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Before the Serpent Became Satan # 3

By Jim Myers

Continued from Issue Number 41.

We pick up the story in Genesis 3:5. Notice how different translators translate the Hebrew word **ELOHIYM** in this verse. The word appears twice and its translations are underlined.

King James Version – 1611/1769

For **God** doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as **gods**, knowing good and evil.

Douay-Rheims Version - 1899

For **God** doth know that in what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened: and you shall be as **Gods**, knowing good and evil.

American Standard Version – 1901

For **God** doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as **God**, knowing good and evil.

There are no capital letters in Hebrew, so, why did one group translate **ELOHIYM** as **God** and **gods**; another as **God** and **Gods**; and the third as **God** and **God**? No wonder people are confused! Most Bible readers just study the same translation and have no idea about the liberty that translators take when working with the Greek and Hebrew texts.

What is the difference between **God** and **god**? Do the capital letters make a difference? *The decision to capitalize the word was completely based on the belief systems of the translators.* However, the decision to translate it as a singular

or plural word is another matter. You may remember that the Hebrew ending “**-IYM**” (ELOH-**IYM**) is a **masculine plural suffix**. If we viewed the word outside of any context we would normally conclude that it must be a plural, therefore we would translate it as “gods.”

But, when we view it in context we must examine the verb linked to it in order to determine whether it should be translated as a singular or plural. In this verse the first occurrence of ELOHIYM is linked to a singular verb, while the second it is linked to a plural verb. Therefore, the first should be translated as a singular (**god** or **God**) while the second should be translated as a plural (**gods** or **Gods**). Notice that the translators of the KJV and DRV correctly selected from these options.

The **American Standard** translators strayed beyond the linguistic boundaries and completely ignored the fact that the second verb was plural. In order to understand the implications of the translators decisions let’s see how they affected the meaning of the serpent’s message.

- (1) **KJV** - you (plural) shall be as **gods**
- (2) **DRV** - you (plural) shall be as **Gods**
- (3) **ASV** - you (plural) shall be as **God**

What is the difference between “**being as gods**” and “**being as God**?” The belief systems of most modern Bible readers are based on the doctrine of monotheism. Therefore, the **King James Version’s “gods”** wouldn’t make much sense *unless the serpent a polytheist?*

The **American Standard Version's** choice of "**God**," however, paints a completely different picture. *In this case it would appear that the serpent was offering the woman a chance to become equal to the Creator of the universe.* There is quite a difference between the words that the two groups of translators put in the mouth of the serpent, isn't there?

Now let's return to the story. We find the woman pondering the words of the serpent. You can almost hear her thoughts as the words "*you (plural) shall be as Elohim (plural)*" reverberate through her mind. The narrator provides a step-by-step view beginning with the moment she focused her eyes on the "forbidden fruit."

- (1) *It is good for food.*
- (2) *It is a delight to the eyes.*
- (3) *It will make that one wise.*

The last thought provides us with an important clue for how she understood the word Elohim; an Elohim was a source of divine wisdom.

This scene provides tremendous insight into the message of the author of this text. We have the **wisest of all the wild animals** offering a human being the **wisdom of an Elohim** if she will simply submit to him. *Will she act like a wild animal and eat the forbidden fruit or will she trust in the wisdom of the Elohim and refuse?* We will return to this scene in a future issue and discuss its implications.

*And the woman said unto the serpent, Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, Elohim has said, "**You (plural) shall not eat of it, neither shall you (plural) touch it, lest you (plural) die** (Gen. 2-3)*

Where did she get the idea that just touching the fruit would kill her? Let's go back and review exactly what was commanded.

*And Yahweh Elohim commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden **you***

*(**masculine singular**) may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, **you (masculine singular) shall not eat of it, for in the day that you (masculine singular) eat thereof you (masculine singular) shall surely die** (Gen. 2:16-17).*

Notice that the woman said "you (plural);" but the words of the Elohim were "you (singular)." The Hebrew language is also gender specific, if she had been given an accurate account of exactly what Yahweh Elohim had said, she would have known that he said "**he** shall surely die," not "**she** shall surely die" or "**you (plural)** shall surely die." This would only happen if the forbidden fruit was eaten, there was no prohibition from touching it. *I wonder who told her that she would die if she simply touched it.*

We can just imagine the internal struggle that is raging within her as stares at the fruit hanging within arms length before her eyes. Would the desire for divine wisdom be worth risking her life? Could divine wisdom be gained in a split-second by simply eating the fruit from this tree?

Most readers picture the woman standing by the tree with the serpent standing beside her as she contemplates her options. This, however, is not an accurate picture. There is someone else standing beside her who knows the truth but remains completely silent – the man! We are not going to be made aware of this fact until after she makes her decision (see Gen. 3:6 below):

"and she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and gave also unto her man with her"

He was the only one that knew exactly what Yahweh Elohim commanded because he was the only one present. Neither the serpent nor the woman existed at that point in time. He was the only one who could have given the woman the information which she believed to be the "word of God." *Apparently, long before the serpent attempted to trick the woman her own partner had played a little trick of his own by telling her that she would die if she even touched the forbidden fruit on that tree."* **BHR**

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