Names of God

Through Scripture, God reveals himself to us and we get a glimpse of his character and nature. In this study, we look at a second name of God: **El Roi** (אֵל רְאוֹי) – *The God who sees.* Last week, we learnt that God is supreme over all, including the heavens and earth that he has created. In this study, we learn that he sees us, our world and the troubles that have resulted from sin impacting his creation. These troubles sometimes affect our ability to see and relate to God, especially if we pray about circumstances and things don’t get better. Hagar experienced God’s care for her, plus discovered God had a bigger plan for her life.

**ICEBREAKER:** How do you know that God cares for you?

**PRAY:** “... ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory—to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing him personally, your eyes focused and clear, so that you can see exactly what it is he is calling you to do, grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life he has for his followers, oh, the utter extravagance of his work in us who trust him …” (Eph 1:18-19 *The Message*)

**READ:** Genesis 16:1-16

- Now, re-read this passage using a paraphrase translation such as *The Message.*
- From Gen 16:1, what do we know about Hagar? Who owned Hagar? When might she have become part of Abram’s household? (ref Gen 12:10-20)
- What were the relational dynamics between Abram, Sarai and Hagar in Gen 16:1-3?
- Why did Abram and Sarai have such a vested interest in having a baby? Other than Abram’s natural need for an heir and the expectation on Sarai to produce offspring, what was at stake? (Gen 12:1-3, 13:14-17, 15:1-5)

Wenham comments: “This practice of surrogate motherhood is attested throughout the ancient Orient from the 3rd to 1st millennium BC, from Babylon to Egypt. ... Give the social mores of the ancient Near East, Sarai’s suggestion was a perfectly proper and respectable course of action.” However, in light of God’s promises to them, their action demonstrated a lack of trust that God would provide. As such, it was sin.

- How did polygamy and Hagar’s pregnancy impact the relationship between Abram and Sarai? Why?
- Master-slave relationships in Bible times were not necessarily benevolent or humane. What changed in the dynamics between Sarai and Hagar, when Hagar discovered she was pregnant? How would you label Sarai’s treatment of Hagar in Gen 16:5-6? (ie: if that behaviour occurred in a home or workplace, today, what terms would you use to name/ describe that behaviour?)

Read Gen 16:6-8, then consider the following: “SHUR (was) A fortified wall or region along the eastern border of Egypt. ... The “way to Shur” is probably an ancient caravan route, the last segment of the northern route of the King’s Highway which came out of Edom, passed through the wilderness of Zin to Kadesh-barnnea and reached Egypt via “the wilderness of Shur” (Exod 15:22).”

- Given her ethnic background, why do you think Hagar might have been in that location? What could have been some of the personal safety and wellbeing issues for Hagar to be in that place, alone and pregnant?
- How did the angel of the LORD address Hagar? What did he already know about her? What admission did she make, in response to his questions?

---

READ Gen 16:9-12, 17:15-22. The promises given to Hagar in Gen 16 are similar to those given to Abraham in Gen 17, regarding the promise of a son, whose descendants will become a large nation. In Gen 25:12-18, we read that Ismael bore 12 sons, who, in turn, fathered 12 tribes and they settled in the south, "from Havilah to Shur". Through the Old Testament, the descendants of Ismael and his half-brother Midian intermittently materialized and disrupted the lives of descendants of Isaac.

Hagar may well have known of the promises given by God to Abram. She may well have recognized that Abram and Sarai had 'used' her, as a surrogate mother, in an attempt to fulfill the promises of God. In Gen 16:11, God told Hagar to name her child "Ishmael" which may mean "God will hear," "God hears," "God heard" or "May God hear."⁴

- In Gen 16:11, what reason did the angel of the LORD give for this name? What do you think the angel was referring to? i.e. Was it some specific prayer of Hagar? Was it her tears/ screams when Sarai abused her? Or was it a promise that God would hear Ishmael? Or some/all of the above?

Gen 16:13 is translated in different ways in different Bible versions and each translation is valid. The underlying Hebrew words are the same. Translation teams recognize that some OT Hebrew and NT Greek words don’t have just one English meaning, so they wrestle with the text to find the 'best fit'. When you study Scripture, watch for footnote comments provided by translators. Alternate translations give us different insights into the underlying meaning – as shown in the following examples.

**NRSV:** So she named the LORD who spoke to her, “You are El-roi"; for she said, “Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?”⁶

**b. Genesis 16:13** Perhaps God of seeing or God who sees

**c. Genesis 16:13** Meaning of Heb uncertain

**NIV:** She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.”

**NKJV:** Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, “Have I also here seen Him who sees me?”

**KJV:** And she called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?

In this verse, we see two names used for God: **LORD** (which is sometimes rendered as Yahweh or Jehovah) and **El-Roi**. Wenham comments that: "In Scripture, when God sees, he cares".⁵

- Take a few moments to think back about Hagar, her life, her status and her immediate circumstances. In a desert place, an angel of the LORD met her and let her know God knew exactly who she was. He spoke directly into her life: to both her hidden hopes and her greatest fears.
  - Why was Hagar so taken aback, that God knew everything about her?

- Hagar got a glimpse of God and his character. What did God teach Hagar about himself?

All of us probably question why God directed Hagar, in Gen 16:9, to go back to a life of submission and abuse. Workplace bullying and domestic violence are also an abominable part of our culture, and are circumstances that some of us find ourselves in. As Christians, it is sometimes difficult to know how to respond, especially the decision whether to leave vs stay and respond. Some resources are linked below.⁶⁷

- Read Jer 29:11-13. When God gave promises to Hagar, he also provided her with a hope beyond her present circumstances. How would her new knowledge of and about God have sustained her?

- At the moment, what do you hope for most? For God to see the trouble and strife in our world – and to intervene? Or for our world to see God, who gives hope, in the midst of trouble?

**PRAY:** For those you know, who need to see God and that God would reveal himself to them. Also, that we will be sustained by hope and courage, even in the tough circumstances of life.

---


⁶ http://www.fixinghereyes.org/single-post/2016/07/07/Handling-Bullying-and-Conflict


Springwood Baptist Church
Sermon Series – Names of God: Term 1 2017

Study 2: El Roi – the God Who Sees