

## Notes for “The Chosen” series (Season 1) small groups Pastor Barry Foster

*The following notes offer some background information, brief explanations related to Scriptural content and context, and suggestions for things to look for when viewing the episode. One practical note: you may find that it is easier to understand what is being said if the captions are turned on when viewing the show.*

### Episode 7 “Invitations”

Our episode opens with a scene that initially seems to be quite strange. Moses is fashioning something in a forge, and Joshua is arguing with him about whether it is right to do so. The scene comes from Numbers 21:4-9. The Israelites were dying from snakebites as a result of God’s judgment for their complaints. What Moses is fashioning is a bronze serpent; he tells Joshua that those who look upon it with faith will be healed. This is an important backdrop for Jesus’ words to Nicodemus in John 3:1-21. (Notice the pole on which the serpent is hung.) In our story, the opening scene is directly tied to the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus that is based on the account in John 3.

The focus for the rest of the episode lies primarily on two individuals, Matthew and Nicodemus, both of whom are struggling to understand what is happening. Both will have an encounter with Jesus, and both must face a basic dilemma: Will they believe the evidence that is placed before them, and the man to whom the evidence leads? Or will they trust in their own sense of what is reasonable? For Matthew, the question concerns the possibility of the miraculous being real, a prospect which threatens everything he has believed. For Nicodemus, the question concerns his entire framework for understanding what faith is; again, the evidence threatens to undermine everything he has believed and the life he lives.

This dilemma is presented as a version of an age-old question: *Is faith opposed to reason?* How the characters wrestle with this question forms much of the story’s development in this episode.

#### *Some things to look for:*

1. When Jesus leaves the house, he pauses to kiss his fingers and touch something on the doorpost. That “something” is called a *mezuzah*. A *mezuzah* is a wooden case containing a piece of parchment inscribed with the words of Deuteronomy 6:4, which became a prayer known as the “Shema”—from the first two words of the verse in Hebrew: *Shema Yisrael* (“Hear, Israel”). Observant Jews mount a *mezuzah* on the doorpost of their homes, in obedience to the command in Deuteronomy 6:9 to write the words of the Law on the doorposts of their houses. (The Hebrew word, *mezuzah*, actually means, “doorpost.”) They kiss the *mezuzah* when entering or leaving the home to signify their desire to honor God by observing the Law and their love for his Word.

2. Notice again how the story emphasizes the concern for Jesus’ security. Roman policy toward would-be challengers to Roman rule was very simple: put down all attempts at rebellion quickly, with brutal efficiency and no mercy. The characters’ concern for Jesus reflects not only their understanding of how the Romans dealt with perceived threats, but also their expectation that Jesus is trying to launch a movement that will lead to the liberation from Roman rule. Hence, their concern about not being found out before he has a chance to gather his followers.

*Some questions to consider:*

1. How would you answer the question, *Is faith opposed to reason??*
2. Who do you think is more surprised by Matthew's decision to follow Jesus—Gaius, the disciples, or Matthew himself? Why? What do you think will happen as he steps into this new situation as a disciple of Jesus?