**The Origin of the English Word for God**

**Part One**

By Craig Bluemel

The English word for “God” has become a source of confusion for Christians since at least the Anglo-Saxon era. Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary says that the origin of the word ‘god’ comes from a Germanic word ‘gad,’ pronounced as “gohdt.”

The following information on the origin of the word ‘god’ will help to understand why we use it in our vernacular.

*GOD - The English word God is identical with the Anglo-Saxon word for “good,” and therefore it is believed that the name God refers to the divine goodness. (See Oehler's Theol. of Old Test.; Strong's and Young's concordances.) (From New Unger's Bible Dictionary) (Originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois. Copyright (C) 1988.)*

Further information on the source of our word for ‘God’ is listed below:

*Word origin: God - Our word god goes back via Germanic to Indo-European, in which a corresponding ancestor form meant “invoked one.” The word’s only surviving non-Germanic relative is Sanskrit hu, invoke the gods, a form which appears in the Rig Veda, most ancient of Hindu scriptures: puru-hutas, “much invoked,” epithet of the rain-and-thunder god Indra. (From READER’S DIGEST, Family Word Finder, page 351) (Originally published by The Reader’s Digest Association, Inc., Pleasantville New York, Montreal; Copyright (C) 1975)*

Now if the sources noted above are accurate, then the word that we use for the Supreme Being, God, comes from a very pagan origin. Thus the word god is used generically by many different religions to refer to their deity or “invoked one.”

Some may laugh at the notion, the very idea that the word “God” has any origin or association with Hindu Sanskrit. To illustrate how this is possible, we again quote from ‘Family Word Finder’ on the historical development of our Modern English language:

*Page 7, ‘Word Origins’ - “English belongs to the Indo-European family of languages, which consists of about 100 related tongues, all descended from prehistoric language of a pastoral, bronze working, horse breeding people, the Aryans, who inhabited the steppes of Central Asia about 4500 B.C. Scholars refer to their language at this stage as proto-Indo-European, or simply Indo-European.*

Over the next 3,000 years or so, the community of Indo-European speakers splintered off, to Iran and India (where their idiom developed into the sister languages, Old Persian and Sanskrit) and elsewhere in many other directions, mainly westward.

The farther afield they ranged, the farther their ancestral manner of speaking the diverged. The old national name, *Aryan* (meaning “noble”), survived in both Persia and India and is in fact the source of the present day *Iran*.

Within a few hundred years after the primeval Aryan community started breaking up, there were already several Indo-European languages where there had once been only one.

Derivative idioms grew even farther apart, so that by the dawn of recorded history a dozen branches of the Indo-European language family overspread most of western Eurasia from the Himalayas to the Atlantic. The most important of these branches are:

* Indo-Iranian (comprising-in Iran-Persian and-in India-Sanskrit, together with the derivative Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, and other languages including Romany, the language of the Gypsies)
* Slavic (Russian, Polish, etc.)
* Hellenic (Greek)
* Italic (Latin and derivative Romance languages such as French and Italian)
* Celtic (Gaelic, Welsh, Breton, etc.)
* Germanic (English, Dutch, German, Yiddish, and the Scandinavian languages).

To illustrate the family relationship of these languages, here are the words for *mother* and *brother* in languages belonging to the above-mentioned branches and also in the common ancestor tongue, Indo-European:

*English* mother brother

*German* mutter bruder

*Gaelic* mathair braithair

*Latin* mater frater

*Greek* meter phrater

*Old Church Slavonic* mati bratu

*Sanskrit* matr bhratr

*Indo-European* \* mater- *\**bhrater

Note: Indo-European forms are preceded by asterisks, indicating they are *reconstructions -* that is, these are educated guesses by scholars as to the word’s original form; also, because word endings are the least predictable, most changeable aspect of language, scholars place hyphens instead of conjectural ending at the end of each reconstructed Indo-European word.)

Words (from the list above) like ‘mother’ and ‘brother’ have common ancestry, and it is customary to refer to them as *cognates*. Thus, English *mother* is *cognate* with Latin *mater*, although it does not derive directly from it. (diagram omitted)

During the Roman occupation of Britain in the first four centuries of the Christian era, many Britons and Romans were bilingual, but as far as we know it never occurred to any of them that their respective languages were long-lost cousins.

