

Scriptural Images for God

I will open my mouth in a parable... - Psalm 78:2
I have said these things to you in figures of speech... - John 16:25

God, I AM, is an unfathomable mystery, a power beyond human comprehension, an embrace transcending human speech. However, both the Old and New Testaments use **images to describe and address God.**

Some familiar images, such as “king,” recur repeatedly in the Bible. Some are quite startling and occur only once—for example, when God is likened to a drunken soldier (Psalm 78:65) or compared to maggots (Hosea 5:12). Some passages employ nouns, as in “the LORD is my shepherd” (Psalm 23:1). Sometimes the noun is implied, as when God issues forth smoke, fire, and glowing coals, although the word “volcano” is absent (Psalm 18:8).

Psalm 147 ascribes to God twenty-five different verbs, each of which calls to mind its own image. Some images are paradoxical: God, who is our fortress, will help us leap over a wall (Psalm 18:2, 29). Some images describe the wholeness of the triune God, while others refer primarily to one of the three persons of the Trinity.

This selection of one hundred images from the New Revised Standard Version Bible testifies to the plethora of biblical images available for addressing the triune God. Thanks to this wealth of biblical imagery, we can complement those beloved images that we know well with the wide range of other images found in sacred scripture, thus **enriching the language of our prayer and praise.**

In this brief catalog of images, common Christian interpretation of some parables and narratives, such as seeing the sweeping woman as an image for God (Luke 15:8-9) or the three visitors to Abraham and Sarah as the Trinity (Genesis 18:1-16), have been omitted.

Concerning gender: all nouns in Hebrew and Greek have grammatical gender—for example, rendering *ruah* (Hebrew for breath, wind, or spirit) and *aletheia* (Greek for truth) as feminine. However, because contemporary English ties gender to sexuality, current biblical translations render such nouns as non-gender specific. Further, although often in the Bible a “judge” is pictured as male (Psalm 96:13), Deborah is a judge (Judges 4:4): thus here “judge” is an image not of a man, but of a human.

In the scriptures, God is imaged . . .

as a quality

glory: You, O LORD, are . . . my glory, and the one who lifts up my head. (*Psalm 3:3*)
hope: You are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas. (*Psalm 65:5*)
strength: I love you, O LORD, my strength. (*Psalm 18:1*)
truth: The Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. (*1 John 5:6*)

Scriptural Images for God

as an element of nature

blazing bush: God called to [Moses] out of the bush. (*Exodus 3:4*)
cloud: The glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. (*Exodus 16:10*)
cypress: I am like an evergreen cypress; your faithfulness comes from me. (*Hosea 14:8*)
dew: I will be like the dew to Israel. (*Hosea 14:5*)
light: The LORD is my light and my salvation. (*Psalms 27:1*)
morning star: It is I, Jesus, . . . the bright morning star. (*Revelation 22:16*)
rain: [The LORD] will come to us like . . . spring rains that water the earth. (*Hosea 6:3*)
root: The Root of David has conquered. (*Revelation 5:5*)
shade: The LORD is your shade at your right hand. (*Psalms 121:5*)
sun: The LORD God is a sun and shield. (*Psalms 84:11*)
thunder: Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder. (*Exodus 19:19*)
vine: I am the true vine. (*John 15:1*)
wind: Like the wind from the east, I will scatter them before the enemy. (*Jeremiah 18:17*)

as an object

alpha and omega: I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last. (*Revelation 22:13*)
bread: I am the bread of life. (*John 6:35*)
cornerstone: [You are] built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. (*Ephesians 2:20*)
cup: My LORD is my chosen portion and my cup. (*Psalms 16:5*)
drink: Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. (*John 7:37-38*)
dwelling place: You have made . . . the Most High your dwelling place. (*Psalms 91:9*)
fortress: Be . . . a strong fortress to save me. (*Psalms 31:2*)
fountain: With you is the fountain of life. (*Psalms 36:9*)
gate: I am the gate for the sheep. (*John 10:7*)
hiding place: You are a hiding place for me. (*Psalms 32:7*)
horn of my salvation: The LORD is . . . my God, . . . the horn of my salvation. (*Psalms 18:2*)
lamp: You are my lamp, O LORD. (*2 Samuel 22:29*)
refuge: You are my refuge in the day of disaster. (*Jeremiah 17:17*)
sacrifice: [Jesus Christ] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. (*1 John 2:2*)
shield: You . . . are a shield around me. (*Psalms 3:3*)
silence: The LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. (*1 Kings 19:12*)
stronghold: The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. (*Psalms 9:9*)
temple: Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. (*John 2:19*)
tower: You are my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy. (*Psalms 61:3*)
way: Jesus said to [Thomas], "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." (*John 14:6*)
word: In the beginning was the Word. (*John 1:1*)

as an animal

bear: I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs. (*Hosea 13:8*)
bird: All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings. (*Psalms 36:7*)

