

# John 8:53

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself?

## Analysis

**Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead?** The question drips with incredulity. "Greater than" (μείζων/meizōn) challenges Jesus's implicit claim to superiority over Abraham, Israel's patriarch and "friend of God" (James 2:23). "Our father Abraham" (τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ/tou patros hēmōn Abraam) claims covenant heritage—Abraham's physical descendants, heirs of promise.

Yet Jesus had already rejected this claim (v.39-40): "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill me." Physical descent means nothing without spiritual likeness. Their appeal to Abraham while rejecting Abraham's God reveals their true father (v.44): the devil, "a liar and the father of lies."

**And the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself?** The verb "makest" (ποιεῖς/poieis) accuses Jesus of self-promotion, arrogating to Himself status above patriarchs and prophets. Their rhetorical question expects the answer "nobody"—You're making yourself somebody you're not.

Ironically, they ask the right question. Jesus's identity is the central issue of John's Gospel (1:1-18, 20:31). But they reject the answer: He is the eternal Word made flesh, the "I AM" who appeared to Abraham (v.56-58), the one greater than the temple (Matthew 12:6), greater than Jonah (Matthew 12:41), greater than Solomon (Matthew 12:42). Yes, He is greater than Abraham—infininitely so, as Creator exceeds creature.

## Historical Context

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Abraham's centrality to Jewish identity cannot be overstated. God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3, 15:1-21, 17:1-27) grounded Israel's election, land promise, and blessing. Jews took immense pride in Abrahamic descent (Matthew 3:9, Luke 3:8). Abraham's faith was exemplary (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3), his obedience tested (Genesis 22), his friendship with God unique (2 Chronicles 20:7, Isaiah 41:8).

The prophets likewise commanded reverence—Moses spoke with God face to face (Deuteronomy 34:10), Isaiah saw the Lord's glory (Isaiah 6:1-5), Jeremiah was set apart before birth (Jeremiah 1:5). To claim superiority over these giants seemed blasphemous hubris.

Yet Hebrews 11, surveying the heroes of faith, concludes they all "died in faith, not having received the promises" (Hebrews 11:13), whereas believers in Christ have received what they only glimpsed from afar. Abraham "rejoiced to see my day" (v.56)—he looked forward to Christ. We look back to the accomplished work. Even Abraham's faith looked beyond Abraham to Christ, the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise (Galatians 3:16).

## Related Passages

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**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

**Psalms 19:1** — Heavens declare God's glory

## Study Questions

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1. How do we subtly appeal to religious heritage or spiritual pedigree rather than present faith in Christ?
2. What does it mean that Jesus is 'greater than Abraham,' and how should this shape our reading of the Old Testament?
3. Why is the question 'Whom do you make yourself?' the central question every person must answer about Jesus?

## Interlinear Text

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μὴ σὺ μείζων εἶ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ ὅστις  
**Art thou greater than** G1488 G3588 **father our** G3962 G2257 **Abraham** G11 **which** G3748  
G3361 G4771 G3187

ἀπέθανον· καὶ οἱ προφῆται ἀπέθανον· τίνα σεαυτὸν  
**are dead** G599 **and** G2532 G3588 **the prophets** G4396 **are dead** G599 **whom** G5101 **thyself** G4572

σὺ ποιεῖς  
**thou makest**  
G4771 G4160

## Additional Cross-References

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**John 4:12** (Parallel theme): Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?

**Romans 9:5** (Parallel theme): Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.