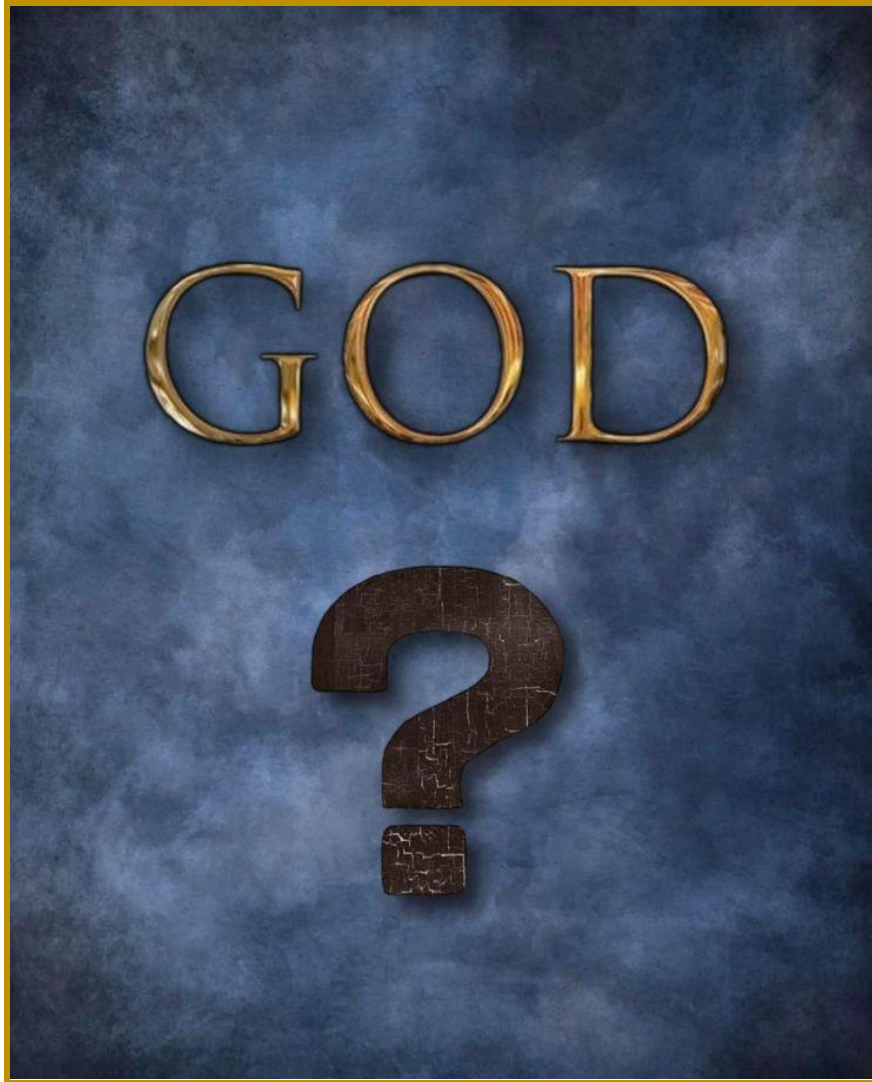


As Luck Would Have It

How “God” Got Into the Bible



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Most of us in the modern world, especially here in the West, are familiar with God...or so we believe. Even those who think themselves to be atheists still live in opposition to someone they call "God". Some Agnostics either do not know if there is a "God" or not, while others believe it is impossible to know whether or not there is a "God". In all our milieu, we argue whether or not there is a "God", but we never delve into the etymology of the term to see if "God" is the one we should be fighting over or fighting for. All over the globe folks are living and dying for the belief in "God"; I'd say that makes it fairly important to know the truth about this term.

We read in our English Bible versions that "God" created the world. We learn that "God" gave the Ten Commandments to Moses. That "God" sent His Son to die for our sins. And that "God" is love....

But the books we call our Bibles are not actually Bibles themselves but translations of the Bible itself. Here in the West we get the various English versions, and one and all of these comes to us by way of translators. Indeed it is necessary to have faith, but our trouble is that we are supposed to be putting our faith in the CREATOR but we have been putting that faith in the translators instead. The translators who told us what Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic words mean in English. The translators who told us that our CREATOR is called "God"...But who checks the translators? Who watches the watchmen?

