



Introduction

- Welcome to the Greater Book of Gods -

PREMISE AND ORGANIZATION

The Premise of this book is simple. List out all the major and many of the minor deities for every culture or civilization that has ever existed that we can historically verify through direct evidence in the physical world.

Simple right?

Well, as I undertook this adventure, I found myself learning quite a bit, assuming quite a bit and never ceasing to be amazed by what we have learned about our distant past.

Each chapter of this book will follow a formula that you can follow with a few exceptions. The Formula will be thus:

- Where is this place physically and in time
- What was their culture like (or is like today if it's still around)
- What/Who are their gods
- What are some of their myths and stories
- What is the family of their gods
- Possibly a Time-line of Major Events

There are some exceptions, like the section on human evolution and others like areas that pull together multiple mythologies and pan-cultural ideas, like the Gods of the Days of the Week. Fitting these into a formula for you to follow was a bit like trying to fit a round peg into a square hole because they are really multi-cultural, pan-theistic subjects.

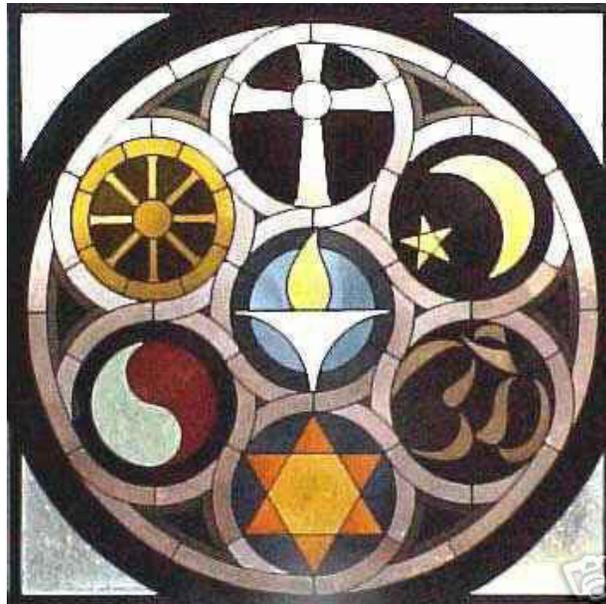
By splitting up each culture or civilization into its own Chapter, no matter how big or small, I can focus on delivering the overall time-line and development of it in one PDF file that you can download and read as you choose to. Hopefully, this format will be easy to digest without too much confusion.

Lastly, Each section might have its own look or feel to it, to reflect the culture that you are reading about, but will still be recognizable as part of a cohesive book.

The page format is setup as be easy to print out or to read on screen. Not everyone wants to spend so much time reading a book on their smart phone, but

its possible. The entire book is richly illustrated and will look good printed out as well. It is truly designed to be held in the hand as best I can manage with file size limitations and the difficulty of finding representative images that are sufficient resolution.

I also wrote it to learn for myself. Nothing teaches like being a teacher. And being an authority on any subject requires long hours of study and filtering information through the internal lense of self doubt. As a result, the information in these chapters is only as good as I can gather it and is limited by my ability to articulate the data. As times change and we learn more, I have seen our beliefs and knowledge substantially change just in the course of one generation. If I get it wrong, I apologize. Let me know and I will fix it!



INTRODUCTION

Does God exist? Believers take a great degree of comfort that their claims for the existence of God cannot be disproved. They might be ignorant of how scientific reason works or realize that scientific reasoning is based on tangible evidence. Science cannot directly “disprove” the existence of God, simply because there is no physical evidence upon which to base a “disproof.” This is nothing new in the history of sci-

entific advancement. Rather than take that approach, scientific reasoning drives out erroneous ideas when stronger evidence points to a different paradigm. While Christians impugn the word “theory” as if it represents a great deal of doubt, in the science lexicon, it is a way of expressing science’s open-endedness. Ironically, religionists are certain of their faith, yet the word epitomizes belief without evidence. Faith is the knowledge of the heart, where intuition and truth passes directly into one’s being without too much intellectual examination in most cases.

Scientific reasoning avoids that trap by binding itself to observable evidence. With regards to cosmology, it can’t be known if the universe had a beginning. The famous Big Bang Theory only infers a cosmic explosion 13.7 billion years ago. Even NASA modestly admits:

Although the Big Bang Theory is widely accepted, it probably will never be proved; consequentially, leaving a number of tough, unanswered questions.