Still less, would it have occurred to them that the speech of the Jutes, Saxons, Angles, and Frisians (who were encamped on the North Sea from Jutland down to the mouth of the Rhine) might be kin? It was with the coming of these Germanic tribes, however, after the collapse of the Roman authority in A.D. 410, in which the history of our language really began.

We now refer to their descendants as the *Anglo-Saxons* and to their language as *Old English*. They were eventually to give Britain a new name: *England*, “Land of the Angles.”

The Anglo-Saxon era lasted 500 years. During the second half of the period (from A.D. 800 onward), successive waves of Viking invaders took over much of England, reaching the height of their influence with the reign of Canute the Great (994-1035), king of England, Denmark, and Norway. Though the Viking invaders eventually integrated with their Anglo-Saxon cousins, these Norse-speaking newcomers left a broad and indelible mark on our vocabulary.

The language of 10th-century England is as far removed from us today as the dragon ships of the Vikings. To read Old English with comprehension, we must study it like a foreign language. Here, for example, are the opening verses of the Lord’s Prayer as recited by Englishmen in the year 1000:

Old English Modern English (King James)

Faeder ure, Our Father

Thu the eart on heofonum, which art in heaven,

Si thin Nama gehalgod. Hallowed be thy name.

Tobecume thin rice. Thy kingdom come.

Gewurthe thin willa on eorthan Thy will be done in earth,

Swa on heofonum... as it is in heaven...

The Norman Conquest brought the old English period to an abrupt close. Expropriating the English nobility in a series of bloodbaths following his coronation in London on Christmas Day, 1066, William the Conqueror installed a new ruling class.

Overnight, French became the language of state business; it was to remain so for several hundred years. At the same time, William promoted marriages between Normans and English - a farsighted policy that led, in the long run, not only to a national reconciliation, but also was richly blended with imported French word-stock.

We call this language *Middle English*, and in it we can recognize the immediate ancestor of Modern English. Emerging during the 12th and 13th centuries, Middle English became a polished literary language during the 14th century.

The dialect of the east Midlands around London was closer to *Modern English* than any of the other dialects of England. In 1476 the printer William Caxton used this dialect when he set up shop at Westminster and printed *The Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers*, the first book ever to be published in England.

In this, as in many subsequent enormously influential translations from the classics, Caxton used the current speech of London and thus helped establish its predominant status. By the reign of Henry VIII, nearly one generation later, London English was becoming a national standard.

A contemporary style manual advises the writer: “Ye shall therefore take the usual speech of the Court and that of London, and the shires lying about London within 60 miles, and not much above.” The language of this admonition is a bit old-fashioned, but it is Modern English nonetheless.

While London town and London English were growing by leaps and bounds, Humanism, the revival of Classical learning, was becoming a major movement in England as elsewhere in Europe. During the 16th century, Humanists introduced Greek and Latin words into the language by the thousands.

A large number of these words survived and now belong to our classic vocabulary. Shakespeare’s works and the King James Bible, contemporary with the first English settlements in America, provided a modern standard on both sides of the Atlantic.

*(From READER’S DIGEST, Family Word Finder, pages 7-10) (Originally published by The Reader’s Digest Association, Inc., Pleasantville New York, Montreal; Copyright (C) 1975)*

**UNDERSTANDING THE WORD “GOD” FROM THE BIBLE**

Since our English language has its origin from Indo-European influence, our understanding of the meaning of the word for “God” (from the Biblical Hebrew and Greek languages) is obviously different.

When the King James Version of the Bible (KJV) was translated in A.D. 1611, the translators used the words common to European people. Instead of translating a word properly, by using the Hebrew or Greek meaning, the translators replaced the true meaning of the Scriptural words with words common to their London English vernacular.

For example, we will first examine the words, LORD, Lord, and lord. By providing the true meaning of the use of these words, it is easy to see how the early Bible translations were in error:

LORD - LORD. The rendering of several Hebrew and Greek words, which have different meanings:

1. LORD; GOD = Jehovah (Yahweh; Hebrew YHWH, third person singular noun from the root word, “ehyeh” meaning literally, “self-existent”). This is used as a proper name of God and should have been retained in that form by the translators. The LORD (Yahweh) should read in the KJV and other versions as, “He is” or “He exists”.

