

“ABBA, FATHER”: WHAT IS HE REALLY LIKE?

All verses are from the Amplified Version unless otherwise noted.

Underlined portion of verses are my emphasis, to draw attention to the point that is being made.

I use the following as synonymous with “Abba, Father”: “God”, “God the Father”, and “Heavenly Father”

The words of Jesus are in red.

To encounter God or be in His presence in the Old Testament was a very scary experience. God told Moses to build a Tabernacle and was given specific instructions how it was to be constructed. In the center of the portable Tabernacle, and later in the permanent Temples, were the two most sacred places. The first was called the Holy of Holies or the Most Holy Place, where the glory of God’s presence dwelt. It contained the Ark of the Covenant, which represented God and His presence, with the Mercy Seat on top of the Ark. The High Priest was allowed in only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, to offer a sacrifice for his sins and the sins of the nation (Heb 9:7). It was thought that anyone else who entered would be struck dead immediately. If the High Priest made a mistake or was irreverent it was thought he might be struck dead, so at some point in time a story began that a rope was tied around the ankle of the High Priest so if he was struck dead he could be pulled out (See Note 1 on the last page).

The second most sacred place in the center of the Tabernacle and Temple was the Holy Place. It was accessible on a daily basis only by priests, which were Aaron’s descendants through his son Levi. Dividing the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was a veil that the High Priest had to go through to enter into the Holy of Holies. The veil, a curtain made of fine linen, and blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, was thought to be between four inches to three feet thick and fifteen to sixty feet tall. It was embroiled with figures of Cherubim, which guard the throne of God in heaven. The purpose of the Veil was thought to act as a barrier or shield between man and God to make sure man could not carelessly or irrelevantly enter into God’s holy presence.

It was this veil that was ripped from top to bottom just as Jesus yielded up His spirit to His Heavenly Father and died (Mt 27:50-51, & Luke 23:46). Since the tearing began at the top, it indicated that the tearing was done by God the Father and showed from that time onward that He was inviting everyone into His presence for fellowship and communion. This was possible because once and for all time on the cross Jesus bore the sins of every person (I John 2:2). Afterwards He entered heaven’s Temple and offered the eternal sacrifice for all mankind (Heb 9:9-17). Now every believer can enjoy, without fear, a relationship like Adam and Eve experienced in the Garden of Eden where God would come walking in the cool breeze of the day seeking their fellowship and companionship (Gen 3:8). It can also be the same warm receptive relationship (Luke 9:11) that people experienced when they met Jesus (Emmanuel or God with us in human form). The Apostle John sums up his experience of living daily for three years with Jesus and invites us to experience the same love, joy, and fellowship in the following verses:



John 1:14 And the Word (Christ) became flesh (human, incarnate) and tabernacled (fixed His tent of flesh, lived awhile) among us; and we [actually] saw His glory (His honor, His majesty), such glory as an only begotten son receives from his father, full of grace (favor, loving-kindness) and truth.

1 John 1:1-4 New Living Translation

1. We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. 2. This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. 3. We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4. We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.

Sadly the reality is, that because of fear, very few Christians ever fully enter into the intimacy and joy of communion with God, their Heavenly Father, which Jesus died to make available to each and every one of us.



Directly in front of the Veil was the Altar of Incense, which was overlaid with gold. For thousands of years since Moses completed the Tabernacle in the wilderness, twice a day, morning and evening (Ex 30:1-10), one priest out of the descendants of Aaron's son, Levi, would be chosen to burn incense at the Altar. The incense symbolized the prayers of God's people that are a sweet aroma and precious to our Heavenly Father (Revelation 5:8 & 8:3).

Luke records a particular incident with Zacharias (or Zachariah), the father of John the Baptist, which occurred at Herod's Temple in Jerusalem about a year before the birth of Jesus. Note especially Luke 1:8-13a (NKJ):

- 8 Now while on duty, serving as priest before God in the order of his division,
- 9 As was the custom of the priesthood, it fell to him by lot to enter [the sanctuary of] the temple of the Lord and burn incense.
- 10 And all the throng of people were praying outside [in the court] at the hour of incense [burning].
- 11 And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.
- 12 And when Zachariah saw him, he was troubled, and fear took possession of him.
- 13a But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zachariah,

Zacharias was chosen by lot on that particular day to burn incense. Because there were so many priests this may have been his first and only opportunity since a priest began serving around the age of twenty five until the age of fifty when he had to retire (Num 8:23-26).

