

RESPONDING TO TRINITARIAN CLAIMS ABOUT GOD

DOES THE PLURAL HEBREW WORD *ELOHIM* MEAN THAT GOD IS THREE?

No! Biblical grammarians explain this word to be an intensive plural and having the meaning of ***the plural of majesty*** or ***the sum of God's displayed powers***.

FACTS IN THE LEXICONS ABOUT THE WORD "ELOHIM"

1. *Elohim* is singular in meaning when referring to the One God. This is shown by the **singular verbs** which normally follow and by thousands of singular pronouns.
2. *Elohim* has a plural meaning when it refers to pagan "gods;" but then plural verbs always accompany it.
3. *Elohim* has a singular meaning when it refers to a **single pagan god** e.g. Milchom, Dagon, Astarte, etc.
4. *Elohim*, *El* and *Eloah* are identical in meaning and **singular in meaning** when referring to the one true God. They are replaced by singular pronouns. This is also true of the personal name *Yahweh*.

This information can be inspected in the Hebrew text, in translations and in all the standard Hebrew lexicons (Brown, Driver and Briggs, Kohler Baumgartner, Jenni and Westermann, etc).

"ELOHIM" IS NOT A NUMERICAL PLURALITY

Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar (pp. 398-399) rejects a "numerical plurality of *elohim*" because it is "almost invariably joined with a singular attribute [verb]." Also the **NIV footnotes** for Genesis 1:1 state regarding the word *elohim* that:

It is plural but the verb is singular...This use of the plural expresses intensification rather than number.

Professor of OT **Gordon Wenham** states in the *Word Biblical Commentary*: "It is universally agreed that the plural *elohim* has nothing to do with the Trinity." And the **NET Bible footnotes** for Genesis 1:1 state that:

This frequently used Hebrew name for God (*elohim*) is a plural form. When it refers to the true God, the singular verb is normally used, as here. The plural form indicates majesty; the name stresses God's sovereignty and incomparability – he is "the God of gods."

*So the word *elohim* is plural in its intensity i.e. the plural of excellence, majesty and incomparability.*

DIFFERENT TERMS FOR THE SAME ONE PERSON

The **singular** words ***El*** and ***Eloah*** for God probably mean "Mighty One" or "Strong One."
➤ "For who is ***El*** but *Yahweh*? Who is a rock except our ***Elohim***?" (2 Sam. 22:32).

- “Before me no **El** was formed nor shall there be after me, I, I am *Yahweh*, and besides me there is no saviour” (Isa. 43:10, 11).
- “For I am **El** and there is no other” (Isa. 45:42).
- “For who is **Eloah** but *Yahweh*? And who is a rock except our **Elohim**?” (Ps. 18:31).
- “Tremble, O earth, at the presence of *Yahweh*, at the presence of **Eloah** of Jacob” (Ps. 114:7).
- “But *Yahweh* is the true **Elohim**, He is the living **Elohim** and an everlasting king....” (Jer. 10:10).

“ELOHIM” = THE SINGULAR WORD “THEOS” IN THE LXX AND THEREFORE IN THE NT

There are **4,400 occurrences** of the word **god** in the Scriptures. Elohim, when referring to the One God comes into the inspired Greek of the NT (some 1,317 times) as Theos (singular). This proves of course that the translations are all correct when they say “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Thousands of singular personal pronouns standing for Elohim, and His other names, can only affirm, massively, the fact that God is a single personal being.

ELOHIM IS NOT A COLLECTIVE NOUN

As has been shown that *elohim* is singular in meaning but this does not mean that it can be treated as if it were a collective noun. This is because the pronouns associated with *elohim* are always **personal** whereas if *elohim* (God) were a collective noun it would require **neuter** pronouns e.g. a herd is an ‘it’.

THE “WE/US” PASSAGES

For example: Genesis 1:26: “LET US MAKE MAN IN OUR IMAGE.” Also Genesis 3:22; 11:7 and Isaiah 6:8. The New International Bible Commentary notes that:

The rabbinic interpretation that God is speaking to the angels is more attractive for man’s creation affects them (Ps. 8:5; 1 C. 6:3), cf. Job 38:7. But there is no suggestion of angelic cooperation, p. 115.

The Notes to the NIV give the same understanding:

Us...our...God speaks as creator-king, announcing his crowning work to the members of his heavenly court (see 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8; see also 1 Kings 22:19, 23; Job 15:8; Jer. 23:18).

Each of these passages has a natural explanation found in 1 Kings 22:19, 23; Job 15:8 and Jeremiah 23:18.

TRINITARIAN REDEFINING OF THE HEBREW WORD *ECHAD* FOR **ONE**

The Hebrew word *echad* occurs 970 times in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is an adjective meaning “one single” i.e. a numerical absolute. Yet a few Trinitarians have tried to redefine it as meaning *one in unity – a compound one*. By so doing they attempt to restate **the shema** regarding the one God of Israel as allowing for the Trinity. However, this is false because all reputable lexicons show that *echad* is used in exactly the same way the English word *one* is

used. When used with a collective noun, that is, a noun containing the idea of plurality e.g. one herd of cattle, the *one* still means “one single” i.e. one single herd of cattle. Whatever number of cows constitute the herd is not relevant. Nowhere in Scripture is there any Hebrew or Greek word that refers to a One that encompasses three divine eternal persons.

By Raymond C. Faircloth
www.biblicaltruthseekers.co.uk

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