

2. In Heaven

The first words in the Lord's prayer are not simply "Our Father," but "Our Father in heaven." What significance do the words "in heaven" have? What do these words suggest?

a) God is above us.

Our Father in heaven means that God is above us. This is true in multiple ways. In John 3:31 we read.

He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.

Here John the Baptist spoke of Christ, but the statement is also true of God, the Father. Since God is above all, the wise man Solomon issued the following warning:

Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few (Ecclesiastes 5:1).

Solomon is instructing us to take our vows before God very seriously. In comparison to God, we are mere dust. Although Christ refers to us as friends and calls us brothers and sisters – this because of the personal relationship we can now have with God the Father, and his Son through salvation – nevertheless, we must never forget that we as mere humans are dealing with God. We are praying to Him who spoke to Moses: take off your shoes before you draw near for the ground on which you stand is holy ground.

In Psalm 73:9 He is referred to as the "Most High". There is none above Him.

When Isaiah caught a glimpse of the glory of God in Isaiah 6:1-8, he was awestruck. He cried out: ***Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips.*** Whoever comes to understand who God in heaven really is, will never be the same. The experience will be life changing. This happens if we comprehend what the words "Our Father in heaven", really mean.

Since God is in heaven, we look up to God. In Psalm 14:2 we read:

The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God.

And even we, who seek after God can never comprehend God completely. Just like an animal, say a cat or dog, cannot understand the workings of a car, or learn how to read a book, so our intelligence can never comprehend some of the heavenly things. God says:

***"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.
"For as the heavens are higher than the earth,***

***So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).***

If we think we have an answer to everything spiritually, then we are trying to bring God down to our level. We cannot bring God down to our level. He is so much higher than we are. Even those who scoff at God are only here for a short time. They had no say in when they were born, and they have no choice but to die. In the short time that is theirs between birth and death, they can make noise and declare their independence from God, or they can humbly bow in awe before him.¹ God has the last word. Of those mortals who scoff at the Eternal One we read in Psalm 2:4-5:

***He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;
The Lord shall hold them in derision.
Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,
And distress them in His deep displeasure***

There are some beautiful mysteries regarding God’s Kingdom that have been revealed to us. Some of the spiritual blessings we have received are hard to understand for those who have not experienced them. Nonetheless the heavenly realm that we will have access to one day is impossible to fully comprehend. Jesus says to Nicodemus in John 3:12: ***If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?***

b) Looking up to heaven means we look away from the things of the earth.

Jesus wants us to lay up treasures in heaven not treasures on earth. (Matthew 6:19-21)

If we keep heaven in our thoughts, then we will endeavor to live a holy life. We have a song in our hymnals written by Charles Naylor. The first verse goes like this:

Heaven is a holy place, filled with glory and with grace;
Sin can never enter there;
All within its gates are pure, from defilement kept secure,
Sin can never enter there.

Sin can never enter there.
Sin can never enter there.
So if at the judgment bar,
Sinful spots your soul shall mar,
You can never enter there.

This is consistent with the Bible’s teaching in Revelations 21:27.

Rev. 21:27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

¹ A.W. Towser, A.W. *The Root of the Righteous*. (Christian Publications Inc., Harrisburg, PA., 1955), pages 158-159

The good news is that God has prepared a solution for the problem of sin. If we confess our sins, he not only forgives us but cleanses us and makes us ready for heaven (1 John 1:9).

c) What is heavenly is not of the world.

If our Father is in heaven, then we as his children also are to be heavenly. In John 17:14-16 Jesus prays to the Father for his disciples and says:

I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

It is significant that in the same passage Jesus also prays for us, for you and me, because he says:

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word (John 17:20).

Just like a ship is to be in the water, but the water is not to be in the ship, so we are to be in the world but not of the world. In Philippians 3:20 we read: ***For our citizenship is in heaven.***

Jesus confirms this. When his disciples came back from their journeys and announced with joy that even the demons were subject to them in the name of Jesus, Jesus answered them:

Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).

In Hebrews 12:23 it is confirmed that we are part of a heavenly church, a heavenly people, a heavenly family. The Father, who is in heaven, wants to take us to heaven where he is because we belong to the heavenly if we are his people.

For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: “And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.” And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.”) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect (Heb 12: 18-23).

d) Heaven is the abode of God

In Genesis 1:1 we read that God created the heavens and the earth. This refers to the creation of the physical universe. The heaven in the Lord's prayer refers to a different heaven. In Hebrews 7:26 we read:

For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens.