Zacharias was very excited, but also apprehensive knowing he was going to be so near God's holy presence. Training had taught him that this could be a dangerous task if done wrong, as in Lev 10:1-7 when two of Aaron's sons offered incense with "profane fire" and were immediately struck dead. The Greek word translated as "profane" has as its root meaning "unauthorized" or "strange", thus not what God had instructed or the way it was to be done.



Zacharias may have planned to fulfill his priestly responsibility and then move quickly outside to where the people were praying. As he burned the incense in the exact way he had been taught, he was totally shocked when suddenly a spiritual being appeared on the right side of the Altar. At first Zacharias didn't know who this being was, so his immediate reaction was one of being troubled to the point that fear took complete control of him. His whole body probably began to shake from head to foot. The first word from the Angel of the Lord was to instruct Zacharias not to be afraid. Throughout the Old Testament many people dreaded or were fearful of being with or near God's presence (Ex 19:16, & 20:18-19), but a few persons actually enjoyed being with and communicating with God (Gen 5:22-24; Ex 3:1-4:17, 19:3-24, 33:7-11; Ps 73:28, 1 Kgs 19:1-18). Why is it this way? We will discuss that subject in another lesson.

For the purpose of contrast, let's move on to a current day imaginary story that involves a young boy of seven who we will call Daring. For the last two years Daring had fought a difficult battle against cancer. Daring, being an only child, was totally adored by his parents, but especially by his father who constantly lavished him with affection. Whenever the pain became too intense, Daring always wanted to be held and comforted in his daddy's arms. In fact during the few short years of Daring's life, running into his daddy's arms or being held tightly in his daddy's lap had always been one of his greatest joys. Daring's father did everything possible to try to ease the pain his son experienced, but he was very aware of his limitations.

From as far back as Daring could remember his parents had always read him stories about Jesus that told about His love and compassion for people, especially for children. Daring's favorite story was how Jesus would gather the children, play with them, lay hands on and bless them, and use them to illustrate that the way to enter God's kingdom was to be childlike (Matt 18:1-3, & 19:13-14). Daring loved being a child, and although he had never told anyone he hoped he'd never grow up, just remain a child since he thought that would make Jesus happy. So many of the adults he met always seemed to be so serious and not very childlike, happy, or playful.

The church Daring's family attended supported his parent's teaching by emphasizing that God was love, which was best illustrated in Jesus, who was just like God the Father. Once Daring overheard their pastor tell his daddy that "Jesus was the spitting image of God the Father". Daring was impressed at how his Dad smiled and shook his head up and down in agreement with that comment.

However, despite all the efforts and prayers of Daring's parents, family, relatives, friends, doctors, and nurses, the day came that Daring lost the battle and died. Daring's spirit departed his frail body and returned to God in heaven (Eccl 3:21 & 12:7).

Daring was immediately met by Jesus (2 Cor 5:8) in all of His glory and majesty, and Daring felt only peace. Jesus' explained that His first responsibility was to escort Daring to the throne of God the Father, or "**Abba, Father**" as Jesus preferred to call Him. When they arrived at the door of the throne room Jesus knelt down and smiled as He looked straight into Daring's eyes and gave him only one instruction about what he should do as he entered God the Father's presence. Daring listened intently and then smiled back at Jesus, showing that he fully understood Jesus' instruction. Daring immediately let loose of Jesus' hand, turned, swung open the door into the Holy of Holies and ran boldly (Heb 4:16) inside as fast as his little legs would go. Quickly "**Abba, Father**" rose to His feet and caught Daring in mid air as he jumped into His outstretched arms. For a few minutes "**Abba, Father**" clutched Daring tightly, then sat down on His throne with Daring on his lap drawing Daring close to His chest. For quite some time Daring quietly sat there soaking up the love, joy, peace, and comfort that flowed out of his heavenly Daddy's heart. Daring finally turned around and focused his complete attention directly into the eyes of his heavenly Daddy. It reminded Daring of the many times he had experienced something similar, but not nearly as intense, when he ran into the arms of his earthly daddy and sat in his lap looking up into his face. Those times had thoroughly prepared him for this encounter with his heavenly Father. As he continued to sit in Abba Father's lap, he was totally overwhelmed with awe and couldn't think of anything to say. However, after awhile Daring began to ask questions and the conversation went on for quite some time. Then they played one of Daring's favorite childhood games, which God the Father enjoyed immensely.

