

God, gods, Yahweh god, and Yahweh

By Jim Myers

In order for people to make good decisions about the words of “the Bible,” we must have accurate information about “the Bible.” For me, the Bible was an English translation. Everyone I knew that had a Bible that was an English translation. The minister at my church held up and English translation when he talked about “the Bible.” The Bible we studied at our church was an English translation.

One of the most important benefits of exploring biblical heritages is learning how to have safe, open, and trust-building discussions about our belief systems and biblical heritages. BHC provides guidelines and models that make those kinds of conversations possible. The guideline I am focusing on today states:

Explorers must have an awareness of the Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic words from which their translations were made.

The words “God” and “gods” are found in all English translations, but very few have the name “Yahweh.” It is only found in a few. I have replaced those words with transliterations of the Hebrew words the translators translated in the verses below.

1. “*In the beginning ELOHIYM created the heavens and the earth.*” (Genesis 1:1)
2. “*Then he forsook the ELOHA who made him . . .*” (Deuteronomy 32:15)
3. “*Now I know that Yahweh is greater than all the ELOHIYM . . .*” (Exodus 18:11)

It is easy to see that the word ELOHIYM is in #1 and #3. However, when you look at those verses in your English translation, ELOHIYM in #1 was translated “God,” but in #3 ELOHIYM was translated “gods.” The Hebrew words are identical, but their English translations are very different. The *grammar* and *contexts* in which they appear are why translators choose different English words for their translations.

- The Hebrew word ELOHIYM is made of a *root word* “ELOHA” with an attached *masculine plural suffix* “-IYM.”
- ELOHA is the singular form of ELOHIYM and it is never translated “gods.”

The Hebrew speaking ancient audience would have asked, “*Why was ELOHIYM used in #1 instead of ELOHA, which would have made it very clear that this only one god?*” The answer will be revealed as the first story unfolds. ELOHIYM was used “to alert members of ancient audiences to be on the lookout for why the plural form was used and the wisdom that it reveals.” *Readers of English translations never see question, or the ancient wisdom revealed by it.*

Another obstacle readers of modern translations unknowingly face are *context destroying insertion of chapter and verse markers*. [Click Here to read The Insertion of Chapter and](#)

Verse Divisions in the Bible. “**Context**” plays a major role in determining *the author’s meanings of biblical words*. Destroying contexts also destroys the correct meanings. This problem is clearly seen in Genesis 2:4. Pay close attention to the underlined words. The translation below is from the King James Version.

*This is the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created,
in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.*

Now I will replace two of the English words with Hebrew transliterations.

*This is the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created,
in the day that Yahweh ELOHIYM made the earth and the heavens.*

Now let’s see what we discover when we compare Genesis 1:1 to Genesis 2:4.

1. In Genesis 1:1 above, **ELOHIYM** created **the heavens and the earth**. “*The heavens and the earth*” matches the order we see in Genesis 2:4a – “*the heavens and the earth.*”
2. Genesis 2:4b states – “*in the day that Yahweh ELOHIYM made the earth and the heavens.*” “**ELOHIYM**” is in Genesis 1, but Genesis 2:4b has **Yahweh ELOHIYM**.
3. Genesis 1 has “*the heavens and the earth,*” while Genesis 2:4b has “*the earth and the heavens.*” Not only has the order changed, the order in Genesis 2:4b would have made the creation of the earth impossible. The “*heavens*” was “*the solid dome-like structure; the barrier that keep the deep waters out.*”
4. In Genesis 1, **ELOHIYM** “**created**,” while in Genesis 2:4b **Yahweh ELOHIYM** “**made**.”
5. In Genesis 1, **ELOHIYM** created the heavens and the earth in “**two days**.” In Genesis 2:4b, **Yahweh ELOHIYM** made the earth and the heavens “**in a day**.”

The above information reveals that Genesis 2:4a is the end of the first story and Genesis 2:4b is the beginning of the second story. The differences between the two stories “**alerted members of ancient audiences to be on the lookout for the wisdom those differences will reveal.**”

Members of ancient audiences were looking forward to finding differences in the biblical text and the questions they raised. They would lead them to the wisdom they valued the most – the wisdom of the Creator. It is time-tested wisdom that will also benefit 21st century lives.

Shalom!

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