

Genesis 1:26

And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." (*KJV*)

1. *Elohim* and *Adonim*, Hebrew words for God, occur in the plural. If this literally meant a plurality of persons, it would be translated "Gods." But the Jews, being truly monotheistic and thoroughly familiar with the idioms of their own language, have never understood the use of the plural to indicate a plurality of persons within the one God. This use of the plural is for amplification, and is called a "plural of majesty" or a "plural of emphasis," and is used for intensification (see note on Gen. 1:1). Many Hebrew scholars identify this use of "us" as the use of the plural of majesty or plural of emphasis, and we believe this also.

2. The plural of majesty is clearly attested to in writing from royalty through the ages. Hyndman writes:

The true explanation of this verse is to be found in the practice which has prevailed in all nations with which we are acquainted, of persons speaking of themselves in the plural number. "Given at our palace," "It is our pleasure," are common expressions of kings in their proclamations (p. 54).

Morgridge adds:

It is common in all languages with which we are acquainted, and it appears to have always been so, for an individual, especially if he be a person of great dignity and power, in speaking of himself only, to say *we*, *our*, *us*, instead of *I*, *my*, *me*. Thus, the king of France says, "We, Charles the tenth." The king of Spain says, "We, Ferdinand the seventh." The Emperor of Russia says "We, Alexander," or "We, Nicholas" (p. 93).

The plural of majesty can be seen in Ezra 4:18. In Ezra 4:11, the men of the Trans-Euphrates wrote, "To King Artaxerxes, from your servants." The book of Ezra continues, "The king sent this reply: Greetings. The letter you sent us has been read and translated...." Thus, although the people wrote to the king himself, the king used the word "us." It is common in such correspondence that the plural is used when someone speaks of his *intentions*, and the use of the more literal singular is used when the person *acts*. Morgridge adds more insight when he says:

It is well known that Mohammed was a determined opposer of the doctrine of the Trinity: yet he often represents God as saying *we*, *our*, *us*, when speaking only of Himself. This shows that, in his opinion, the use of such terms was not indicative of a plurality of persons. If no one infers, from their frequent use in the Koran, that Mohammed was a Trinitarian, surely their occurrence in a few places in the Bible ought not to be made a proof of the doctrine of the Trinity (p. 94).

3. Some scholars believe that the reason for the "us" in Genesis 1:26 is that God could have been speaking with the angels when he created man in the beginning. Although that

is possible, because there are many Scriptures that clearly attribute the creation of man to God alone, we believe that the plural of emphasis is the preferred explanation.

4. The name of God is not the only word that is pluralized for emphasis (although when the plural does not seem to be good grammar, the translators usually ignore the Hebrew plural and translate it as a singular, so it can be hard to spot in most English versions).

After Cain murdered Abel, God said to Cain, “the voice of your brother’s *bloods* cries to me from the ground” (Gen. 4:10, “bloods” is the way the Hebrew text reads). The plural emphasizes the horror of the act. In Genesis 19:11, the men of Sodom who wanted to hurt Lot were smitten with “blindness.” The Hebrew is in the plural, “blindnesses,” and indicates that the blindness was total so Lot would be protected. Leviticus tells people not to eat fruit from a tree for three years, and in the fourth year the fruit is “an offering of praise to the Lord” (Lev. 19:24). The Hebrew word for “praise” is plural, emphasizing that there was to be *great* praise. Psalm 45:15 tells of people who are brought into the presence of the Messiah. It says, “They are led in with joy and gladness.” The Hebrew actually reads “gladnesses,” emphasizing the great gladness of the occasion. In Ezekiel 25, God is speaking of what has happened to Israel and what He will do about it. Concerning the Philistines, He said, “the Philistines acted in vengeance...I will carry out great vengeance on them” (Ezek. 25:15 and 17). In the Hebrew text, the second vengeance, the vengeance of God, is in the plural, indicating the complete vengeance that the Lord will inflict. Although many more examples exist in the Hebrew text, these demonstrate that it is not uncommon to use a plural to emphasize something in Scripture.

Buzzard, p. 13

Farley, pp. 25-27

Hyndman, pp. 53 and 54

Morgridge, pp. 92-96

Snedeker, pp. 363-366

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