Is “God Forbid” A Mistranslation in the KJV?

The Old Testament Hebrew translated as “God forbid” is the negative interjection לָנֵא (Joshua 22:29). Commenting on this verse, Keil and Delitzsch note, “לָנֵא, far be it from us away from Him (לָנֵא יָרְאֵהוּ, 1 Samuel 24:7; 26:11; 1 Kings 21:3), to rebel against Jehovah, etc.” That is, the word is properly considered in texts such as Joshua 22:29 as a part of a syntactical construction that expresses the idea of “God/Jehovah forbid.” This view is supported by texts such as לָנֵא יָרְאֵהוּ (1 Samuel 24:6), לָנֵא יָרְאֵהוּ (1 Samuel 26:11), לָנֵא יָרְאֵהוּ (2 Samuel 23:17), לָנֵא יָרְאֵהוּ Job 34:10 (Job 34:10, KJV, “be it far from God”), and לָנֵא יָרְאֵהוּ (1 Chronicles 11:19, KJV “my God forbid it me”).

One notes that the LXX at times translates לָנֵא phrases with μὴ γένοιτο. The Greek phrase μὴ γένοιτο is consistently rendered in the New Testament of the KJV as “God forbid.” Concerning this, A. T. Robertson’s massive Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research notes: “In modern Greek Dr. Rouse finds people saying not μὴ γένοιτο, but ὁ θεὸς νὰ φυλάξῃ (Moulton, Prol., p. 249), though νὰ is not here necessary (Thumb, Handb., p. 127).” That is, the modern Greek version of μὴ γένοιτο is “God forbid.”

Thus, there are good reasons in both the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament for the translation “God forbid” as found in the King James Version of the Bible.

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2 Note in the Hebrew text the ל that consistently follows, the נ often present, etc.
4 Genesis 44:7, 17; Joshua 22:29; 24:16; 1 Kings 20:3— in each case the KJV reads “God forbid.”