

“Chariots of Fire” starring Ben Cross, Ian Charleson, Nigel Havers, & Ian Holm, 1981, PG, 124 minutes

“Chariots of Fire” was nominated for seven Academy Awards and won four, including Best Picture. It is ranked 19th in the British Film Institute's list of Top 100 British films.

Major themes:

- Serving God with our gifts vs. the pursuit of personal glory
- Anti-Semitism
- Faith
- Priorities
- Integrity
- Sportsmanship

Major Characters:

- Eric Liddell
- Harold Abrahams
- Lord Andrew Lindsay
- Aubrey Montague
- Jennie
- Sybil
- Sam Mussabini

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Interesting info:

The film's title was inspired by the line, "Bring me my chariot of fire," from the William Blake poem adapted into the popular British hymn "Jerusalem"; the hymn is heard at the end of the film.

Blake's poem

*And did those feet in ancient time,
Walk upon England's mountains green:
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On England's pleasant pastures seen!*

*And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills?* [the early Industrial Revolution and its destruction of nature and human relationships]

*Bring me my Bow of burning gold;
Bring me my Arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire!*

*I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green & pleasant Land*

Beneath this poem Blake inscribed an excerpt from the Bible: "'Would to God that all the Lord's people were Prophets" Numbers 11:29

The original phrase "chariot(s) of fire" is from 2 Kings 2:11 and 6:17 in the Bible. The line from the poem, "Bring me my Chariot of fire!" draws on the story of 2 Kings 2:11, where the Old Testament prophet Elijah is taken directly to heaven: "And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and

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Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." The phrase has become a byword for divine energy, and inspired the title of the film.

Eric Liddell's sister Jennie has a brief cameo in the Paris Church of Scotland during Liddell's sermon.

Scriptures:

Exodus 20:8 – 11 (NIV) – *“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”*

Ephesians 2:8 – 10 (NIV) – *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

Isaiah 40:21 – 31 – *“Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, “My way is hidden from*

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the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

Philippians 4:11 – 13 (NIV) – "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength."

2 Timothy 1:7 (AKJV) – "For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

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Discussion points:

1. What are some of the motivations we can have in competing with others?
Discuss the importance of setting goals that honor God.
2. Early in the film, Liddell's father says, "*The kingdom of God is not a democracy. The Lord never seeks re-election.*" Discuss.
3. Abrahams says that he uses his victories in running as a weapon against those he considers his enemies. What are some other "weapons" people use to gain the upper hand or boost their self-esteem in everyday life?
4. After being knocked down in a race, Liddell gets back up and perseveres without complaining or crying foul. What is significant about that? Can you think of people in the Bible who were "knocked down" but showed strength and character in the way they finished *their* races?
5. When Abrahams first loses to Liddell, he's devastated and believes that any man who comes in second is a failure. Discuss.
6. Discuss our need for approval. Do you feel the need to justify your existence in your own eyes or someone else's?