

Why shouldn't I enter heavenly courts anytime I want?

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Remember the TV show JAG?¹ Even though the thought of an officer going from Navy pilot to JAG lawyer (who still flies fighter jets) is far-fetched, my wife and I still found it quite entertaining. Although one of the main messages of the show seemed to be that any problem can be fixed with the proper application of a F-14 Tomcat, it was the courtroom scenes that Janelle and I found most entertaining. Each time he was in court, Harmon Rabb, the main character would often push the bounds of courtroom procedure. It seemed that only after multiple warnings from the judge would he back off and behave himself.

Legal courts aren't only in the real world. There are heavenly courts as well and Christian bookstores are replete with books on this topic. Just as the fictional character, Harmon Rabb, misbehaved in physical courtrooms, I find that Christians are often misbehaving in heavenly courts and sometimes making situations worse.

Whenever new revelation moves through the body of Christ², we end up biblically based information but also with theory and belief. One of the beliefs floating around is that we can enter heavenly courts anytime we want to. I do not find that to be biblically accurate. To investigate this, let's first look at a passage from Psalms that, on face value, appears to encourage entering God's courts anytime:

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name!*³

As always, we must consider the original language of the verse and not just the translation. The Hebrew word translated as courts in the above verse is *hāṣēr* and means court or enclosure.⁴ But what kind of court are we talking about? That same Hebrew word is used to indicate an enclosed area or "courtyard":⁵

But a young man saw them and told Absalom. So both of them went away quickly and came to the house of a man at Bahurim, who had a well in his courtyard. And they went down into it.

According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, most references using this Hebrew word indicate sacred or royal buildings.⁶ A good example of this is in the book of Esther:

And the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for him⁷

¹ JAG-Judge Advocate General: www.imdb.com/title/tt0112022/

² In other words, a group comprised of believers in Jesus Christ: Romans 12:4-5, Ephesians 3:6

³ Psalms 100:4

⁴ Yamauchi, E. (1999). 722 הָצֵר. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr., & B. K. Waltke (Eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed., p. 314). Chicago: Moody Press.

⁵ 2 Samuel 17:18

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Esther 6:4

I trust that you agree the word ḥāṣēr does not automatically refer to a place where legal matters are decided. I propose that what Psalm 100:4 refers to as a court is a supernatural place where we can enter God’s presence and celebrate His love for us. Furthermore, I believe this becomes clearer when we consider the context of the entire chapter.

To properly answer the question at hand, we need examples of a supernatural court, where legal matters are decided. Such a place is described in Daniel:

*“As I looked,
thrones were placed,
and the Ancient of Days took his seat;
his clothing was white as snow,
and the hair of his head like pure wool;
his throne was fiery flames;
its wheels were burning fire.
A stream of fire issued
and came out from before him;
a thousand thousands served him,
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;
the court sat in judgment,
and the books were opened.”⁸*

Wow. That’s a lot of fire! I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to enter this place uninvited. But what goes on in this place? The Hebrew word written as “the court” in verse 10 is *ḏīn* and literally means “to judge”⁹. This Hebrew word is also used in the Bible as the English word “judgement”. Consider this verse from Psalm 76:

*From the heavens you uttered judgment;
the earth feared and was still,¹⁰*

With just two examples, we have seen a court where celebrations take place and a court where judgement takes place. Just because we have an open invitation to praise and worship in certain courts, that doesn’t mean we can automatically enter into courts where judgement is passed. Rather, we need to wait for an invitation from God.

For instance, Esther 4:11 gives us this example of what happens when people enter the inner court without invitation:

“All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days.”¹¹

⁸ Daniel 7:9-10

⁹ Harris, R. L., Archer, G. L., Jr., & Waltke, B. K. (Eds.). (1999). *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed., p. 1000). Chicago: Moody Press.

¹⁰ Psalm 76:8

¹¹ Esther 4:11

We also have this instruction from Proverbs:

*Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence
or stand in the place of the great,
for it is better to be told, "Come up here,"
than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.*

*What your eyes have seen
do not hastily bring into court,
for what will you do in the end,
when your neighbor puts you to shame?¹²*

As Christians, we will see much more breakthrough if we petition God directly through prayer. We can ask Him to initiate court cases, but let's allow God to decide the venue for the case at hand. Then, using discernment, we can gain understanding regarding where God will pass judgement. Let's wait for Him to invite us into these places of judgement and remember to behave ourselves once we get there. We do that by following God's lead and asking Him what part He wants us to play in the proceedings.

¹² Proverbs 25:6-8