Suppose there is an infinite universe. By definition it can’t be seen. The Big Bang, if it is true, may only have been an explosion within a universe with no beginning and no end. Or to say it another way, existence always existed. Science does not rise or fall on whether existence had a beginning or not. Mainstream religion’s credibility does not seem to tolerate this ambiguity. Even as science and physics marches on, getting out of one’s universe to look at it from the outside objective state seems like an impossibility.

GOD’S FIRST DAY

Now, we will turn our attention to the beginning of “God,” the proper noun. When did god become God? Mainstream religions place no credibility in heathen religions, yet their very foundation and evolution rests on them. If “God” had a beginning, archaeological and historical evidence points to the polytheistic religions that preceded and paralleled the rise of Judaism and early Christianity. Religionists could argue that belief in a single God was a refinement of all the other ideas. The problem with that assertion is that without something concrete to guide the direction of their logic,

there are as many explanations for the existence of a God or god(s) as human minds can imagine and as evidenced by today's world.

Fortunately, we have two concrete sources from which to trace the evolution of God and religion: archeology and religious texts.

THE HEBREW RELIGION AS AN EXAMPLE

El was the creator of all things and was believed to be the father of all things. Over time, El's name became the generic Semitic term for any god. El was the oldest of the gods. He was head of the divine council, and he was well respected for his wisdom and judgment. El's home was in the mountains, far to the north, believed to be the source of the waters of the cosmos. El lived far away where the waters originated, up in the sacred mount. When the other gods want to consult with El, they must go to where El is.

The most significant epithet given to El was "the Bull El." The mainstream interpretation is that the name symbolized strength, but I think it had more to do astrological Age of Taurus when the god was popular. His consort was his sister, the mother of the god Ashura or Elat. El's other sister, Astarte, was also his mistress, and so was his daughter Anat, who is also the wife of his son, Baal. The divine relationships show plenty of incest and a lot of fertility. Many old religions do, as a kind of purity of the bloodline. Obviously incestual relationships among deities did not have the same connotations as today, not to mention gods actually having sex. Ew!

El also appears as a divine warrior, but only in the context of gaining supremacy over the other gods. Once he becomes dominant among equals, he retires from warfare and the work of divine warrior falls to Baal. Baal also sits at El's right hand in the council of gods. Baal was initially a god of the storm who made the earth fertile by providing rain. The name of Baal means "Lord or master." And like El, the name of Baal became a generic identification for gods. Sometime in the murkiness of Israelite history, the Israelite cult of Yahweh arose as belief in El faded.

To hear the monotheists (Christian, Jewish; Islam) tell it, there was one god who created the universe. The way the Bible tells it, there were many gods

responsible for the origins of the universe. We learn this by translating back to Hebrew. "El" is the singular for god and "elohim" is its masculine plural form. Thus in the first creation story:

(Gen. 1:1) - In the beginning the Gods [Elohim] created the heavens and the earth.

(Gen. 1:26) - Then said the Gods [Elohim], "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

The name "Yahweh" first appears in the second creation story, but as Yahweh elohim, meaning "Yahweh of the gods." If this is to be interpreted as a continuation of the first creation, then it is about one of the gods, Yahweh, who created a particular place, Eden, within the greater universe.



Above: Yahweh in Hebrew translates as "the LORD"

(Gen. 2:4) - These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the LORD [Yahweh] of the Gods [elohim] made the earth and the heavens,

(Gen. 2:5) - And every plant of the field before it was in the earth and every plant of the field before it grew up—for the LORD [Yahweh] of the Gods [elohim] had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground;

(Gen. 6:5) - The LORD [Yahweh] saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

(Gen. 6:13) - And the Gods [Elohim] said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

Exodus 15:11 asks "Who is like you among the gods."

(Exo. 15:11) - "Who is like thee, O LORD [Yahweh], among the gods?"

(Exo. 20:3) - And of course there are the famous words of the First Commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me."

In any event, the Old Testament was not written down until long after the oral stories originated, so that may account for the oddities in noun/verb pairs. Its difficult to say for sure. I intentionally went back to the Hebrew writings that are translated into English in order to try to stay true to the original written words. Modern translations have had too many cultural and religious biases added to them that have slightly changed the meanings from the first scriptures.

