**CHARIOTS OF FIRE**

*Chariots of Fire* is a 1981 British film. It tells the fact-based story of two athletes in the 1924 Olympics: Eric Liddell, a Scottish Christian who runs for the glory of God, and Harold Abrahams, an English Jew who runs to overcome prejudice.

The film was written by Colin Welland and directed by Hugh Hudson. It was nominated for seven Academy Awards and won four, including Best Picture. 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.

**Plot**

In 1919, Harold Abrahams (Ben Cross) enters Cambridge University, where he experiences anti-Semitism from the staff. He becomes the first person in 700 years to complete the Trinity Great Court Run – running around the college courtyard in the time it takes for the clock to strike 12. Abrahams achieves an undefeated string of victories in various national running competitions. Although focused on his running, he falls in love with a leading Gilbert and Sullivan soprano, Sybil (Alice Krige).

Eric Liddell (Ian Charleson), born in China of Scottish missionary parents, is in Scotland. His devout sister Jennie (Cheryl Campbell) disagrees with Liddell's plans to be a competitive runner. But Liddell sees running as a way of glorifying God before returning to China to work as a missionary.

When they first race against each other, Liddell beats Abrahams. Abrahams takes it extremely badly, but Sam Mussabini (Ian Holm), a professional trainer, offers to improve his technique. This attracts criticism from the Cambridge authorities (John Gielgud and Lindsay Anderson). They say a gentleman would not employ a professional coach. Abrahams thinks this is really anti-Semitism and he does not follow their advice.

When Eric Liddell accidentally misses a church prayer meeting because of his running, his sister Jennie says that he does not care about God. Eric tells her that though he intends to return to the China mission, he feels inspired by God when he runs: "I believe that God made me for a purpose. But He also made me fast, and when I run, I feel His pleasure."
The two athletes, after years of training and racing, are accepted to represent Great Britain in the 1924 Olympics in Paris. Also accepted are Abrahams' Cambridge friends, Lord Andrew Lindsay (Nigel Havers), Aubrey Montague (Nicholas Farrell), and Henry Stallard (Daniel Gerroll).

While boarding the boat to Paris for the Olympics, Liddell learns the news that the heat for his 100 metre race will be on a Sunday. He refuses to run the race – despite strong pressure from the Prince of Wales and the British Olympic committee – because his Christian beliefs prevent him from running on the Sabbath.

However, a solution appears in the form of Liddell's teammate Lord Andrew Lindsay. He has already won a silver medal in the 400 metre hurdles, so he gives his place in the 400 metre race on the following Thursday to Liddell, who agrees. Liddell delivers a sermon at the Paris Church of Scotland that Sunday, and quotes from Isaiah 40, verse 31: "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and be not weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Abrahams is badly beaten by the heavily favoured United States runners in the 200 metre race. He knows his last chance for a medal will be the 100 metres. He competes in the race, and wins. His coach Sam Mussabini is happy that the years of dedication and training have brought an Olympic gold medal. Now Abrahams can continue with his life and reunite with his girlfriend Sybil, whom he had neglected to compete in the Olympics.

Before Liddell’s race, the American coach says to his runners that Liddell has little chance of doing well in the 400 metre race. But one of the American runners, Jackson Scholz, gives Liddell a note of support for his convictions. Liddell defeats the American favourites and wins the gold medal.

The British team returns home triumphant. As the film ends, onscreen text explains that Abrahams married Sybil, and became the elder statesman of British athletics. Eric Liddell went on to missionary work in China. All of Scotland mourned his death in 1945 in Japanese-occupied China.

Chariots of Fire Quiz

Choose the correct answer.
1. Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddell are
   A. runners
   B. classmates
   C. friends

2. Eric Liddell was on the Olympic Team for
   A. France
   B. China
   C. England

3. The 1924 Olympics were held in
   A. London, England
   B. Paris, France
   C. Sydney, Australia
4. Sam Musambini was Harold’s
   A. father
   B. friend
   C. coach

5. Which runner did NOT win an Olympic gold medal?
   A. Jackson Schultz
   B. Eric Liddell
   C. Harold Abrahams

6. Harold Abrahams faced prejudice because
   A. he didn’t run fast enough
   B. he was Jewish
   C. he was a Cambridge University student

7. Cambridge University leaders were upset with Harold Abrahams because
   A. he was using a professional coach
   B. he had said “If I can’t win, I won’t run”
   C. he had lost a race to Eric Liddell

8. English leaders were upset with Eric Liddell because
   A. his sister did not want him to run
   B. he wanted to go back to China
   C. he believed running on Sunday would break God’s law

9. When Eric said, “God made countries and God makes kings,” he meant
   A. I am very religious
   B. God’s laws are more important than the laws written by world leaders
   C. countries and kings are not important

10. True Olympic athletes see other Olympic athletes as
    A. enemies to beat
    B. friends to help
    C. competitors who push each other to be the best they can