2. Lord or lord = (Hebrew ‘Adon’), an early word denoting ownership; hence, absolute control. It is not properly a divine title, being used of the owner of slaves (Genesis 24:14,27; 39:2,7, rendered “master”), of kings, such as the lords of their subjects (Isaiah 26:13, “master”), of a husband as lord of the wife (Genesis 18:12). It is applied to God as the owner and governor of the whole earth <Ps. 114:7>. It is sometimes used as a term of respect (like our sir) but with a pronoun attached (“my lord”). It often occurs in the plural.

3. Lord = Adonai (Hebrew ‘adonay’), emphatic, “the Lord”; many regard it as the plural of number two (above; Adon). It is used chiefly in the Pentateuch-- always where God is submissively and reverently addressed (Exodus 4:10,13; Joshua 7:8) and also when God is spoken of (1 Kings 13:9; 22:6). The Jews, out of a superstitious reverence for the name Jehovah, always pronounce “Adonai” where “Yahweh” is written. The similar form, with the suffix, is also used of men, as of Potiphar (Genesis 39:2, “master”) and of Joseph (Genesis 42:30, 33).

4. Lord, Master = (Greek ‘kurios,’ meaning, “supreme”); referencing *he to whom a person or thing belongs, the master, the one having disposition of men or property, as the “owner of the vineyard”* (Matthew 20:8; 21:40; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:15); the “Lord of the harvest” (Matthew 9:38; Luke 10:2); the “master of the house” (Mark 13:35); “Lord of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5), as having the power to determine what is suitable to the Sabbath, and of releasing himself and others from its obligation.

The term is also a title of honor sometimes rendered “sir” and is expressive of the respect and reverence with which servants salute their master (Matthew 13:27; Luke 13:8; 14:22); employed by a son in addressing his father (Matthew 21:29); by citizens toward magistrates (Matthew 27:63); by anyone wishing to honor a man of distinction (Matthew 8:2,6,8; 15:27; Mark 7:28; Luke 5:12); by the disciples in saluting Jesus, their teacher and master (Matthew 8:25; 16:22; Luke 9:54; John 11:12). This title is given to God, the ruler of the universe, both with the article ‘ho kurios’ (Matthew 1:22; 5:33; Mark 5:19; Acts 7:33; 2 Timothy 1:16,18) and without the article (Matthew 21:9; 27:10; Mark 13:20; Luke 2:9,23, 26; Hebrews 7:21). The title is also applied to Jesus as the Messiah, since by His death He acquired a special ownership of mankind and after His resurrection was exalted by a partnership in the divine administration (Acts 10:36; Romans 14:8; 1 Corinthians 7:22; 8:6; Philippians 2:9-11).

5. Master, master, lord = Baal (Heb. ba`al, “master”), applied only to heathen deities, or to the man as husband, and so on, or to one especially skilled in a trade or profession. See Baal.

6. Other and less important words in the original are rendered “Lord,” such as mare', “master” (Acts 2:47), an official title, and seren, a Philistine term found in Joshua, Judges, and 1 Samuel, where “the lords of the Philistines” are mentioned.

*\*Bibliography: E. Lohmeyer, Kyrios Christos (1928); W. Bousset, Kyrios Christos (1935). (From New Unger's Bible Dictionary) (originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois. Copyright (C) 1988.)*

According to New Unger’s Bible Dictionary, the word, “LORD” seen in the OT is “Yahweh.” Unger’s says of the word Yahweh:

*This is used as a proper name of God and should have been retained in that form by the translators.” Since we know that most translators have mistranslated the name of the Almighty, by calling Him, “LORD,” instead of, “Yahweh,” we will now research the word “God.” Perhaps there are similar translator errors here as well.:*

**A STUDY ON THE OLD TESTAMENT WORDS USED FOR “GOD”**

1. “El” - The primary Hebrew word for ‘God’ is the word “El.” By using Strong’s Definition, we can quickly ascertain the meaning of both the Hebrew and Greek words for “God”:

*  410 'el (ale); shortened from 352; *strength*; as adjective, *mighty*; *especially the Almighty* (*but used also of any deity*): KJV-- God (god), X goodly, X great, idol, mighty one), power, strong. Compare names in "-el."
*  352 'ayil (ah'-yil); from the same as 193; properly, *strength*; *hence, anything strong*; *specifically a chief* (politically); also a ram (from his strength); a pilaster (as a strong support); an oak or other strong tree: KJV-- mighty (man), lintel, oak, post, ram, tree.
*  193 'uwl (ool); from an unused root meaning *to twist*, i.e. (by implication) *be strong*; the body (as being rolled together); *also powerful*: KJV-- mighty, strength.