PLURAL VS. MONOTHEISTIC ARGUMENTS

Christian scholars try to have it both ways by saying that the plural refers to the Holy Trinity. To do that they would have to ignore the pluralisms, other gods, and pantheons of lesser gods mentioned throughout the Bible. In addition, the Holy Trinity was not invented as a concept until you have the son of god. Clearly, the early Hebrews were henotheists who recognized the existence of many gods from El to Yahweh and even Zeus and Astarte.

Other scholars will argue that El and Elohim are generic terms as the early Semitic languages was devoid of many of the terms of more modern languages, but to agree to this ignores the roots of the many cultures that influenced and surrounded the Semitic culture as it developed, not to mention what we know of the Semitic language itself.

There are a caveats, to be fair, to the use of elohim in the Hebrew bible. It sometimes refers to angles and it is mostly used with singular verbs. So there is ambiguity.

EL WAS THE GOD OF ISRAEL

As suggestive by the “El” in the name “Israel,” the original god of Israel was El. There is no distinct cult identified with El except when identified as Yahweh. As the Bible tells us “Semite” comes from Shem, Noah’s oldest son (Gen. 5:32) and “Hebrew” is derived from Eber, a descendant of Shem (Gen. 10:21).

Most times, “El” and “Elohim” are used as a general term for god. But there are a few passages where “El” and “Elohim” are used as proper names.

El is presented separately from Yahweh. El Shadday means “El of the mountain,” not El Almighty as the revisionists translate in the Bible. Similar to El, Yahweh was thought to live on a mountaintop. It brings to mind, Moses’ visit to Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. Gods have sacred places and the early Semitic tribes were fond of Mountains, just as the Greeks were.

In Genesis Yahweh is cast as one of the sons of El, called elyon here. He has portioned the land allotted to Jacob. At first Yahweh co-existed with the Canaanite gods, but later competed as a warrior god. There is a kind of a parallel in several Bible stories where brothers become rivals and the namesakes of competing geographies. Gods also have territories. Land is equated to wealth.

(Deut. 32:8) - When the Most High [elyon] gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel.

(Deut. 32:9) - For the LORD’S [Yahweh] portion is his people, Jacob is the lot of his heritage.

The Bible rarely distinguishes between El and Yahweh. The development of El into a generic noun meaning “god” was compatible with the loss of El’s distinct character in Israelite religion.

WHAT IS THE POINT OF THIS EXAMINATION

Religions evolve over time, just like languages and cultural norms change over time. From the early beginnings of the oral tradition we get hints and glimmers of

pre-scripture and most of us are familiar with Greek Mythology that was the religion of the western world for many centuries until the Roman Empire was eventually supplanted by the Holy Roman Empire.

From the Hebrew religion we can see its roots evolve from the Canaanite Pantheon and become the foundation for the Jewish, Islamic and Christian faiths and how they continue to evolve on to today.

The point of closely examining any religion is to discern how its beliefs change over time and how



the culture affects the religion and how the priestly classes affect politics and daily life.

We can see empires rise and fall, their gods and goddesses rise and fall and morph into new gods, stories and beliefs. Myths from one culture are carried on into new forms and stories as time marches forward. The lineage of myth, religion and belief are central elements to any culture that makes it distinct from the other societies around it to give it tradition, ceremony and a path through life for its people.

MY GOAL FOR THE BOOK

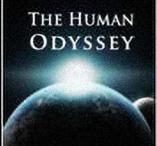
My goal of the introduction is not to destroy myth or ruin the foundations of anyone faith. Only to lead you to think critically about your religion and find the deeper meaning of your relationship to the cosmos, your fellow man and seek to keep exploring this path until the day that all secrets are revealed unto you.

Look with an objective stare at all sacred truths and filter them through the lense of your inner being to see the great miracles that lie around you and to not put your faith in the impermanent hopes and desires of the many who will tell you that they are the only holders of the one truth.

By examining each culture and subject in a single chapter we can learn about what the important themes of these cultures were, how they contributed to the mythos of the world and ultimately how their gods are reflected in the eyes of its people. None of us would be here today if early societies did not have a religious foundation, as it provides the rules and regulations for multiple groups of people to live together and survive.

