

ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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Our FATHER



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By Rev. Rebecca J. Brimmer, *International President and CEO*

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REPEATEDLY JESUS/YESHUA used the term “Father” to refer to God Almighty. According to Eric von Atzigen, “Jesus traveled and taught for three years. There are about 110 pages in the Bible dedicated to His ministry and message. We have approximately 25,000 words that Jesus spoke recorded in the Bible. Of those 25,000 words, Jesus taught about the Father in Heaven at least 181 times. This means 1 out of every 140 words, Jesus was speaking about His Father. His central message and purpose was to restore us to a relationship with our Daddy in Heaven.”

When we hear the term “Our Father,” probably the first thing we think of is the Lord’s Prayer. When asked by the disciples how to pray, Jesus/Yeshua started with the words, “*Our Father who art in heaven.*” When I first heard it said in Hebrew I was astonished by how similar it sounded to many Jewish prayers. In fact in the central prayer of Judaism, called the *Amidah* (“standing” because one stands when praying it) also called the *Shmoneh Esreh* (“18” which refers to the number of sections), there are several references to God as Father. (see example in box below).

Many historians believe that the *Amidah* prayer dates to the Second Temple period, the exact time period we read about in the Gospels. Jesus/Yeshua and His followers may have known this prayer. In any case, the Jews of the Second Temple period would have been very familiar with the concept of God being the Father.

From the Amidah prayer

**Cause us to return,
our Father, to Your Torah;
draw us near, our King,
to Your service;
and bring us back to You
in whole-hearted repentance.
Blessed are You L-rd,
who desires penitence.**

**Pardon us, our Father,
for we have sinned;
forgive us, our King,
for we have transgressed;
for You are a good
and forgiving G-d.
Blessed are You L-rd,
gracious One who
pardons abundantly.**



Let's consider a few Scriptures from the *Tanakh* (*Tanakh* is an acronym standing for three sections of the Old Testament: the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.), the Prophets, and the Writings).

From the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

“Do you thus deal with the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?” (Deut. 32:6).

From the Writings (Ketuvim)

King David addressed all the leadership of Israel at the time of passing the baton of leadership to Solomon. After his address he prays in front of the entire assembly starting with the words, *“Blessed are You, LORD God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever...”* (1 Chr. 29:10b).

In Psalm 68:4–5, David says, *“Sing to God, sing praises to His name; extol Him who rides on the clouds, by His name YAH, and rejoice before Him. A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation.”*

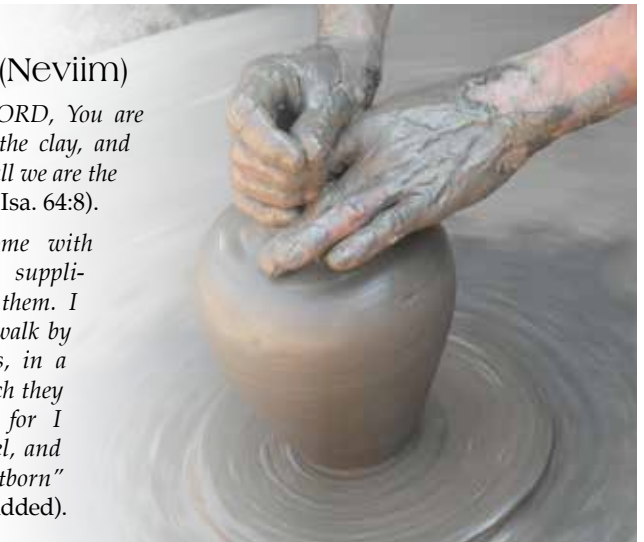
Psalm 89, written by Ethan the Ezrahite, is an amazing song about the nature of God, and the calling of King David. In verse 26 the psalmist says, *“He [David] shall cry to Me, ‘You are my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.’”*

Nathan the prophet came and spoke words from the Lord to King David regarding his son Solomon, *“I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him...”* (2 Sam. 7:14–15a).

From the Prophets (Neviim)

“But now, O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand” (Isa. 64:8).

“They shall come with weeping, and with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, in a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is MY firstborn” (Jer. 31:9 emphasis added).