**HISTORY ON THE USE OF THE WORD “EL”:**

“El” = GOD or god ('el 410). This term was the most common general designation of deity in the ancient Near East. While it frequently occurred alone, ‘el’ was also combined with other words to constitute a compound term for deity, or to identify the nature and functions of the “god” in some manner. Thus the expression “God, the God of Israel” (Genesis 33:20) identified the specific activities of Israel's God.

In the ancient world, knowledge of a person's name was believed to give one power over that person. Knowledge of the character and attributes of pagan “gods” was thought to enable the worshipers to manipulate or influence the deities in a more effective way than they could have if the deity's name remained unknown.

To that extent, the vagueness of the term ‘el’ frustrated persons who hoped to obtain some sort of power over the deity, since the name gave little or no indication of the god's character. This was particularly true for El, the chief Canaanite god.

The ancient Semites stood in mortal dread of the superior powers exercised by the gods and attempted to propitiate them accordingly. They commonly associated deity with the manifestation and use of enormous power. Hence the common meaning of the word for God (el) simply meant, “strength” or “strong.”

The concept of a deities’ strength or might is reflected in the curious Hebrew phrase, “the power (‘el’) of my hand” (Genesis 31:29), KJV; RSV, “It is in my power”; cf. (Deuteronomy 28:32).

Some Hebrew phrases in the Psalms associated ‘el’ with impressive natural features, such as the cedar trees of Lebanon (Psalms 80:10) or mountains (Psalms 36:6). In these instances, ‘el’ conveys a clear impression of grandeur or majesty.

Names with ‘el’ as one of their components were common in the Near East in the second millennium B. C. The names Methusael in Genesis 4:18 and Ishmael Genesis 16:11 come from a very early period.

In the Mosaic period, ‘el’ was synonymous with the Lord who delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt and made them victorious in battle (Read Numbers 24:8). This tradition of the Hebrew ‘el’ as a “God” who revealed Himself in power and entered into a covenant relationship with His people was prominent in both poetry (Psalms 7:11; 85:8) and prophecy (Isaiah 43:12; 46:9).

The name of ‘el’ was commonly used by the Israelites to denote supernatural provision or power. This was both normal and legitimate, since the covenant between “God” and Israel assured an obedient and holy people that the creative forces of the universe would sustain and protect at all times. Equally, if they became disobedient and apostate, these same forces would punish them severely.

*(From Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words) (Copyright (C) 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers)*

**SUMMARY OF FACTS ON THE HEBREW WORD ‘EL’ FOR GOD**

This term was the most common general designation of deity in the ancient Near East.

The word ‘el’ was also combined with other words to constitute a compound term for deity, or to identify the nature and functions of the “god” in some manner.

Knowledge of the character and attributes of pagan “gods” was thought to enable the worshipers to manipulate or influence the deities in a more effective way than they could have if the deity's name remained unknown. To that extent, the vagueness of the term ‘el’ frustrated persons who hoped to obtain some sort of power over the deity, since the name gave little or no indication of the god's character.

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**INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BIBLE ENCYCLOPEDIA ON THE WORDS ‘EL’, ‘ELOHIM’ AND ‘ELOAH’**

1. ‘El’: In the group of Semitic languages, the most common word for Deity is El (‘el’), represented by the Babylonian ilu and the Arabic ‘Allah’. It is found throughout the Old Testament, but more often in Job and Psalms than in all the other books. It occurs seldom in the historical books, and not at all in Leviticus. The same variety of derivations is attributed to it as to ELOHIM, most probable of which is the Hebrew root word ‘ul’, meaning, “to be strong.” Brown, Driver, and Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament interprets ‘ul’ as meaning “to be in front,” from which came ‘ayil’, “ram” the one in front of the flock, and ‘elah’, “the prominent.”

**OTHER OLD TESTAMENT WORDS FOR “GOD”**

2. “Elohim”: Strong’s Dictionary of the OT defines Elohim as follows:

*  430 ‘elohiym’ (el-o-heem'); plural of 433; *gods in the ordinary sense*; *but specifically used (in the plural thus, especially with the article) of the supreme God*; *occasionally applied by way of deference to magistrates; and sometimes as a superlative (superlative means ‘Most excellent’; of the Highest order; greatest; superior or Supreme; magnificent; pre-eminent; foremost; unsurpassed; unequaled):* KJV-- angels, X exceeding, God (gods)- dess, -ly), X (very) great, judges, X mighty.
*  433 'elowahh (el-o'-ah; rarely (shortened) ‘eloahh’ (el-o'-ah); probably prolonged (emphatic) from 410; *a deity or the Deity*: KJV-- God, god. See 430.
*  410 'el (ale); shortened from 352; *strength; as adjective, mighty*; *especially the Almighty* (*but used also of any deity*): KJV-- God (god), X goodly, X great, idol, might (-y one), power, strong. Compare names in “-el.”

