

Elohim (God) is Plural in Genesis 1:1?

“In the beginning, Gods created the heavens and the earth?”

“In the beginning God [Elohim, plural] created [bara, singular] the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).
“Heb.: elohim, It should be carefully observed that is plural in form, yet when, as here, it is construed with a verb in the singular, it is naturally singular in sense; especially since the “plural of quality” or “excellence” abounds in Hebrew in cases where the reference is undeniably to something which must be understood in the singular number.” (Joseph Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible, footnote b.)
(http://www.teleiosministries.com/rotherham_bible/The-Emphasised-Bible-Black-Edition.pdf)

Example of a singular noun and a singular verb: I am proud.

Example of a plural noun and a plural verb: We are proud.

Example of a plural noun with a singular verb: We am proud. This is Genesis 1:1; plural noun, Elohim, with a singular verb, bara.

Blue letter Bible

Created, in Genesis 1:1, is the Hebrew word, ‘bara’ (1254) which is a Verb (Speech), Qal (Stem), Perfect (State), Third Person (Person), Masculine (Gender), Singular (Number).
(https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/gen/1/1/t_conc_1001)

Hebrew for the Rest of Us

“Honorific Plural. “The plural in Hebrew can be used to indicate majesty or some kind of intensive idea. Numerous examples exist, especially terms for God, but also terms for humans. For example, in Isaiah 1:3, “the trough of its master,” the word for “its master,” is a grammatical plural, “its masters,” but refers to one master...”

The common word for God in the OT is Elohim. It is clear that the ending on this noun is masculine plural. Many Christians from the second century onward have argued that the plural form proves the doctrine of the Trinity.

Number, however, is a grammatical quality. We must still interpret its function. When Elohim is used in passages referring to the one creator God, Jews and Christians are agreed that, since Scripture clearly teaches against polytheism, this is not a numeric plural. Nor is it an abstract. This is an example of an honorific plural, or the so-called, “plural of majesty.” This is even more clear when the verbs used with Elohim are verbs used with a singular subject. This conclusion rules out the possibility that the form Elohim teaches the Trinity simply because it is grammatically plural.

Arguments for the Trinity must be made on bases other than the fact that Elohim is a grammatical plural form. Responsible Bible students and teachers never take a shortcut by using inappropriate evidence to get to a desired conclusion, even if the conclusion is correct.” (Hebrew for the Rest of Us, Lee M. Fields, pg. 103 and 105) An example of confirmation bias, concerning Elohim being a Trinity, is presented below by Adam Clarke who died in 1832.

Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

(<http://www.teleiosministries.com/pdfs/Bible-Commentary-Adam-Clarke/OldCovenantVol1Genesis-Numbers.pdf>)

Deuteronomy 6:4. Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord. (Footnote) "These words may be variously rendered into English; but almost all possible verbal varieties in the translation (and there can be none other) amount to the same sense: " Israel, hear! Jehovah, our God, is one Jehovah ;" or, " Jehovah is our God, Jehovah is one ;" or, " Jehovah is our God, Jehovah alone ;" or, " Jehovah is our God, Jehovah who is one ;" or, " Jehovah, who is our God, is the one Being." On this verse the Jews lay great stress; it is one of the four passages which they write on their phylacteries, and they write the last letter in the first and last words very large, for the purpose of exciting attention to the weighty truth it contains. It is perhaps in reference to this custom of the Jews that our blessed Lord alludes, Matt. xxii. 38; Mark xii. 29, 30, where he says, this is the first and great commandment; and this is nearly the comment that Maimonides gives on this place: " Hear, O Israel; because in these words the property, the love, and the doctrine of God are contained."

Many think that Moses teaches in these words the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity. It may be so; but if so, it is not more clearly done than in the first verse of Genesis, to which the reader is referred. When this passage occurs in the Sabbath readings in the synagogue, the whole congregation repeat the last word [one] achad for several minutes together with the loudest vociferations : this I suppose they do to vent a little of their spleen against the Christians, for they suppose the latter hold three Gods, because of their doctrine of the Trinity; but all their skill and cunning can never prove that there is not a plurality expressed in the word Eloheinu, which is translated our God; and were the Christians, when reading this verse, to vociferate Eloheinu for several minutes the Jews do [one] achad, it would apply more forcibly in the way of conviction to the Jews of the plurality of persons in the Godhead, than the word [one] achad, of one, against any pretended false tenet of Christianity, as every Christian receives the doctrine of the unity of God in the most conscientious manner. It is because of their rejection of this doctrine that the wrath of God continues to rest on them; for the doctrine of the atonement cannot be received, unless the doctrine of the Godhead of Christ is received too. Some Christians have joined the Jews against this doctrine, and some have even outdone them, and have put themselves to extraordinary pains to prove that Elohim is a noun of the singular number! This has not yet been proved. It would be as easy to prove that there is no plural in language." (Adam Clarke Commentary on the Old Testament, 1843, Vol. 1, Deu. 6:4, pgs. 752-753)