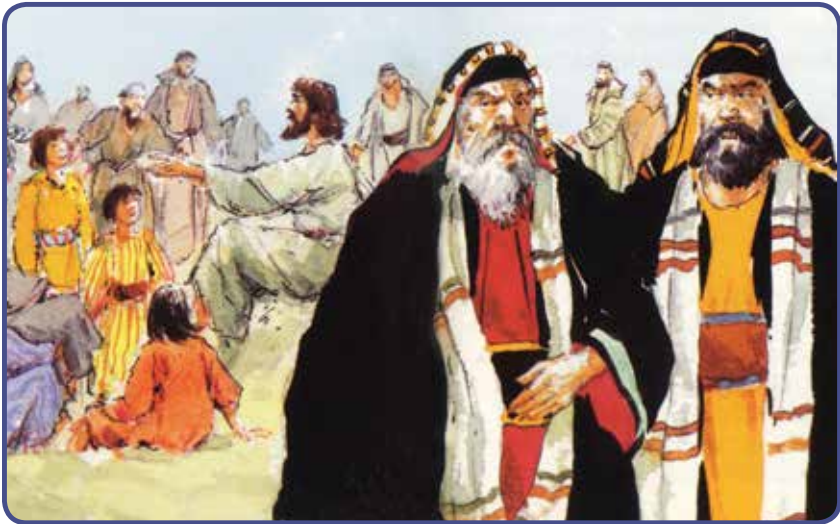


Extra Biblical Sources

The *Mishnah*, which contains the teachings of the early rabbis, relates that before the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70 Jews used to pray “Upon whom shall we depend? Upon Our Father who is in heaven” (*Mishnah Sotah* 9:15).

The Hellenistic Jewish sage Ben Sira, who wrote the book of *Sirach* in Hebrew (also known of as *Ecclesiasticus*) 200 years before Jesus/Yeshua, prayed “O Lord, Father and Master of my life... O Lord, Father and God of my life” (Ben Sira 23:1,4). Also “Lord you are my Father; do not forsake me in the days of trouble, when there is no help against the proud” (Ben Sira 51:10).

The title “Our Father,” was found in a fragment of the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q511 fragment 127 line 1), and the title “My Father” was found in Cave 4 fragments 4Q372.



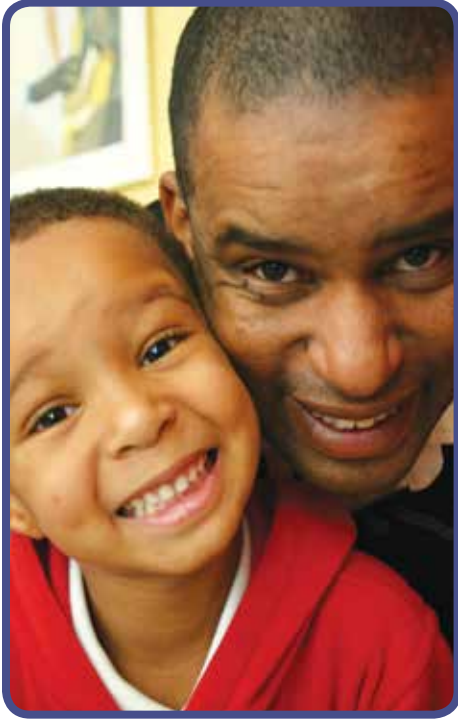
So we see, Jesus’/Yeshua’s use of the term “our Father,” in reference to God was not at all unusual in the Judaism of His time. It was found in all sections of the *Tanakh* (O.T.), and also in non-biblical writings that would have been known at the time of Jesus. His use of the first person, “my Father,” was less normative (although found in Psalm 89:26, in Ben Sira, and the Dead Sea Scrolls). It was this personal first person usage “my Father” that brought Him much criticism from the religious leaders of His day who recognized Jesus was claiming a special relationship with the Father. For example John tells us that some of the Jews of His day sought to kill him because, “...[He] said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:18b). As Christians we understand that Jesus and the Father are one (John 10:30). This was a radical and difficult concept for the religious leaders of His day.

Cultural Misunderstandings

As Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg says, “The Bible does not need to be re-written, but it needs to be re-read.” The truth is we read our Bibles from our own unique cultural understanding, which is 2,000 years removed from the Writings of the Apostles (New Testament) and farther removed from the *Tanakh* (O.T.). Our cultural understanding is often drastically different from the culture of the Hebrews found in the Bible. Additionally, since we don’t read the Bible in its original languages we miss cultural and language differences that are difficult to convey in the receptor language. The question I am constantly asking when reading the Bible is, “What did this mean to the original readers/hearers?”