Now let's contrast the emotions and feelings of Zacharias with those of Daring. Zacharias was scared, even fearful as he entered near to the presence of Holy God and encountered a spiritual being. Religion had taught him to be fearful. The majority of everything he had read from the Scriptures or had been taught during his religious training indicated that God was to be feared. Therefore he wondered if he had made a mistake fulfilling his duties as a priest, even the smallest error in attitude or action; would God react in anger and strike him dead immediately like He had done to Uzzah?

2 Sam 6:6-7 (NKJ)

6 And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled.

7 And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for touching the ark, and he died there by the ark of God.

Even King David, who from early childhood was a passionate lover of God, became fearful of God after seeing what God did to Uzzah:

2 Sam 6:9a (NKJ) David was afraid of the Lord that day...

Daring's experience with God the Father was just the opposite of Zacharias'. Daring's home life and religious teaching had always emphasized Jesus as gentle but firm, loving, compassionate, approachable, willing to help whenever His God and Father told Him to. These truths were reinforced by his parent's lives and actions, but especially by his father who was very gentle, approachable, and loving, yet firm when necessary. So Daring easily understood Jesus' instruction, and simply ran into his Heavenly Daddy's outstretched arms just like he had done with his daddy.

Purpose:

The purpose of this lesson is to challenge each of us to take an honest look at what our real heart attitude is toward "**Abba, Father**". Only as we become truly honest with ourselves and admit how we really feel and what we really think about God the Father, can we begin the healing process toward truly loving God with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength (Mark 12:30, Deut 6:5). Fear and love are opposites and both cannot control our hearts at the same time. One or the other will exert its influence in our heart and thoughts toward God, our Heavenly Father. Thus we need to experience our Heavenly Father's love in such a way that it casts out fear and the torment it produces in our heart and attitude toward God. John the Apostle mentions this in the following verse:

I Jn 4:18 (NKJ)

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

After having fear cast out and being made perfect in our heavenly Father's love will we begin to understand and experience what the Apostle Paul meant in the following verse:

Rom 8:15 (NKJ)

15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

Our perspective of God the Father is primarily developed first by our childhood emotional experiences with those that raised us, and second by the religious teaching and models we received. Unfortunately both of these have created in so many a twisted view of Abba Father as someone to be afraid of because He is harsh, critical, angry, or who looks for every opportunity to punish us for the slightest infraction or mistake. Before we can develop a new perspective and see "**Abba, Father**" as He really is (Mt 5:8), we must cleanse our hearts by dealing with the lies we've been taught that we accepted to be the truth. We will need to forgive our parents, especially fathers, and anyone else that raised us for the poor model of God the Father they modeled to us. We will have to cleanse our hearts of judgments we've made against our parents and religious instructors that we've projected on our Heavenly Father. We must forgive the church and its leaders who taught us wrongly about God's character. Only then will we begin to understand and experience the following invitation:

Heb 4:16 (NKJ)

16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Oh, that we would be like Daring and run boldly and confidently into Abba Father's presence and outstretched arms to have intimate fellowship and communion with Him. It is one of the greatest longings of the Father's heart for each and every one of His children.

Goal:

Future lessons will provide help in learning how to do the steps mentioned above. Yet getting rid of the fear that resulted from negative models and wrong teachings is only the first small step in beginning to see "**Abba, Father**" as He really is. The bigger and more important steps are seeing "**Abba, Father**" through the only person who truly knows Him, and that person is Jesus Christ, the healer of the brokenhearted. As we look and see the truth through Jesus' eyes, life, and teachings will we come to an accurate heart understanding of what our heavenly Father is really like, which is the goal of this series of studies.

Personal Application Questions, Additional Resources, and Notes, are below the signature.

Personal Application Questions:

1. What did your religious education teach you, by either word, example, or deed about God the Father?
2. What kind of example or model did you receive from your father, mother, or any other individual that raised you from birth through age 16, about what God the Father is like? Remember that male and female are both made in the image of God. Therefore, fathers are meant to be a representative of the Father Heart of God, while mothers are meant to be a representative of the Mother Heart of God.
3. What do you personally believe deep down in your heart and spirit, about what God the Father is really like?
4. What is your emotional reaction to God The Father when life events go badly for you?
5. How do you feel when using the word "Father" in relationship to God?