**SUMMARY DEFINITION OF “ELOHIM”:**

1. a) *Gods in the ordinary sense*; *but specifically used (in the plural thus, especially with the article) of the supreme God*;
2. b) Occasionally applied by way of deference to magistrates;
3. c) Sometimes as a superlative (\*NOTE: The word ‘superlative’ means ‘Most excellent’; ‘of the Highest order’; ‘greatest’; ‘superior or Supreme’; ‘magnificent’; ‘pre-eminent’; ‘foremost’; ‘unsurpassed’; ‘unequaled’)
4. d) The root words from which Elohim derives its origin indicate that Elohim can also have in its meaning the idea of “*strength; as adjective, mighty*; *especially the Almighty* (*but used also of any deity*).”

The first form of the Divine name in the Bible is ‘Elohim’, ordinarily translated “God” (Genesis 1:1). Elohim for “God” is the most frequently used name in the Old Testament, as its equivalent Theos, is in the New Testament. Elohim occurs in Genesis alone approximately 200 times. Though a wide chasm exists between the languages of Greek and Hebrew, the basic definition for Elohim and theos is nearly identical in use and meaning.

The Hebrew Elohim is one of a group of kindred words, to which belong also ‘El’ and ‘Eloah.’ Its form is plural, but the construction is uniformly singular, i.e. it governs a singular verb or adjective, unless used of heathen divinities (Ps 96:5; 97:7) or earthly judges (magistrates; rulers; Psalms 82:1 “rulers”; Psalms 82:6 – the judges in Israel are called “gods”).

It is characteristic of Hebrew that, by extension, Elohim means magnitude and dignity. As a plural noun in use with singular verbs and pronouns, the word is distinctly singular in nature, but applied as a *plural of majesty* or *multiplication of strength*. That is, Elohim is a plural word used to express greatness, and to magnify the basic meaning of its root word (el’ meaning strength) as the “strongest of the strong.”

Elohim is also used of actual multiplicity and expressed literally by the plural (numeric). It is not reasonable, therefore, to assume that *the plurality of form indicates primitive Semitic polytheism*. On the contrary, historic Hebrew is unquestionably and uniformly monotheistic.

**UNCERTAIN ORIGIN OF ELOHIM**

The derivation of Elohim is quite uncertain. Gesenius, Ewald and others find its origin in ‘ul’, meaning, “to be strong.” The Hebrew ‘ul’ is derived from ‘ayil’, meaning, “ram” and ‘elah,’ meaning, “terebinth.”

Elohim is then an expanded plural form of ‘el’; others trace it to ‘alah,’ meaning, “to terrify.” The singular form is found in the infrequent Hebrew word ‘eloah,’ which occurs chiefly in poetical books.

Brown, Driver, and Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament inclines to the derivation being from ‘alah,’ meaning, “to be strong.” They contend ‘alah’ as the root of the three forms, ‘El’, ‘Eloah,’ and ‘Elohim,’ although admitting that the whole question is involved in uncertainty

*  *NOTE: It is this author’s contention that the root word origin of* 'elowahh *(‘alah’ meaning, “to be strong”) is the most likely source of the Arabic “Allah.” Allah is the name of the principle deity of the pagan religion of Islam. The heathen nations borrowed from the Semitic language to create names for their particular deities.*

The origin of the Hebrew word Elohim must always lie in doubt, since the derivation is prehistoric, and the name, with its kindred words ‘El’ and ‘Eloah’, is common to Semitic languages and religions and beyond the range of Hebrew records.

It is the reasonable conclusion that the meaning is “might” or “power”; that it is common to Semitic language; that the form is plural to express majesty or “all-mightiness,” and that it is a generic, rather than a specific personal, name for Deity, as is indicated by its application to those who represent the Deity (Judges 5:8; Psalms 82:1) or who are in His presence (1 Samuel 28:13).