One thing we must bear in mind is that the writers and readers in the first century AD did not have a complete compilation of the Writings of the Apostles (N.T.). When we read the word “Scripture,” it is referring to the *Tanakh* (O.T.). It is the only Bible they had! Most scholars believe that the books that have come to be known as the New Testament were written between AD 50—150. Amazingly, the Writings of the Apostles (N.T.) canon were not finalized until the fourth century AD.





A father is involved in a creative process with God



Fathers

When we think of the role of a father, we think of many things. A father is involved in a creative process with God and his mate—the creation of a new human being made in the image of God. A good father doesn't abdicate responsibility for his children; he raises them to be responsible adults! The father nurtures his children, trains them in righteousness (right living), provides for them and punishes them as needed to accomplish the desired results. These are some of the same actions of our heavenly Father as He prepares His children for a life of service and a heavenly reward. Although not all earthly fathers have been good to their children, our heavenly Father is always looking out for our best interest. As a child when I needed correction I didn't always understand that my father was acting for my own best. Similarly, as believers we don't always understand why our Father God does or doesn't do things. Only later, looking back, do we gain clarity.

When Jesus/Yeshua and His Jewish followers referred to the Father, they were undoubtedly thinking and speaking of the truths and character traits found in the *Tanakh* (O.T.). Let's consider a few examples.

Rachum
compassion
mercy

chanun
gracious

arach
patient
slow to anger

hesed
kindness
loving kindness
goodness

emet
truth
trustworthiness

Merciful Father

“But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:35–36). Those hearing this statement must have immediately thought of Exodus 34:6–7:

“And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and fourth generation.’”

This passage, called the 13 attributes of God’s mercy, is a very important passage in helping us understand the nature of God. This is His self-proclaimed definition of Himself. I wrote about this at length in the teaching letter entitled, “Knowing and Loving God” which you can find on our website: www.bridgesforpeace.com. Some important Hebrew words are found in this passage: *Rachum* (compassion, mercy), *chanun* (gracious), *arach* (patient, slow to anger), *hesed* (kindness, loving kindness, goodness) and *emet* (truth, trustworthiness). The Jewish people (including the disciples) who heard Jesus/ Yeshua talk about the Father’s mercy would have thought of all these amazing characteristics of God. He was encouraging them to be close to the Father, and to emulate His character in their interaction with others. Relationship with the Father was of great benefit to His children, but it was also a modeling of the way they should act toward others with the goal that others would recognize God in their actions.

This idea is emphasized in Matthew 5:16: *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

Clearly it is not God’s intention that we live our lives just to be happy and please ourselves! Our lives are to reflect the character of our Father so that others may come to know Him.

Good Provider

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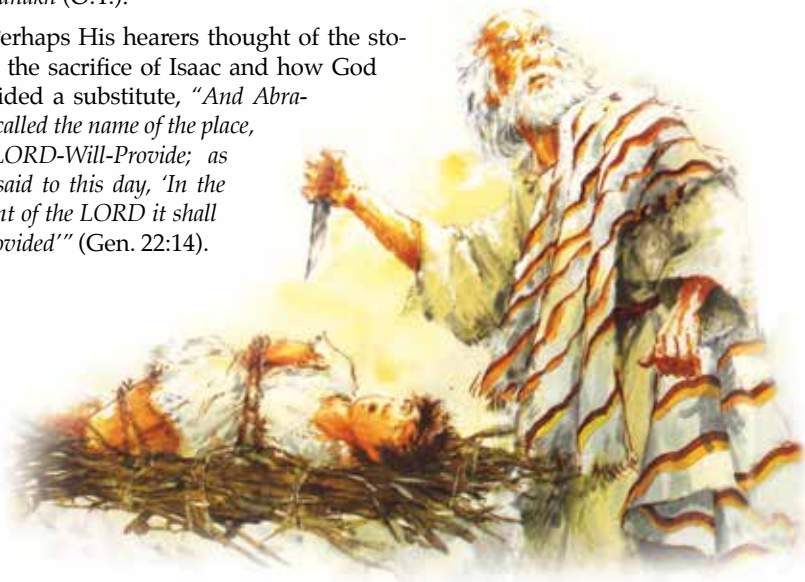


“Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:9–12).

In this passage the Father is shown to be a good provider. When children have good fathers, they know that they will be fed. They have absolute trust in the fact that their father will provide food. Our heavenly Father is good! King David testified of the goodness of God saying, *“I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread” (Ps. 37:25).*

The phrase about the Law and the Prophets is a reference to two of the three sections of the *Tanakh* (O.T.): the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) and the *Neviim* (Prophets). Jesus / Yeshua is saying that the character of God as provider is seen throughout the *Tanakh* (O.T.)!