Additional Resources:

While doing some research recently on the Internet I came across the testimony of a young widow's struggle in her relationship with her Heavenly Father. Below is a portion of her testimony:

"Several years ago, I became dissatisfied with my relationship with God. I read Scripture daily and prayed regularly, but I just didn't feel a connection to Him. I couldn't figure out why I felt so distant to Him. During this time, I became plagued with anxiety. I feared and doubted. I tried praying through my anxiety, but I got nowhere. I became so frustrated and couldn't understand what was happening. Through many arduous weeks of journaling and reflecting, I realized that I had not completely given my heart over to God. Because of events and some dysfunction in childhood, I had built a fortress around my heart to protect it from being hurt further. I didn't want to let anyone inside of it. I had locked away pain and disappointment. To give my heart to God would require incredible amounts of vulnerability on my part. I just wasn't sure that I could trust Him with it. Viewing God as "Father" was a scary thought for me. The connotation of the word "Father" was not one of tenderness or love. It evoked fear in me.

What I learned through this experience was that I was indeed a Christian. However, when I accepted Christ as a 16-year old, it was like I put Jesus on my pile of "trash" (sand). I did not let Him in to the inner chambers of my heart where I had locked away pain. My foundation was weak. It was all of the hurts that had accumulated over my life. The time had come for me to crack open my heart and let God have all of my "trash". I had to begin a journey of trust, learning who my Father in Heaven was. I had to take a look at God's promises to me — that He would never leave me. He would never forsake me. Nothing could ever separate me from His love. I was sealed with His Holy Spirit. God was Father to the fatherless. He held my tears in a bottle. Working through all of this was hard, but the reward was great. I began to embrace God as my Father, believing that He is who He says He is. I was able to open up my heart and allow Him to flood the whole thing with His love and healing. My cracks were

patched up by His blood. My foundation changed. No longer was God on top of my “trash”. He now was holding all of my “trash” as He held my heart. My foundation truly was a Rock.

This was a beautiful illustration for me as I was able to understand the redemptive power of my Lord and Savior. His timing is perfect. That work paid off greatly to me because in February of 2008 the rains did come. The streams did rise, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the Rock. When my husband died that day in February, my house stayed standing. I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that because my house (heart) was being held by the Rock, I did not fall. I was able to stand firm in my faith, knowing, trusting, and believing that God would take care of me... He would not let go.

Thank you so much God, for being my Father, my Rock, my Fortress, and my Deliverer. I will praise You all the days of my life.

Suzie (suzielawyer)

The complete article can be seen in its entirety at <http://66books.wordpress.com/>. When the page opens, scroll down until you come to the article for June 26, 2011.

Here is what Suzie writes about herself:

“A widowed mother of six children, I basically never stop! I always seem to be moving at such a fast pace just to keep up with the demands of life. This year, I really want to stop, pause, and reflect on what God has to teach me. Therefore, I have chosen to make the word “abide” my word for 2011. I want to be so close to my Creator, where I am walking in step with Him, abiding in His love, allowing Him to fill me with unspeakable joy. I want to be overwhelmed with the joy that can only come from Him.

Losing my husband in 2008 has left a huge hole in my heart and my life. For the past few years I have been trying to discover my identity apart from my husband. Who am I now? It is in God’s Word that my identity is clear — I am a beloved, precious daughter of the King of kings. I belong to God. My Maker is my husband — the Lord Almighty is His name (Isaiah 54:5). I want to abide in Him and grow this year, fully discovering who I am in Christ. I am totally looking forward to this amazing journey!”

Notes:

1. The story of a rope being tied around the High Priest’s ankle so he could be pulled out of the Holy of Holies if he was struck dead has been researched and found to have no historical fact. See articles on the following websites:
 - <http://www.christiananswers.net/q-eden/anklerope.html>
 - <http://blog.bibleplaces.com/2009/01/that-rope-around-high-priests-ankle.html>
 - <http://en.allexperts.com/q/Bible-Studies-1654/rope-high-priest-legend.htm>