Praying The Names of God for 52 Weeks

A Year-Long Bible Study

Ann Spangler
A YEAR-LONG BIBLE STUDY

Praying
THE NAMES OF GOD
FOR 52 WEEKS

EXPANDED EDITION

ANN SPANGLER
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INTRODUCTION

The Bible reveals many fascinating names and titles for God that can yield rich insights for Bible study. *Praying the Names of God for 52 Weeks* rests on the premise that we can experience God in fresh ways by encountering his names and titles in the Scriptures and by learning about the biblical and cultural context in which these were revealed. But these names and titles, particularly in the Old Testament, may be difficult for lay readers to identify simply by paging through their English translation of the Bible.

*Praying the Names of God for 52 Weeks* allows readers to explore the richness of these names for themselves. Each of the names and titles is presented in English (along with its rendering in Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic). And each section includes a key Scripture passage revealing the name, helpful background information, and Bible study questions designed for individuals and groups. Each week also includes passages and prompts designed to help readers learn how to pray them and to see where the name can be found in Scripture.

Though I have focused on 52 “names of God,” I should point out that most of these are more properly called titles. In fact, the name for God in the Old Testament is *Yahweh*, and of course the name for his Son in the New Testament is “Jesus,” whose Hebrew name, *Yeshua*, means “Yahweh is salvation.”

When studying the names of God, it helps to realize that names in the ancient world in which the Bible was written often functioned differently than they do today, at least in the western world. In addition to distinguishing one person from another and linking people to their family heritage, names were thought to reveal the essential nature and character of a person. This is particularly true when it comes to the various names and titles of God revealed in Scripture. Furthermore, it was thought that to know God’s name was to enjoy a kind of privileged access to him. Once his people knew his name, they could cry out to him, claiming his
help and protection. But God’s self-revelation also introduced a note of vulnerability. By associating his name so closely with a particular people, God risked the possibility that they would dishonor it by behaving in ways that contradicted his character.

Names like Abba, “Father,” Yahweh Yireh, “The Lord Will Provide,” and El Shadday, “God Almighty,” spread comfort, hope, and awe, while names like Esh Oklah, “Consuming Fire,” and El Kanna, “Jealous God” challenge us to a purer, more passionate commitment. The same is true for the names and titles of Jesus, which yield a rich and deeper understanding of his character and purpose. Titles like “Bright Morning Star” and “Prince of Peace” are not only beautiful but deeply meaningful, revealing facets of his life and ministry we may have previously overlooked.

This study is drawn from two longer books entitled Praying the Names of God and Praying the Names of Jesus that I wrote several years ago. Each book contains 26 names or titles, each of which is explored through a brief Bible study and daily devotional readings pertaining to the name. Because some readers may prefer a standalone Bible study rather than a larger work with daily devotions, I combined the Bible studies from both of these “mother books” to create the original version of this study, published in 2009. Now, this new edition has the added benefit of including Bible passages drawn directly from the Names of God Bible, which places the Hebrew names of God directly into the English text. This makes it much easier for readers to locate the Hebrew names in their own preferred translation of the Bible. Though the Names of God Bible is no longer available in print form, readers may want to consult the online edition at Biblegateway.com, where it can be searched by passage or keywords.

Careful readers may wonder why I do not refer to the Greek titles in the last half of the study as often as I refer to the Hebrew titles in the first half. Many, if not most, of the Scripture passages cited for the Hebrew titles, are found in the Old Testament, which was written in Hebrew. The Scripture passages that are cited to help readers understand and pray with New Testament titles, originally written in Greek, come from both
the Old and New Testaments. It seemed confusing to put the Greek title in headers that often contain passages originally written in Hebrew rather than Greek. While not a perfect rationale, I believe handling it this way adds clarity and avoids unnecessary complexity for most readers.

My hope is that all who undertake this study of the names and titles of God will be richly rewarded, recognizing many surprising connections between the Old and New Testaments, revealing a God whose forgiveness, love, and determination to help and to save is utterly consistent. My prayer is that everyone who encounters God’s name within the Bible will be led into a deeper experience of his goodness, majesty, and love.

Special thanks for this edition go to Sara Riemersma, Acquisitions Editor for Trade Curriculum at HarperChristianResources. I’m grateful for Sara’s enthusiasm and vision for this revised edition. Thanks also to Meredith Hinds for suggesting passages and prayer prompts that did not appear in the original edition. I’m also grateful to Beth Murphy and her team for their marketing expertise and their efforts to help this study find a wide audience. My gratitude extends to my executive assistant, Natalie Hart, who patiently entered my corrections to the final manuscript.