We are all quite capable today of double checking their work...but how many of us do so? Interlinear versions, concordances, lexicons, Bible dictionaries, etc. All these tools enable us to investigate the work of the scribes who gave us the Scriptures in our language... to see if they were trustworthy. And when we do the work of checking theirs as it turns out we will be surprised to find, they were not so trustworthy, not always faithful in their duties.

For example, they gave us the word, "God" to revere and adore and they told us that He is the CREATOR...but upon inquiry, we find that where they set the term "God" in our English, the word "Elohim" appears in the Hebrew. (Theos in the Greek translations. Deus in the Latin.) Though we are told that the translation of "Elohim" is "God" ...it so happens this is an old bold-faced lie, easily proven false with a brief investigation using just a few of our tools.

Elohim translates to “Mighty Ones” or when used with a singular modifier “Mighty One”....Alternatively, it can be rendered as “Majesty, Force, Strength, or Power...But never “God”. So where then does the word “God” come from? And why? If the men and women of the Bible worshiped an “Elohim” instead of a “God”, and Elohim does not actually mean “God”, when, how, and why did the students of the Scriptures come to call on “God” rather than to call upon Elohim? And why does it matter?

It has been wisely said that time is the ally of deceit. If someone in biblical times worshipped a deity called God they would be called idolatrous. But today people find it hard to believe the deity of the Bible is not called God. How did we get from then to now? Slowly. Truly time aids, supports, and succors error and ignorance. And ignorant men in every generation lend their “expertise” to increasing loss of knowledge and the finding of new things thought to be old.

The bad habit of empire is the adoption of the conquered culture. Medo-Persia did it to Babylon. Assyria repeated this practice in defeating Persia. Greece thereafter did likewise. And Rome to follow. But who conquered Rome? Rome. Rome conquered Rome. Self-defeated. And from her rubble rose the Holy Roman Empire which was the Christian Church. Never one single thing and always sundering. Ultimately leading to the British Empire that wrapped around the world, eventually giving rise to the modern day we live in. What does all that have to do with the term “God” getting put into the Bible? As goes the messenger so goes the message. From the time of the fall of Jerusalem, the Scriptures went to Rome where they were translated into Greek and eventually Latin (via a Greek go-between) and kept under Church control. Eventually, as British influences became the dominant force in the world and the belief in the Bible being in the vernacular rose to prominence, the English versions especially the King James Version became the most dominant. And the missionaries of the church took this version and British culture across the globe. Thus today, the term “God” from English versions is the accepted epithet for the deity of Scripture...though not rightly so.

Early English and German Bible versions, Britain and Germany leading the way of reformation, adopted the traditional use of “God” in English and “Gott” in German to render “Elohim” in the common tongue. Tradition, is so very hard to let go. This particular tradition preceded the Reformation by several centuries. Originally introduced into Bible versions by

Roman missionaries to the barbarian tribes. Introduced as a translation of Elohim? No. Introduced in the bad habit of empire adoption of culture for the sake of inclusion. When Romish missionaries encountered the Germanic tribesmen, they did not just discover the term “god” as a general word for deity but a variant contraction of their chief deity, Godan, a local variant of Woden or Odin. As was their tradition, these translators adopted the local terminology when giving the people a version of the Scriptures. So “God” appeared in a primitive Germanic translation as early as the 4th century. But this was an aberration rather than the norm.