Scriptural Images for God

dove: [Jesus] saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. *(Mark 1:10)*

eagle: As an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young; as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions, the LORD alone guided [Jacob]. *(Deuteronomy 32:11-12)*

hen: How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. *(Matthew 23:37)*

lamb: Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. *(John 1:29)*

leopard: Like a leopard, I will lurk beside the way. *(Hosea 13:7)*

lion: I will devour them like a lion, as a wild animal would mangle them. *(Hosea 13:8)*

serpent: Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. *(John 3:14)*

as a woman

comforting mother: As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you. *(Isaiah 66:13)*

laboring mother: Now I will cry out like a woman in labor. *(Isaiah 42:14)*

midwife: It was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast. *(Psalm 22:9)*

mother: You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth. *(Deuteronomy 32:18)*

as a man

bridegroom: The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. *(Mark 2:20)*

father: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. *(Matthew 6:9)*

husband: . . . a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband. *(Jeremiah 31:32)*

king: Make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD. *(Psalm 98:6)*

son: A voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." *(Mark 1:11)*

as an embodied person

breath: The breath of the Almighty gives me life. *(Job 33:4)*

ears: Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! *(Psalm 130:2)*

eyes: The eyes of the LORD your God are always on [the land]. *(Deuteronomy 11:12)*

face: Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. *(Exodus 33:11)*

feet: These are the words of the Son of God, . . . whose feet are like burnished bronze. *(Revelation 2:18)*

finger: God . . . gave [Moses] the two tablets of the covenant, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God. *(Exodus 31:18)*

hand and arm: The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. *(Deuteronomy 26:8)*

mouth: One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. *(Deuteronomy 8:3)*

nostrils: At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up. *(Exodus 15:8)*

Scriptural Images for God

voice: The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.
(*Psalm 29:4*)

as a human being

advocate: The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything. (*John 14:26*)

avenger: You were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings. (*Psalm 99:8*)

builder: Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth. (*Psalm 102:25*)

composer: Write this song, and teach it to the Israelites . . . in order that this song may be a witness for me. (*Deuteronomy 31:19*)

creator: The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. (*Isaiah 40:28*)

deliverer: O LORD, my Lord, my strong deliverer, you have covered my head in the day of battle. (*Psalm 140:7*)

friend: My Father, you are the friend of my youth. (*Jeremiah 3:4*)

garment-maker: The LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them. (*Genesis 3:21*)

healer: I am the LORD who heals you. (*Exodus 15:26*)

horse rider: There was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True. (*Revelation 19:11*)

housecleaner: I will sweep it with the broom of destruction, says the LORD of hosts.
(*Isaiah 14:23*)

judge: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just? (*Genesis 18:25*)

keeper: The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand. (*Psalm 121:5*)

lawgiver: The LORD said to Moses: Write these words; in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel. (*Exodus 34:27*)

maker: May the LORD, maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion. (*Psalm 134:3*)

master: Return, O faithless children, says the LORD, for I am your master. (*Jeremiah 3:14*)

metalworker: I will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy. (*Isaiah 1:25*)

parent: It was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up in my arms. (*Hosea 11:3*)

planter: The LORD God planted a garden in Eden. (*Genesis 2:8*)

potter: Yet, O LORD, . . . we are the clay, and you are our potter. (*Isaiah 64:8*)

priest: We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God. (*Hebrews 4:14*)

redeemer: They remembered that God was their rock, the Most High God their redeemer.
(*Psalm 78:35*)

servant: I am among you as one who serves. (*Luke 22:27*)

shepherd: The LORD is my shepherd. (*Psalm 23:1*)

teacher: They said to [Jesus], “Rabbi” (*which translated means Teacher*), “where are you staying?”
(*John 1:38*)

vinegrower: My Father is the vinegrower. (*John 15:1*)

warrior: The LORD is with me like a dread warrior. (*Jeremiah 20:11*)

wrestler: A man wrestled with [Jacob]. . . . So Jacob [said], “I have seen God face to face.”
(*Genesis 32:24, 30*)

as a divine being

deity: I will bow down toward your holy temple in awe of you. (*Psalm 5:7*)

Scriptural Images for God

god of weather: Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar.

(Jeremiah 31:35)

goddess of wisdom: Wisdom has built her house. . . . [She says,] “Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.” *(Proverbs 9:1, 5)*

head deity: You are exalted far above all gods. *(Psalm 97:9)*

monster-slayer: You broke the heads of the dragons in the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan. *(Psalm 74:13-14)*

son of man: Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with great power and glory. *(Mark 13:26)*

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Old Testament Names of God

- El Shaddai (Lord God Almighty)
- El Elyon (The Most High God)
- Adonai (Lord, Master)
- Yahweh (Lord, Jehovah)
- Jehovah Nissi (The Lord My Banner)
- Jehovah-Raah (The Lord My Shepherd)
- Jehovah Rapha (The Lord That Heals)
- Jehovah Shammah (The Lord Is There)
- Jehovah Tsidkenu (The Lord Our Righteousness)
- Jehovah Mekoddishkem (The Lord Who Sanctifies You)
- El Olam (The Everlasting God)
- Elohim (God)
- Qanna (Jealous)
- Jehovah Jireh (The Lord Will Provide)
- Jehovah Shalom (The Lord Is Peace)
- Jehovah Sabaoth (The Lord of Hosts)

New Testament “I AM” Images of Jesus + Additional Names for Jesus

I AM (John 18:1-6)

The Bread of Life (John 6:35, 48)

The Light of the World (John 8:12, 9:5)

The Gate (John 10:7, 9)

The Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14)

The Resurrection and The Life (John 11:25)

The Way and The Truth and The Life (John 14:6)

The True Vine (John 15:1, 5)

The Lamb (John 1:29; Revelation 5:6-14)

Son of Man (Revelation 1:13; Mark 8:31-33)

Jesus (Matthew 1:18-21)

Immanuel – God With Us (Matthew 1:18-23)

Christ (Luke 2:1-11)