It would be remiss of me were I not to thank Andrea Doering, editorial director of Revell Books, and Brian Vos, executive editor at the Baker Publishing Group for their help and support in publishing The Names of God Bible, for which I served as general editor.

Whatever its flaws might be, I hope this year-long Bible study will lead readers into an encounter with God that will increase their longing to know him better.
Elohim is the Hebrew word for God that appears in the very first sentence of the Bible. When we pray to Elohim, we remember that he is the one who began it all, creating the heavens and the earth and separating light from darkness, water from dry land, night from day. This ancient name for God contains the idea of God’s creative power as well as his authority and sovereignty. Jesus used a form of the name in his agonized prayer from the cross. “About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’—which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Psalm 22:1 NIV).
KEY SCRIPTURE

In the beginning Elohim created heaven and earth.
—Genesis 1:1

GOD REVEALS HIS NAME IN SCRIPTURE

GENESIS 1:1–10, 31

Open your personal Bible translation and read the same passage. Make note to yourself or use a simple mark in your Bible every time Elohim is the name God uses for Himself.

In the beginning Elohim created heaven and earth.

2 The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep water. The Ruach Elohim was hovering over the water.

3 Then Elohim said, “Let there be light!” So there was light. 4 Elohim saw the light was good. So Elohim separated the light from the darkness. 5 Elohim named the light day, and the darkness he named night. There was evening, then morning—the first day.

6 Then Elohim said, “Let there be a horizon in the middle of the water in order to separate the water.” 7 So Elohim made the horizon and separated the water above and below the horizon. And so it was. 8 Elohim named what was above the horizon sky. There was evening, then morning—a second day.

9 Then Elohim said, “Let the water under the sky come together in one area, and let the dry land appear.” And so it was. 10 Elohim named the dry land earth. The water which came together he named sea. Elohim saw that it was good. 31 And Elohim saw everything that he had made and that it was very good. There was evening, then morning—the sixth day.
UNDERSTANDING THE NAME

ELOHIM (e-lo-HEEM) is the plural form of El or Eloah, one of the oldest designations for divinity in the world. The Hebrews borrowed the term El from the Canaanites. It can refer either to the true God or to pagan gods. Though El is used more than 200 times in the Hebrew Bible, Elohim is used more than 2,500 times. Its plural form is used not to indicate a belief in many gods but to emphasize the majesty of the one true God. He is the God of gods, the highest of all. Christians may also recognize in this plural form a hint of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. ELOHIM occurs thirty-two times in the first chapter of Genesis. After that the name Yahweh appears as well and is often paired with ELOHIM and, in the NIV, the two together are translated “the Lord God.”

CONNECTING TO THE NAME

1. “Genesis” is a word that can mean “birth,” “history of origin,” or “genealogy.” What can you observe about who God is from this passage about beginnings?

2. What can you observe about the world Elohim has made?

3. God gave human beings dominion over the earth. How might we honor the Creator in our stewardship of the earth?

4. In what ways do you enjoy and benefit from creation every day?
5. Since God made us in his image, he has instilled in us creative power. What are your creative gifts?

6. Elohim seems delighted by what he has made, proclaiming it good and even very good. How does God’s assessment of creation shape your own attitude toward the world? Toward yourself?

7. What do you think it means to be created in “the image of God”? How would your life change if you lived with the constant awareness that he created you to bear his image?

**PRAYING A PASSAGE WITH GOD’S NAME**

Set all your desire on knowing God as David did in this psalm. Spend a few moments reflecting on God, your mighty Creator. Then pray through Psalm 63:1–4 focusing your mind and heart on Elohim.

“O Elohim, you are my Elohim,
At dawn I search for you.
My soul thirsts for you.
My body longs for you
In a dry, parched land where there is no water.
So I look for you in the holy place
To see your power and your glory.
My lips will praise you
because your mercy is better than life itself.
So I will thank you as long as I live.
I will lift up my hands to pray in your name.”
PRAYING THE NAME ELOHIM FOR MYSELF

Look up and read: Genesis 9:12–17

Rewrite this passage of Scripture into a personal prayer responding to God’s promise as Creator God, as Elohim, as he dealt with human brokenness and sin.

PROMISES FROM ELOHIM

“Remember, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go. I will also bring you back to this land because I will not leave you until I do what I’ve promised you.”

—Genesis 28:15

FOR DEEPER STUDY

Read the following passages, considering the name ELOHIM and how its meaning relates to the context of the passage.

Psalms 18:28, 22:1–5

Isaiah 41:10
THE GOD
WHO
SEES ME
אֵל רֳאִי
EL ROI

An Egyptian slave, Hagar, encountered God in the desert and addressed him as El Roi, “the God who sees me.” Notably, this is the only occurrence of El Roi in the Bible.