In an effort to dominate world culture the church did seek to destroy much of heathenry, but all she could not crush she sought to conquer and control. Much she also mistakenly saw as harmless or a matter of semantics, adopting and absorbing without questioning. In the British isles one such concept adopted and absorbed was the use of the term “God” to refer to the Almighty Creator. Over a period of a 1000 years, the term God spread with migration and conquest across the water from Germania into Britainia. While in Germania “God” developed into (or possibly from) “Gott”, in Britannia, “God” alternated between “God” and “Good”, until eventually “God” was the term for deity and eventually the title of the supreme deity with “good” being the term for positive things. In daily life among the Britains “God” was the normative nomenclature for the Most High, but it had not conquered common parlance beyond the Anglo-Saxon lands. That would take a bit of rebellion on the part of one John Wycliffe who took it upon himself in c. 1382 to translate the Bible into English for its availability to the common man to contemplate. Though we say “the Bible” that is not entirely accurate as Wycliffe rendered his version of Scripture from one translation (or rather 2) into another translation instead of utilizing the original manuscripts themselves, or as near as can be. Utilizing the Greek translation of the so called Old Testament (the Septuagint or LXX for sort) and relying heavily upon the Latin Vulgate translation. In Greek the then translators had rendered the term Elohim in the Hebrew text as Theos in Greek and later translators utilized Deus for their Latin versions. (Oddly enough both theos and deus trace their etymological ancestry in a not so distant line to the chief heathen deity of the Hellenic world, Zeus.) As arbitrarily as those ancient translators had chosen deus and theos as “translations” of elohim (even though utterly unrelated) so too John Wycliffe in repetition of the same exact pattern, stuck the common British parlance of his day into the text of his version, to render Elohim as God. And on his word alone and it’s

common usage already rampant among the English speaking peoples, God was passed off as a translation of Elohim, though itself unrelated to the term in any way whatsoever.

Following the Protestant reformation shy of 200 years later, William Tyndale took it upon himself to translate the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into the English common to his day, a task that resulted in the church burning him alive for his efforts. But before his death, Tyndale completed his translation of the entire so-called "New Testament" as well as the five Books of Moses and Jonah, and in his version of the Bible Tyndale chose to follow Wycliffe's lead utilizing God as a term for rendering Elohim into English. Yet not because it was a translation thereof. He simply chose this term because it was again common usage among English speaking peoples and because Wycliffe had done so before him. In the aftermath of Tyndale being burned to ash, Myles Coverdale took up the work of translating the remainder of William's work publishing the Matthew Bible and later the Coverdale Bible, carrying on the now well established tradition of replacing Elohim with God in English. (Ironically, though the church burned Tyndale for daring to translate the Bible into English, particularly without the church's permission, his translation in after years was embraced by the church through Coverdale's publications.) The Great Bible followed this and the Geneva Bible, then the Bishop's Bible...and finally the so-called Authorized Version - The King James Bible.

Each successive Bible version was rendered in English for political or for liturgical reasons rather than for fidelity to the truth. And all translations or versions were required to retain certain British traditions regardless of their relationship to reality. In addition to particular pro-monarchic interpretations and pro-episcopalian language, scribes were required to render such terms like "ecclesia" as "church" instead of fellowship or assembly, to utilize "Christ" as a title rather than return to Messiah as the intended title, to replace the Divine NAME of YHWH as "Lord", and to write "God" in English in place of theos and Elohim in the Greek and Hebrew respectively.

As the British Empire expanded, so too did the British language and culture. In time England established colonies on every continent and carried the KJV with them to the ends of the earth. With the Authorized version came British tradition, particularly the spread of "God" as the term for the divine being. Real or imagined it was irrelevant, because nobody

rejected the nomenclature. Nobody questioned the narrative. Eventually atheism arose to prominence in pop-culture, but even then the rebels argued within the given framework and narrative – that there is no God rather than that the deity is not rightly called God. Even in opposing the existence of the deity they inadvertently embraced the common terminology.

In the end, God won out in common knowledge and speech so that today, few if any know the NAME of the Creator or the term the Bible actually uses to refer to the kind of Being He is - Elohim. The most knowledgeable say “God has many names.” And then proceed to rattle off the many titles of the Most High as if they were names and as if there is no difference between the two. The average person it seems is so deeply rooted at this point in British tradition without knowing it’s extent or impact that they will not even notice in the study of the origin of the divine that they will refer to Him as God without even a second thought. Even in a conversation about whether or not God is accurate terminology or not.

Perhaps the worst though are the theologians and Hebrew teachers, because who else should know better? The average individual has no reason to know more than the most notable names in the field of metaphysics. And especially in our modern world of fast paced everything and overstimulation, who has time to even investigate these matters...especially when the most educated, influential, and important people in the given study ignore the issue entirely, or else espouse the idea that it doesn’t really matter or make any difference whether we call our Heavenly Father, by the adopted terminology “God” or by the terminology native to the Scripture, “Elohim.”

