



JOHNSON AVENUE
Church of Christ
WHERE *God's Family* BUILDS ETERNAL HOMES

A Spiritual Encouragement Message

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Our Father In Heaven

by Oscar Velazquez

Jesus' prayers recorded by the four gospel writers are mostly short, but they also recorded that Jesus sometimes would pray all night long (Lk.6:12). For us it is easy to suppose that a long prayer equals a good prayer and that a short prayer would be an immature prayer. But that is not the case, the gospel writers as well as other Scripture writers recorded short and long prayers done by different faithful men and women of God. Jesus criticized the gentiles' long prayers because they were so repetitive (Mt.6:7-8). We can find written examples like in the time of Elijah when 450 religious, pagan Canaanites called on the name of their false god from morning until noon, crying, "O, Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no answer after many hours (1Kings 18:26-29).

The Jews would pray three times a day (Dn. 6:10, Ps.55:17). Starting the day, in the middle of the day and when the day ends. But we don't see Jesus suggesting special hours for the daily prayers. Him and His disciples prayed not just three times a day but at any time of the day or night (Lk.18:1). The Rabbinic Jews daily prayer consisted of reciting Deut. 6:4-5 and then repeated a series of 18 prayers called the Amidah, they would call this entire process the Tefillah (prayers). They still practice that today domestically and in synagogues using a traditional Jewish prayer book called Siddur for ordinary sabbaths and on weekdays, but for High Holidays their prayer book is called Mahzor. Jews also pray moving like the flame of a candle, meaning that the light of his or her soul ignites in their desire to connect directly with God by praying.

Jesus taught His disciples how to pray without using vain repetitions, He instructed them to choose their words wisely, fewer but powerful and meaningful words.

Jesus lived in a world where the public teaching of the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) and the prayer were all done in Hebrew. There is some evidence that Jesus used Aramaic language in His teachings (Mk. 5:41, 7:34, 11:9, 14:36, Mt. 5:22, 27:46, John 20:16) which opened the door for the New Testament to be written later by His disciples in Greek, the most influential and easier known language at that time. As a result, there is no sacred tongue to teach the Scriptures or to pray to God. The Word was translated from Divine to human in the incarnation (Jn.1:14), so all nations can hear, believe, repent and obey.

The people of Israel had always known that God is the Father because He is the Creator (Deut.32:6, Is.63:16, 64:8, Jer.3:4,19, 31:9, Mal.1:6, 2:10). But they refer to God in prayer as Adonai (my Lord or Master), Elohim (He who is powerful), El Shadai (God Almighty) and other similar combinations of His revealed name to them (1Kings 8:22-23, 2 Kings 19:15, Dn.9:4), but they never refer to God as Father when they taught or prayed (Mt. 26:63-65). Jesus would openly call Him Father, as it was prophesied of Him (Ps.2:7, 89:26) and taught His disciples to refer to God as Father in their prayers as well. You see, Jesus could have chosen any other term, but He chose Father. "Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Matthew 6:9 ESV).

Today in at least five countries in the Middle East (Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Jordan), father (abba, daddy) is the first word a child pronounces when they are learning to speak even though they now speak Arabic and not Aramaic as in Jesus' time, that term survived. Jesus taught us to speak to God far in Heaven, but at the same time always close to us as our Father. Jesus made it possible for us to call God our Father and truly live our lives in that close relationship with Him (Gal.3:26-29).