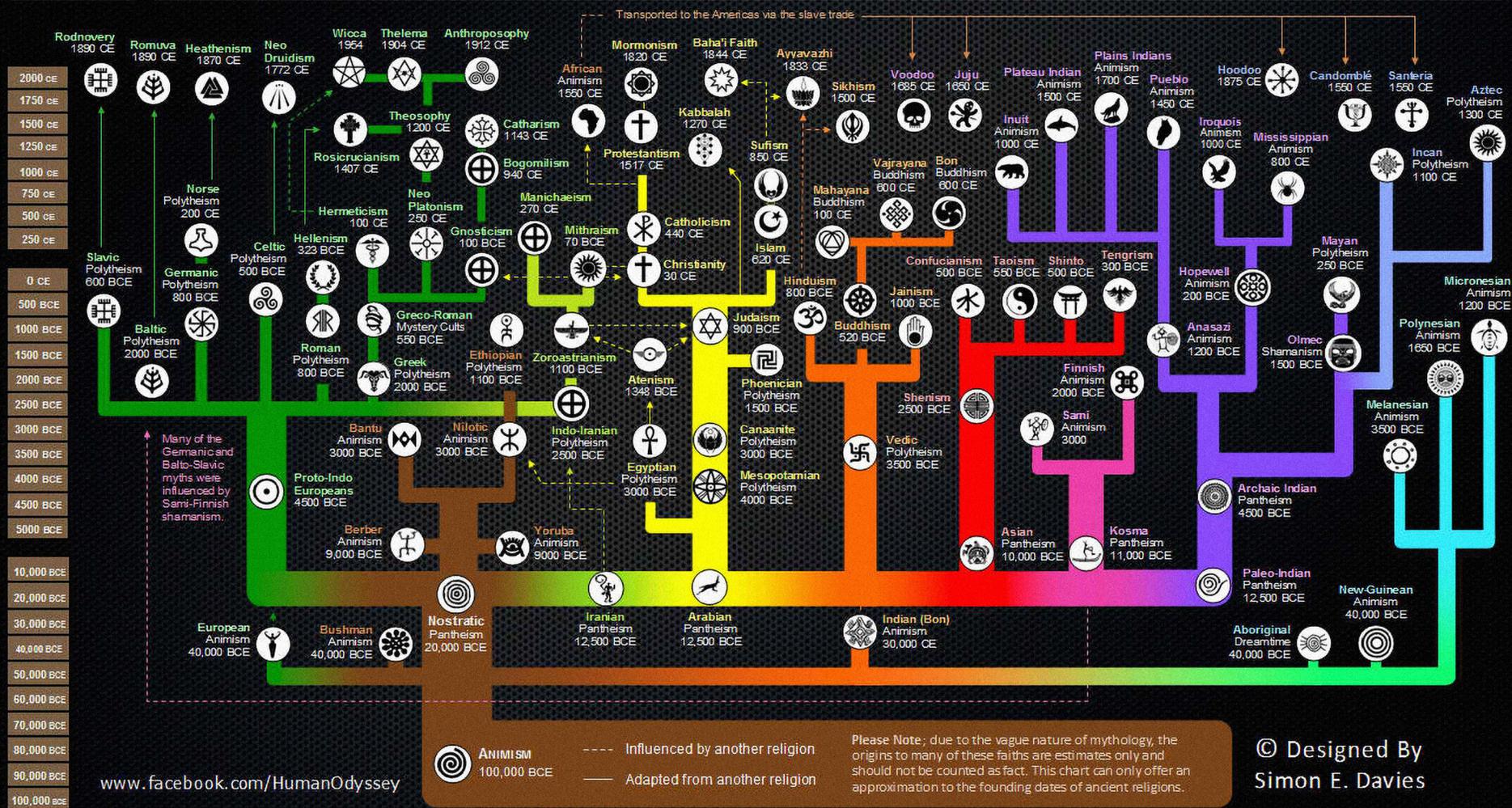
I hope that by exploring this book you will wonder at the vast differences of the gods, the power of mankind’s imagination and the great wealth of our history that is still being re-discovered and re-learned.

Note: Please examine the infographic on the following page.



THE EVOLUTIONARY TREE OF RELIGION (Faith, Myths & Mysticism) v1.1

- European
- African
- Iranian
- Arabic / Semitic
- Indian
- East Asian
- Arctic
- N. American
- S. American
- New Guinean / Australian
- Oceanic



This is one of the best infographics I have found to date that sums up the human historic record on religious practices and how they have evolved over time. Many of the chapters in the Book of Gods will be covering these religions and mythic stories on their world views. It illustrates a genealogy or family tree of all the worlds religious beliefs stretching back into the prehistoric. It is a great overview for the introduction to give you a place to get your head around how religion has developed through time, geographic location and culture. Kudos to Simon E. Davis for developing this along with the staff at Human Odyssey.