The abode of God is not of this creation and can be described as higher than the heavens. When we pray “Our Father in heaven” or as the Old King James Version has it: “Our Father which art in heaven”, we acknowledge that heaven is the abode of God, and by that we do not mean the heavens that we see. Christ came from heaven to be “Immanuel”, God with us: ***No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven (John 3:1).***

Paul was allowed to have a glimpse of what this heaven was like. Here is how he described it:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

Here we see that heaven and Paradise are used to describe the same thing. Paul calls it the third heaven. What did Paul mean with the term “third heaven”? Some commentators think that the first heaven is the heaven that contains the clouds, the second heaven refers to the universe beyond the clouds also including the stars, and the third heaven is the abode of God. I have no better explanation, although I cannot verify that that is what Paul meant. Terms like the third heaven, the heaven of heavens, Paradise, and Abraham Bosom, are used to describe the same concept.

e) God is omnipresent

When King Solomon had finished building the temple in Jerusalem as a place where God was to dwell among men he said:

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built! (1 Kings 8:27).

God’s greatness and his magnificent glory are expressed in these words of Solomon
Also Moses says in Deuteronomy 4:39

Therefore know this day and consider it in your heart, that the LORD Himself is God in heaven above, and on the the earth beneath; there is no other.

And David writes in Psalm 139:8,

If I ascend up into heaven, You are there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there . If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, “ Surely the darkness shall fall on me,” even the night shall be light about me.

God is so great that nothing can contain him, and yet he is still able to live in the heart of his child through the Holy Spirit. And although heaven is his abode, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain him, still Jesus say:

If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our home with him (John 14:23)

This is a mystery and only possible because God is Spirit, God is omnipresent, and God is love.

We have seen that Solomon says the heaven of heavens (1 Kings 8:23) cannot contain God, and Psalm 2:4 refers to God sitting in the heavens. Here the plural for heaven is used instead of the singular. It is common to speak of the heavens in the plural, rather than the singular. In the first verse of the Bible which specifies that God created heaven and earth, the original says “heavens,” plural not singular plural. Also our text also uses the plural. Literally it says “Father our who in the heavens” or “Father our, the [one] in the heavens.”

f) God's Authority

When praying “Our Father in Heaven” we acknowledge that He is the Highest Authority. Nonetheless He has given his Authority to Christ. When Jesus said, “***All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth***” (Matthew 20:18), it is apparent that God the Father is the one who gave him that Authority.

God has raised Christ from the dead and has set him at his right hand (Ep 1:20-22). God, the Father, has committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22). In 1 Corinthians 15:27-28 we read about the end of the world when death, the last enemy, will be conquered and God

“has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

g) When Christians die they go to a place of bliss called Heaven or Paradise

When Christians pass from this earth, they go to be with “Our Father in heaven”. Heaven is referred to in the Bible by several different terms including Paradise, and Abraham's Bosom,

To the repentant thief on the cross Jesus said, “***Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise***” (Luke 23:43).

This same place is referred to as Abraham's Bosom in Luke 16:22: ***So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom.***

In Revelation 2:7 Jesus promises, “***To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.***”

Souls go directly to be with Christ after they die. We see this in Philippians 1:23 where Paul says: ***“For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.”***

In 2 Corinthians 5:8 we read: ***“We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”***

h) A new heaven and a new earth will be our future home.

When the last day, the day of judgment comes, then heaven and earth shall pass away. All those written in the Lamb's book of life will then inherit the new heaven and the new earth. The souls who are no longer living in their earthly bodies await the day of judgment. Those who are saved are being comforted and are with their Saviour. Those who are lost are already in a place of punishment, as can be seen from Luke 16. In his letter, Peter, the Apostle, describes it like this:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. (2 Peter 3:10-13)

John saw a glimpse of this new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21 and 22. Here are a few sample verses:

I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea (21:1).

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (21:4).

And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it (21:22).

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (22:1).

And there shall be no night there; and they need no lamp nor light of the sun; for the Lord God gives them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever (22:5).

Did Paul get a foretaste of our future home when he was in a state of rapture as he describes in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4? If so, no wonder he says: ***Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth (Col 3:2)*** because our citizenship is in heaven. (Phil 3:20).

Peter assures us of ***an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you (2 Peter 3:20)***.

all this because “Our Father” is “in heaven.”

Questions for: 2. In Heaven

1. Give some examples of scriptures that teach us that God is above all.
2. Why should we take our vows, spoken before God seriously?
3. Why will we never completely understand the things of God?
4. What does laying up treasures in heaven mean?
5. How can we be in the world but not of the world?
6. What does the term “third heaven” refer to?
7. How can God live in our hearts, if he is in heaven?
8. How does the Lord’s prayer underline the Authority of God?
9. What synonyms are found in the Bible for heaven?
10. List some of the things that the Book of Revelation tells us about heaven.