3. ‘Eloah’: The singular form of the preceding name, ‘Eloah’, is confined in its use almost exclusively to poetry, or to poetic expression, being characteristic of the Book of Job, occurring more often in that book than in all other parts of the Old Testament. It is, in fact, found in Job more often than the ordinary plural ‘Elohim’. For derivation and meaning see above under 1 (2). Compare also the Aramaic form, ‘elah’, found frequently in Ezra and Daniel.

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4. ‘Elah’ 426, “god.” This Aramaic word is the equivalent of the Hebrew ‘eloah.’ It is a general term for “God” in the Aramaic passages of the Old Testament, and it is a cognate form of the word ‘Allah’, the designation of deity used by the Arabs.

Elah is used widely in the Book of Ezra, occurring no fewer than 43 times between Ezra 4:24 and 7:26. On each occasion, the reference is to the “God” of the Jewish people, whether the speaker or writer was himself Jewish or not. While the Persians were certainly not worshipers of the “God” of Israel, they accorded Him the dignity that befitted a "God of heaven" (Ezra 6:10). This was done partly through superstition; but the pluralistic nature of the newly won Persian empire also required them to honor the gods of conquered peoples, in the interests of peace and social harmony.

In the only verse in the Book of Jeremiah that was written in Aramaic (Jeremiah10:11), the word ‘elah’ appears in plural form to describe “gods” that had not participated in the creation of the universe. Although such false “gods” were being worshiped by pagan nations (and perhaps worshiped by some of the Hebrews who were in exile in Babylonia), these deities would ultimately perish because they were not eternal in nature.

In the Book of Daniel, ‘elah’ was used both of heathen “gods” and the one true “God” of heaven (Daniel 2:11). The Chaldeans referred to such “gods” when reporting that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to participate in idol worship on the plain of Dura (Daniel 3:12).

Daniel enumerated the “gods” when he condemned Nebuchadnezzar’s neglect of the worship of Israel's one true “God” (Daniel 5:23). In Daniel 3:25, the word ‘elah’ refers to a divine being or messenger sent to protect the three Hebrews (Daniel 3:28). In Daniel 4:8-9,18 and Daniel 5:11, the phrase “the spirit of the holy gods” appears (KJV, RSV, NEB, NIV). Elsewhere the references to ‘elah’ are to the living “God” whom Daniel worshiped.

*(From Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words) (Copyright (C) 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers)*

The word ‘elah’ is similar in its uses to the word “el.” Both of these words are used interchangeably for either the one true God, or to pagan deities (the pagan deities are really no gods at all! READ Galatians 4:8).

**Old Testament word summary**

The most common words used on the OT for God, are “elohim,” and “el.” Both Hebrew words indicate, “might, strength, most excellent’; of the highest order; greatest; superior or supreme; magnificent; pre-eminent; foremost; unsurpassed; unequaled.”

Since the OT words used for the Supreme deity have the basic meaning of, “strength,” why did the King James and other English translators used the word “God” instead? The translators could have translated the word “elohim” as “the mighty One of mighty ones,” or “the Strongest One.”

In like manner, Bible translators could have translated the Hebrew word “el” as “one with strength” or “the Strong one.” **Rather than be true to the Hebrew meanings, for some unknown reason, the King James and subsequent translators have used the Anglo-Saxon word “God,” which means “the invoked one.”**

**A Study on NT words for God**

The NT is much less complex in its use of words for “God.” The NT manuscripts are primarily in Greek, with the exception of some Aramaic. The King James Version and other Bible translators have blundered by using a generic word, “god” to refer to the Almighty.

The problem with associating the Almighty with lesser deities is more than mere semantics. When God inspired both OT and NT writers to pen the inspired text of scripture, He knew the importance of word meanings.

It is NOT BY ACCIDENT that God used the Hebrew word ‘elohim’ and the Greek word ‘theos’ as the primary word to describe himself. Elohim and theos are virtually identical in meaning, and to translate both words with an Indo-European bastard language is taking away from our understanding of Him as the strong one, or as our source of strength.

The antiquity of the Semitic languages are more pure than Greek. The Hellenized Roman Empire had adopted the Greek pantheon of deities. Both Greek and Roman culture were polytheistic and they had numerous deities, but they used one basic root word to describe a deity in general. This word was theos or theotes, albeit the word was commonly applied to rulers (magistrates).

