Let me show you how I know that and why you should believe it!”