

John 8:56

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.

Analysis

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.

Jesus makes an astonishing claim: Abraham, centuries before Christ's birth, "rejoiced" (ἡγαλλιάσατο/ēgalliasato) to see Christ's day. This verb indicates exuberant joy, jubilation—not passive observation but active delight. Abraham wasn't merely ancestor in Christ's genealogy but a believer who looked forward to Messiah's coming.

"To see my day" (ἵνα ἴδῃ τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ἐμήν/hina idē tēn hēmeran tēn emēn)—"my day" refers to Christ's incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, the messianic age. Abraham "saw it" (εἶδεν/eiden)—but how? Several possibilities:

1. prophetically through the promised seed (Genesis 12:3, 22:18, cf. Galatians 3:16)
2. typologically through Isaac's near-sacrifice and ram substitute (Genesis 22, foreshadowing substitutionary atonement)
3. theologically through understanding God's promises pointed to future fulfillment
4. actually through pre-incarnate Christ's appearance (Genesis 18).

Most likely, Abraham grasped that God's promise of blessing to all nations through his seed meant Messiah would come from his lineage.

Hebrews 11:13 says patriarchs "saw [the promises] afar off, and were persuaded of them." Abraham looked forward with faith-filled anticipation, as we look backward

with faith-filled gratitude.

"And was glad" (ἐχάρη/echarē)—the aorist tense indicates definite historical gladness. Abraham's faith produced joy, the fruit of seeing God's redemptive plan. This demolishes the leaders' claim that Jesus dishonored Abraham. On the contrary, Abraham himself honored Christ by rejoicing in Him!

Historical Context

Genesis records no explicit statement of Abraham seeing Christ's day, so Jesus appeals to typological and theological insight. Genesis 22—the Akedah (binding of Isaac)—was central to Jewish theology. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his "only son" (Genesis 22:2, 12, 16) whom he "loved," with God providing a substitute ram, clearly foreshadowed the Father's sacrifice of His beloved Son, with Christ as both Isaac (offered) and ram (substitute).

God's promise to Abraham that "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:18) pointed beyond Isaac to one ultimate Seed. Paul explicitly identifies this Seed as Christ (Galatians 3:16): "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Abraham understood his descendants would bless the world—thus he rejoiced at God's redemptive plan.

Jewish tradition held that Abraham kept the entire Torah before it was given (based on Genesis 26:5). Some rabbis taught Abraham visited Paradise or received visions of future history. Jesus's claim that Abraham saw His day wasn't unprecedented in form, but in content—identifying Jesus as the fulfillment Abraham foresaw—this was revolutionary.

For Jewish Christians in John's audience, this verse provided crucial continuity: faith in Jesus didn't abandon Abraham but fulfilled Abraham's own faith. Christianity isn't a break from Old Testament faith but its consummation. Abraham himself would recognize and rejoice in Jesus as Messiah.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does understanding that Abraham 'rejoiced to see' Christ's day change our reading of Genesis and God's promises?
2. What does Abraham's forward-looking faith teach us about living between Christ's first and second comings?
3. How do Old Testament types and shadows (like Isaac's near-sacrifice) deepen our appreciation of Christ's work?

Interlinear Text

Ἀβραὰμ	ὁ	πατὴρ	ὑμῶν	ἠγαλλιάσατο	ἵνα	εἶδεν	τὴν
Abraham	G3588	father	Your	rejoiced	to	he saw	G3588
G11		G3962	G5216	G21	G2443	G1492	
ἡμέραν	τὴν	ἐμήν	καὶ	εἶδεν	καὶ	ἐχάρη	
day	G3588	my	and	he saw	and	was glad	
G2250		G1699	G2532	G1492	G2532	G5463	

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 11:13 (Parallel theme): These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Genesis 22:18 (Parallel theme): And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

Matthew 13:17 (Parallel theme): For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

John 8:39 (References Abraham): They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.

Luke 10:24 (Parallel theme): For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

Hebrews 11:39 (Parallel theme): And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

John 8:37 (References Abraham): I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.