Both Greek and Roman societies embodied secular leadership with their deities. Great men and women (those of high status and influence) were viewed as gods and goddesses. Platonic philosophy blended nicely with the anthropomorphism of pagan deities. Those whom they subjugated worshiped conquering kings. Sages were elevated to god status by virtue of the knowledge (gnosis) and were considered divine luminaries and part of the greater Demiurge.

**THE WORD GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The Greek word Theós (2316) in the NT is translated as “God.” In the polytheism of the Greeks, Theós is denoted “a god or deity,” (e.g. Acts 14:11; 19:26; 28:6; 1 Corinthians 8:5; Galatians 4:8).

In New Testament times, Jews apparently used “Theós,” and “Theós” was later retained by Christians to denote “the one true God.” In the Septuagint “Theós” translates (with few exceptions) into the Hebrew words Elohim and Yahweh; the former indicating His power and preeminence; the latter is clearly a translator error by those who worked on converting Hebrew into Greek.

When the Septuagint, which is the Hebrew OT translated into Greek, was made, its translators were not true servants of Yahweh. Had they been, they would not have associated the Hebrew word Yahweh (YHWH meaning, “He is” or “He exists”) with the Greek word Theós, meaning “strength.”

Yahweh is derived from ehyeh, meaning, “I am {He} who exists, or is.” Ehyeh comes from a root word hayah, meaning, “to be.” The Greek counterpart to ehyeh is eimi, meaning, “I exist.” The Greek equivalent to Yahweh is ésti, meaning, “he exists,” or “he is.”

Yahweh is a third person noun meaning literally, “He is.” In the English Bible translations of the OT, where “GOD” is all capitalized letters, it is the Hebrew word “Yahweh.” After the Jews were deported from Babylon, they no longer used the word “Yahweh” because of superstitions that they would somehow be blaspheming the name to even utter it.

Since most of the Roman Empire in NT times was Hellenized, the majority of Jews spoke Greek, and therefore referred to their supreme deity as “Theós.” Only a few scribes, Pharisees, lawyers, and Sadducees actually spoke and wrote fluent Hebrew. They would use “Elohim” or “El” to refer to the Supreme Deity, but no longer used Yahweh’s covenant name.

To distinguish the one true God from pagan deities, the majority of Greek texts precede the noun Theós with the definite article “ho’ (meaning “the, this, that”). Of course, to simply say “the God” does not prove he is, in reality, the supreme deity. For example, in 2 Corinthians 4:4 the Greek text reads, “ho Theós” but refers to Satan, calling him, “…*the god* of this world.”

However, if the Greek text “ho Theós” read, “*the God* of this people Israel” as in the context of Acts 13:17, it would clearly identify Him as the one and only true God. Also, if God’s attributes are used in connection with “ho Theós,” then this would also be a way to distinguish the true God from pagan deities in the NT. Some of His attribute are His monism, (Mark 12:29; 1 Timothy 2:5; self-existence, (John 5:26); unchallengeable, (James 1:17); eternal, (Romans 1:20); creative power, (Acts 17:26-28) and so on.

Theós is used with the definite article and without (an anarthrous noun). The English may or may not have need of the article in translation. But that point cuts no figure in the Greek idiom. For example, in Acts 27:23 “the God (toú Theoú) whose I am,” the article toú points out the special God whose Paul is, and is to be preserved in English. In the very next verse (ho Theós) we in English do not need the article" (A. T. Robertson, Gram. of Greek, NT, p. 758).

In the following titles God is described by certain of His attributes; the God of glory, Acts 7:2; of peace, Romans 15:33; 16:20; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:20; of love and peace, 2 Corinthians 13:11; of patience and comfort, Romans 15:5; of all comfort, 2 Corinthians 1:3; of hope, Romans 15:13; of all grace, 1 Peter 5:10. These describe Him, not as in distinction from other persons, but as the source of all these blessings; hence the employment of the definite article. In such phrases as “the God of a person,” (e.g. - Matthew 22:32), the expression marks the relationship in which the person stands to God and God to him.

The word “theós” is also used of divinely appointed judges in Israel, as representing God in His authority, as in John 10:34, quoted from Psalms 82:6, which indicates that God Himself sits in judgment on those whom He has appointed. Jesus refers to the leaders of the Jews, saying, “You are gods…”

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Theós is a genitive noun, and Theoú is the masculine noun. Originally the heathen used Theós and they thought the gods were makers and disposers (thetemres, placers) of all things. The ancient Greeks used the word both in the singular and the plural.