Whenever this subject is raised, people are quick to say God is a translation of Elohim...as if that is explanation enough and no more is needed. We didn’t look. We didn’t check. But we know this is truth. Say no more about it. It’s fine. But why are we so inclined to gloss over this aberration? If we believe hold the unadulterated unvarnished truth, why are we so adverse to inspecting this issue? Could it be because we never have? Perhaps we pass over this poignant piece of information because there is something off about it, and deep down we know we will not like what we find if we fiddle with such core elements of our Faith.

If indeed it is so that Elohim means God, then we should be fine with returning to calling our Creator, Elohim, as is written in Scripture instead of replacing that title with God. If we are to truly hold to what was written, why do we insist on adopting an English appellative first before we refer to Him? Why an English title for the Hebrew deity? And one unrelated in any way?

And moreover, if we truly believe in, proclaim, and insisted that God is proper terminology for the Almighty because Elohim translates to God, then we need to be able to define that new terminology.

If indeed the Christian claim is correct that the word Elohim means God, then what does the word God mean? When asked, the average Christian will say God means Elohim...and they usually don't even notice they have spoken cyclically, defining a word by itself and back again which is meaningless gibberish. But the fact is that gibberish is the best possible result from trying to define the word, God. Not only is it unrelated to the biblical term Elohim, in any way, shape, or form, but also and moreover, no scholar on earth can explain with any degree of certainty what the term God actually means. To date the best efforts of historians have produced an educated guess that God means "to invoke" or "to pour out", or "to invoke by pouring out", as in a drink offering poured out in honor of a deity.

Yet Elohim is not a matter of any mendacity or malleable meaning. Elohim is a plural term in general meaning "Mighty Ones, Majesties, Forces, or Powers". Rather than a name of any kind, Elohim is a common means of referring to an entire class of beings from creatures to the Creator Himself. Elohim is used to describe kings, warriors, idols, angels, demons, mountains, rivers, storms, warriors, judges, and giants etc. When used of the One Supreme Being Himself, Elohim, though grammatically plural in general becomes singular instead. So we must ask ourselves - "If the word 'God' is truly a translation of 'Elohim', how come scholars can only speculate as to the meaning of the word 'God'?" If we can say God is the same as Elohim then surely we can say what God means...right? Alas no we can't. No one can. Yet we carry on.

God is not infact a translation of Elohim, yet inspite of that indisputable fact, the faithful hold fast to it anyway. And when they find out how futile it is to try to claim God as a translation, what follows is an instant pivot to tradition. "God doesn't care what we call Him"

they proclaim with as little thought as went into the initial belief in God as translation. Ignoring the newfound evidence and doubling down on the familiar, the common practice of most who encounter this conundrum is to act as if it doesn't even matter. Aside from the fact that that is yet one more conclusion without a question, it is also willfully ignoring the overwhelming emphasis of Scripture. Throughout the Biblical narrative the Almighty insists on being the only Elohim we submit to and serve. He never says He wants us to acknowledge Him as God. Not only is this instance demanding a different thing than we imagined, it is focused on the opposite of our aims. Scripture has always compelled our conformity to its commandments rather than allowing our transforming its truths into the image of our traditions.

When we find out the Heavenly Father was never rightly called God, that God is not a translation of Elohim, and that we were saddled with that brummagem by bowdlerism, if our first response is not inquisitiveness and curiosity, but instead a knee-jerk reaction to justify our junk theology, then we need to get on our knees and repent of our prejudice and perfidy. What after all was our aim and ambition in religion anyway? To shape our faith as we saw fit? To tell the Father Who He is because the lying pen of the scribes said so? To decide that our desire will rule the day?

Contrary to how we have imagined the Most High, He has always been extremely jealous of His identity. The Almighty Elohim has done wonders for His NAME and reputation and will not begrudge us to bestow upon His blessed renown the names and titles of other deities. Of course we are each left free to do as we please, but if we truly seek to please Him instead of ourselves, we ought to stop adopting the terminologies of foreign cultures and telling the Creator that that is who He is.