Genesis 1:1. "The original word Elohim, God, is certainly the plural form of El, or Eloah, and has long been supposed, by the most eminently learned and pious men, to imply a plurality of Persons in the Divine nature. As this plurality appears in many parts of the sacred writings to be confined to three Persons, hence the doctrine of the Trinity, which has formed a part of the creed of all those who have been deemed sound in the faith, from the earliest ages of Christianity. Nor are the Christians singular in receiving this doctrine, and in deriving it from the first words of Divine revelation. An eminent Jewish rabbin, Simeon ben Joachi, in his comment on the sixth section of Leviticus, has these remarkable words: "Come and see the mystery of the word Elohim; there are three degrees, and each degree by itself alone, and yet not withstanding they are all one, and joined together in one, and are not divided from each other." See Ainsworth. He must be strangely prejudiced indeed who cannot see that the doctrine of a Trinity, and of a Trinity in unity, is expressed in the above words. The verb bara, he created, being joined in the singular number with this plural noun, has been considered as pointing out, and not obscurely, the unity of the Divine Persons in this work of creation. In the ever-blessed Trinity, from the infinite and indivisible unity of the persons, there can be but one will, one purpose, and one infinite and uncontrollable energy." (Adam Clarke Commentary on the Old Testament, 1843, Vol. 1, Genesis 1:1, pgs. 25-26)

Examples of Plural Hebrew Nouns that are Translates as Singular

Genesis 1:2. Face, panîm (6440), always plural but translated as singular; “Now, the earth, had become waste and wild, and, darkness, was on the face [panîm, faces] of the roaring deep...” “This particular word always occurs in the plural, perhaps indicative of the fact that the face is a combination of a number of features. As we shall see below, the face identifies the person and reflects the attitude and sentiments of the person. As such, *panîm* can be a substitute for the self or the feelings of the self.” (TWOT)

“Hebrew contains a feature which, to my knowledge, is unique among both Semitic and non-Semitic languages. That is, there is a small but significant class of nouns which are plural in form but singular in concept. The nature of this handful of Hebrew words is telling not only about the beauty of the language of holiness but also about the way we understand God.

There are four commonly cited examples of these grammatical phenomena:

mayim – ‘water’

shamayim – ‘sky, Heaven’

panim – ‘face’

hayyim – ‘life’

Notably, the English translations for each of these are firmly singular (water, sky, face, life), yet the Hebrew form possesses a plural ending (-im) and is treated as plural when put into agreement with an adjective (for example, ‘good life’ is hayyim tovim, both of which are plural). Why do we use plural words for these concepts which are singular? ‘Face’ is just a face, right? ‘Waters’ sounds more King James than King David. Why these things in particular? What connects them?” (<https://stateofformation.org/2015/05/but-not-in-number-one-and-many-in-hebrew-grammar/>)

Genesis 2:7. “So then Yahweh God formed man, *of the* dust of the ground, and breathed in his nostrils the breath of life [hayyim, lives (2416)]...” (Hebrew Noun: Common, Masculine Plural Absolute) (https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/gen/2/7/t_concf_2007)

When Elohim is Translated Plural, ‘Gods’

When Elohim is used in a sentence where the verb is also plural, then it is translated in its plural form, gods. For example: Ex 32:23 So they said to me — Make for us gods [elohim, plural], who shall go [yalak, plural] before us...

Nosism

The royal we, majestic plural (pluralis majestatis), or royal plural, is the use of a plural pronoun (or corresponding plural-inflected verb forms) used by a single person who is a monarch or holds a high office to refer to themselves. A more general term for the use of a we, us, or our to refer to oneself is nosism. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_we)

Conclusion

Trinitarians will not translate, Elohim, Gods as in Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning, Gods created the heavens and the earth,” but, nevertheless, they will always stated that Elohim is plural, meaning, the Trinity, as illustrated above, all the while knowing that plural of quality abounds in the Hebrew language.

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