Perhaps His hearers thought of the story of the sacrifice of Isaac and how God provided a substitute, *“And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, ‘In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided’” (Gen. 22:14).*



Surely they remembered the provision of food in the wilderness for the entire nation as they journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land. Or perhaps they remembered the way God provided food for Elijah during a time of famine.

I have personally experienced the faithfulness of my Father to provide for my daily needs. When we first came to Israel as volunteers we daily prayed as Jesus/ Yeshua emphasized in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). It wasn't just words in a memorized prayer to us! We needed the provision of God on a daily basis. Over those first few years when we had very little income, over and over again we witnessed the provision of the Lord. We learned that the Father is good and as we put our trust in Him He will provide for our needs.



Dependable

"Every good gift and perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

"For I am the LORD, I do not change" (Mal. 3:6).

Our heavenly Father is totally dependable! Fortunate is the child who has a godly, dependable natural father. They can count on the fact that their father will always be there. They will always love, protect and defend. But these fathers will also recognize that true love means helping their children grow up to be godly, responsible human beings. So they train their children, model good behavior and chastise when necessary. Sadly many today are growing up in broken homes and don't have a good father to raise them. Regardless, of whether our earthly father is good, bad, present or absent, we all have a loving Heavenly Father.

Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt of Tikkun UK, says, "Judaism tells us that God is committed to not only the physical, but also the spiritual, wellbeing of His children. And if spiritual and physical priorities come into conflict, the spiritual will

Our Father in Heaven guides our lives with a level of love and care that is far greater than even the greatest of parents



always take priority—because it is more valuable and more permanent. God is not a grandfather. He doesn't walk away frustrated when we are misbehaving. He stands by us and tries to guide us to a better way of living. His guidance might sometimes require us to endure hardship, but it is always done out of love. Parents sometimes put their children through painful experiences—I had to pull out my daughter's wobbly tooth last week and she thought I was Tomas de Torquemada himself—but from my perspective it was done with love. God too, always does what He does with love. It might not always be so easy to see, but our Father in Heaven guides our lives with a level of love and care that is far greater than even the greatest of parents."

If you want to truly mature as a believer, then consider the following:

"You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you. Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him" (Deut. 8:5–6).

We find a similar message in the book of Proverbs, *"For whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights" (Prov. 3:12).*

The writer of the book of Hebrews says, *"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the LORD, nor faint when you are reproved by Him; for those whom the LORD loves He disciplines (or chastens—NKJV)...All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (portions of Heb. 12:5–11 NASB).*

We can depend on God to be faithful to His word!

Our Father

When Jesus/Yeshua spoke of “our Father,” I am sure He remembered the many facets of God’s character, as well as the many stories of Israel’s history that show God acting on behalf of the nation and the people. They had good reason to refer to Him as Father—He had protected them, provided for them, shown mercy to them, chastised them and guided them by His Word. We sometimes have a tendency to focus on a few warm fuzzy facets of His character and tend to ignore the ones we don’t like. This can give us a distorted picture of God.

God is loving, merciful, showing kindness, righteous, holy and all-powerful. He is the healer, the judge and the embodiment of truth. He acts with justice. He cares for the widow, the orphan and the stranger. He is full of grace. He is faithful, pure and true.

His Word tells us that blessing comes when we walk in His ways; and He warns us against ignoring the parts of His Word that we don’t like. “*Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it*” (Deut. 12:32). This concept is repeated in Revelation 22:18–19.

Jesus/Yeshua repeatedly drew the attention of the people to the Father. May we also remember that we have a Father who wants us to grow, develop and mature. He wants us to show the world who He is as His character is reflected through us, His children.

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Scripture is taken from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God’s chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (*Yeshua*)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or O.T.) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or N.T.)
- *Torah* (Gen. - Deut.)

VIOLENCE

Shatters Shabbat and breaks the Father Heart of God

On July 22nd, an armed terrorist invaded the home of the Salomon family, slaughtering the 70-year-old patriarch and two adult children in cold blood as they sat at their *Shabbat* table, worshipping the Father....

The aftermath left three killed, one seriously wounded, two new widows, five new orphans, and a grief-stricken community in mourning and reeling from the chaos of terror.

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whose lives are at risk**

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