Would we really treat anyone else in this fashion? Should we keep referring to a person as Fred when we find out his name is Bryan? Could we truly be called a friend when we tell them they are expected to adjust their identity to our entitlement? We are quick to say of our Creator, "He doesn't care what we call Him." And to say, "He knows my heart. He knows what I mean." And "It's really all just the same thing anyway." When we know damn well we would never treat anyone on earth in that manner, mandating they surrender their own name and renown unto our selfish imaginings....And here's a scary thought, He does

actually know what we mean...even though we don't...and He knows we don't care when we find out.

Besides who gets to decide? The Creator already clarified long ago, ages before the Church changed His designation from Elohim to theos, then later changed it from theos to deus and then eventually from deus to god, that He is YHWH Elohim...not Theos Kurios or Dominus Deus or Lord God. Or anything else we choose to call Him. Who are we to choose? We are nobody, but if we insist on altering the biblical terminology why are we relying on the long ago alterations of others. Why not take charge of it ourselves and name Him something normal for nowadays. How about Chuck? That's short like we like it. Relatable. Reliable. And easily repeatable. He is no longer Elohim, Theos, Deus, or God. He is now Chuck.

What?! Too much? Not daunting enough? Or is it the audacity that I, a lowly nobody, would dare to rename His Dread Sovereign Majesty?... I know "who am I, right?" Well who was Wycliffe? Who was Tyndale? Who was Coverdale? Who were any of these men to adopt a new title for the Almighty to replace the Elohim of Scripture? And worst of all, who were they to pass off that new title as if it were a translation of the original?

It is the age old instinct of man to reshape religion in his image. As far back as the Garden when "don't eat that" was all the instruction given and still we thought "perhaps just a small bite?" Compromise has always been the killer of true faith, even by well meaning and righteous men.

Take Jacob for example, one of His wives was a heathen Canaanite woman, and named her son, Gad after her particular elohim, a local idol of luck and fortune. And Jacob allowed that slight to slide. He did not deny her designation. He did not demand she change his name. Nor did he do his duty and rename his own child by a different appellation. In truth he should not have married a heathen woman to begin with but that done he definitely did evil allowing his child to bear through life the name of a heathen deity. A compromise that came back to bite him and his son in the long run. How so?

Well, as luck would have it, the tribe of Gad who grew from Gad, the son of Jacob eventually took up the worship of their namesake. Along with the rest of their brethren, the other northern tribes, they were exiled from the land of Israel and made their way into the wide

world bringing with them not only their name but moreover the worship of the one they were named for.

Though historians are hesitant to make the connections, it is evident that if not all the tribe of Gad at least a sizable portion migrated eventually into Europe settling in the Germanic regions emerging in the 1st century as the Goths or or People of Gott. With the passage of hundreds of years Gad evolved into Gott with variants of Gutt, Gothi, Gotta, and more. Conquest and migration saw the Gothic people destroyed or dispersed, but though their language and culture did not survive their defeat, their name did. Moving in and out of Germanic tongues Gott made its way to Britain with the Saxons evolving into the term God and Gud, and Good. In Britain this became commonplace as the term for positivity and morality or the term for deity, interchangeable till the late middle ages when Good became the fixed term for righteous behavior and God the term for the deity. And finally stuffed by Wycliffe and his successors into their Bible versions, stuffed like bread into the hind end of a dead Thanksgiving Turkey.

So ask yourself do you believe in God? Or are you skeptical? And don't take my word for it any more than you should take the word of Wycliffe. See it for yourself. And ask yourself, are you willing to compromise? Can you say with any certainty that God is what our Creator should be called? Are you sure beyond all doubt that the jealous Elohim does not care about correctness? And above all what kind of faith are you trying to forge in your life? The kind that tells the True and Holy One, "you are gonna take what I give you and you are gonna like it or lump it."? Or are you attempting to approach the thrown of grace with fear and trembling, in awe and wonder falling to the ground, casting down your pride and crown and begging for not but knowledge of His NAME and Renown?!

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