Hagar’s God is the one who numbers the hairs on our heads and who knows our circumstances, past, present, and future. When you pray to El Roi, you are praying to the one who knows everything about you.

KEY SCRIPTURE
Hagar named Yahweh, who had been speaking to her, “You Are El Roi.” She said, “This is the place where I watched the one who watches over me.” This is why the well is named Beer Lahai Roi [Well of the Living One Who Watches Over Me]. It is still there between Kadesh and Bered.

—Genesis 16:13–14
Open your personal Bible translation and read the same passage. Make note to yourself or using a simple mark in your Bible whenever EL ROI is used as God's name.

7 The Messenger of Yahweh found her by a spring in the desert, the spring on the way to Shur. 8 He said, “Hagar, Sarai’s slave, where have you come from, and where are you going?”

She answered, “I’m running away from my owner Sarai.” 9 The Messenger of Yahweh said to her, “Go back to your owner, and place yourself under her authority.” 10 The Messenger of Yahweh also said to her, “I will give you many descendants. No one will be able to count them because there will be so many.”

13 Hagar named Yahweh, who had been speaking to her, “You Are El Roi.” She said, “This is the place where I watched the one who watches over me.”

UNDERSTANDING THE NAME

In the ancient world it was not uncommon for an infertile wife to arrange for a slave girl to sleep with her husband so that the family could have an heir. In fact, Ishmael, the son born to Abraham and Hagar, would have been considered Sarah’s legal offspring. Hagar and Ishmael might have fared better had Hagar not forgotten her place the moment she learned of her pregnancy. Still, Sarah’s treatment of her seems inexcusable and harsh.

In the midst of her difficulties, Hagar learned that El Roi (EL raw-EE) was watching over her and that he had a plan to bless her and her son. One of Abraham’s grandsons, Esau, married Ishmael’s daughter, and it was the Ishmaelite traders (also referred to as Midianite merchants in Genesis 37:26–28), themselves descended from an Egyptian slave, who transported his great-grandson Joseph into slavery in Egypt.

*For an explanation of the name Yahweh, consult week 6.*
CONNECTING TO THE NAME

1. Why do you think the angel of the Lord began his communication with Hagar by questioning her?

2. Describe what Hagar must have been feeling when she fled from Sarah into the desert. What circumstances in your own life have produced similar emotions?

3. What gave Hagar the courage to go back to Sarah and face her again? How might Hagar’s demeanor have changed after her encounter with the angel of the Lord?

4. What images come immediately to mind when you hear the name El Roi, “The God who sees me” or the “one who watches over me?”

5. Sarah tried to “force God’s hand” in order to have a family. Describe a time when you thought God did not see your need and you were tempted to take matters into your own hands? What happened?

6. How have you seen God’s mercy emerge from your own misguided attempts to be in charge?
7. How have you experienced El Roi’s watchful care?

**PRAYING A PASSAGE WITH GOD’S NAME**

Hagar used the name **EL ROI** for God in Genesis 16. Those events occurred when her son Ishmael was a baby. In this second passage, which takes place years later, God calls himself Elohim. Still, he sees Hagar and Ishmael in their distress.

Focus on the name El Roi and what it reveals about God’s character as you read Genesis 21:17–19:

17 *Elohim* heard the boy crying, and the Messenger of *Elohim* called to Hagar from heaven. “What’s the matter, Hagar?” he asked her. “Don’t be afraid! *Elohim* has heard the boy crying from the bushes. 18 Come on, help the boy up! Take him by the hand, because I’m going to make him into a great nation.”

19 *Elohim* opened her eyes. Then she saw a well. She filled the container with water and gave the boy a drink.

**PRAYING THE NAME EL ROI FOR MYSELF**

Look up and read:

El Roi is the God who sees you. As you read this passage, realize that nothing can possibly escape His notice. Write a response to God about a particular difficulty in your life. Address him as though he knows exactly what’s going on.
PROMISES FROM **EL ROI.**
THE GOD WHO SEES YOU

He will not let you fall.

Your guardian will not fall asleep.

5 **Yahweh** is your guardian.

**Yahweh** is the shade over your right hand.

6 The sun will not beat down on you during the day,
nor will the moon at night.

7 **Yahweh** guards you from every evil.

He guards your life.

8 **Yahweh** guards you as you come and go,
now and forever.

—Psalm 121:3, 5–8

**FOR DEEPER STUDY**

*Read the following passages, considering the name **EL ROI** and how its meaning relates to the context of the passage.*

Genesis 21:1–21

2 Chronicles 16:9

Psalms 33:13–22

Proverbs 15:3

Matthew 6:3–4