When they used the plural form of Theós, they intimated their belief that elements had their own “disposer” or “placer,” (e.g., the god of money called mammon; read Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:9, 13).

The heavens were the grand objects of divine worship throughout the heathen world as is apparent from the names attributed to the gods by the ancient Greeks. The Scriptures also attest to this (Acts 7:42, 43; Deut. 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kings 17:16; 23:4, 5; Job 31:26, 27; Jeremiah 8:2; 19:13; Zephaniah 1:5).

The gods the Greeks worshiped were the various aspects of created nature, especially the heavens, or some demons or intelligences they supposed resided in them. For instance, Orpheus, a legendary poet and musician of ancient Thrace, noted for charming animate and inanimate objects with his lyre, called most gods of the Greeks demons.

The Septuagint constantly translated the Hebrew plural name Elohim, when used for the true God, by the singular Theós, “God”, never by the plural “theoi”, meaning “gods.” The primary reason for this is that the Hebrew word “elohim” is a plural of majesty, but the noun itself is singular. Plural of majesty emphasizes the greatness of the noun elohim. Therefore the Hebrew word “elohim” would mean, “Mighty one of mighty ones.”

Greek idolatry was the prevailing superstition, especially in Egypt under the Ptolemy. Their gods were regarded as demons, that is, intelligent beings totally separate and distinct from each other. If the translators rendered the name of the true God by the plural “theoi”, they would have given the heathen under Greek culture an idea of a polytheistic God, inconsistent with the numerous scriptures in the OT and NT that state “God is One.” The following scriptures are examples:

* **Mark 12:29** Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord. (NAS)
* **James 2:19** You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. (NAS)
* **Deuteronomy 6:4** Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! (NAS)

Theós is applied personally to the Father as the one true “God.” (John 4:23-24; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:6)

The word “theós” also denotes the heathen gods or idols (Acts 14:11; 1 Cor. 8:5); magistrates (John 10:34, 35); by false application to Satan (2 Corinthians 4:4); to the belly which some people make their god or in which they place their supreme happiness (Philippians 3:19).

**Summary of NT word “theos”**

The Greek word “Theós” simply refers to “deity.” In most cases the word is used for the one true God. Theós is the Greek counterpart to the Hebrew word “el” or “elohim,” and both Hebrew and Greek words have comparable meanings.

Today, our word ‘theology’ (meaning the study of God) comes from “theoó,” the root word of “theos.”It would be difficult to call the Almighty, “the Deity,” particularly in our culture. People will most likely always call the Creator by the term “God,” even though this word is in no manner associated with scripture.

At the very least, earnest Christians with a reverence for the scriptures would begin to refer to God as,”the Almighty,” or “the Mighty One,” or “my Strength.” These words denote His true nature and characteristics, whereas the generic word, “God” tells us nothing about the One we love and serve.

It is my prayer that Christians from all walks of life study the scripture, in order that they may know their Creator more intimately and with more knowledge. The King James translators used a pagan Anglo-Saxon word “god” from the Germanic “gad.” No one has ever really challenged this widespread use of this Indo-European word.

The King James translators made the same erroneous translation of the covenant name of the Almighty. They changed the name “Yahweh”, which means, “He is,” to the Anglo-Saxon word, “LORD.” Why? They cared less about the truth of scripture than orthodoxy, and they decide to conform and relate to their manmade tradition. It was too much work, too big a leap of faith, and too unorthodox to step outside of their paradigms and comfort zone.

It might seem strange at first to speak of the Almighty, addressing His covenant name, and saying, “I love the one Who is,” instead of saying, “I love the LORD.” But one could at least acknowledge Him as, “The One who is, and was, and always will be....”

Maybe by adding His attributes to the meaning of the name Yahweh, one would pray in this manner, “The One WHO IS my strength, I call upon You for help.” This study is not intended to make a person more technical in their relationship with Almighty, but to let their hearts and minds understand who He is in their life more clearly.

Instead of calling Him “LORD God” (Yahweh Elohim), we would call him, “He is the strongest one.”

Instead of calling Him “LORD God” (Yahweh El) we would address Him as, “He is strength” or “He is MY strength” or “He is the strong one” or “He is MY strong one.”

May the One who is, the One that exists as all you need Him to be, give you’re a spirit of wisdom and knowledge and revelation that you may understand His purpose and will for your life.