

## Some Notes on the Word “Elohim”

This lesson contains a good bit of material from my website relating to my exchange with Zecharia Sitchin disciple Erik Parker (Sitchin’s webmaster). Erik knows zero about Hebrew as the discussion below will indicate, but at least he has entered the discussion, unlike his master. Since from this point on I plan to go over some of the controversial issues in Israelite religion that relate in some way to the council, I wanted to make sure people are on the same page. Next month I am tentatively planning to cover the “Yahweh’s wife” controversy since that has been alluded to in several book reviews.

For now, a few points to be made about the word *elohim*.

**1) “Elohim” does not mean “shining ones” or “luminous ones,”** per the speculation of MANY “alternative researchers” out there, like Laurence Gardner, William Henry, and Lloyd Pye.

I’m not sure where people get this idea, but will hazard a guess below (the best bet is they make it up to build on for some spurious agenda). *Elohim* (אלהים; consonants = <sup>ʾ</sup>lh<sup>m</sup>) is morphologically plural (it’s “shape” is plural; see the link on my website to “Sitchin’s disciple” for a more lengthy explanation). Its morphologically singular form is *Eloah* (אלה; consonants = <sup>ʾ</sup>l(w)h, but often spelled *ʾilh* for English speakers). The “w” (Hebrew *waw*) is in parentheses because it is a consonant used as a vowel marker. Without the vowel marker, the consonants would be <sup>ʾ</sup>lh. This spelling is consistent with Akkadian, Phoenician, and Canaanite (Ugaritic) spelling (see the article on “god” / “elohim” in DDD for references). The other common singular word for “god” is *El* (אל; consonants = <sup>ʾ</sup>l, but often spelled *ʾil* for English speakers).

I’m guessing that the reason some people think *elohim* means shining ones (other than deliberate misinformation) is that they are trying to pretend they know how to use semitic language tools. If they found a decent dictionary that let them know that *ʾlh* is the morphologically singular form of *elohim*, then they likely noted that Hebrew *El* / *ʾil* corresponds to Akkadian *ʾil*. That much is true. Some dictionaries note that the Akkadian word is at times spelled with two L’s (*ʾill*) depending on form and use. If one looked up *ʾill* IN AN ENGLISH-LETTER DICTIONARY OF AKKADIAN one would be misled (assuming one did not know any of the Akkadian cuneiform signs) into thinking that *ʾill* (and hence *El*) meant “shine” or “shining,” since *ʾill* means “shining.” The problem with saying *elohim* means “shining ones” is that the *ʾill* spelling for “shine” is made up of different cuneiform signs. The sign spelling for that word is not the same as for “god.” That’s my best guess as to the inaccuracy, giving these people the benefit of the doubt.

**2) Elohim and its morphological singular, Eloah, are masculine forms, not feminine.** I point this out because a (female) Sitchinite once tried in vain at a convention to tell me Eloah was feminine. My guess is she wanted the Hebrew Bible to have a goddess. She was flat wrong (not sure if Sitchin himself came up with this or not). But don't take my word for it. Eloah is used quite often in the book of Job for Israel's God, who is ALWAYS referred to with masculine pronouns, verbal endings, etc.:

I picked this verse because it has a nice example of a masculine possessive pronoun (HIS nostrils) to make the point Eloah is masculine (TNK = Tanak, the English translation of the Jewish Publication Society).

Job 4:9 מִנְשַׁמַּת אֱלֹהִים יֵאָבְדוּ וְיִמְרוּחַ אִפּוֹ יִכָּלְדוּ:

<sup>TNK</sup> Job 4:9 They perish by a blast from **God**, Are gone at the breath of **His nostrils**.

In point of fact, the Hebrew Bible doesn't even have a word for "goddess." There is no feminine form of El/Elohim in the Hebrew Bible. Hebrew actually uses "elohim" (since it's a generic word for god) for foreign goddesses (see I Kings 11:5, 33; II Kings 23:13, where the "goddess of the Sidonians" is referred to with the word elohim).

**3) As noted above, elohim is morphologically plural.** Morphology refers to the "shape" or construction of a word - its form. **As far as meaning, though, elohim can be either singular or plural depending on context.** As anyone who has taken a language can testify, meaning is determined by context, not by a list of glosses in a dictionary (which are only OPTIONS – the translator must look to context for accuracy).

**More specifically, the meaning of any occurrence of elohim must be discerned in three ways:**

- A. Grammatical indications elsewhere in the text that help to determine if a singular or plural meaning is meant.
- B. Grammatical rules in Hebrew that are true in the language as a whole.
- C. Historical / Logical context.

To illustrate, consider words in English such as:

**"deer", "sheep", "fish"** - the point is *you need other words to help you tell if one or more than one of these animals is meant*. Sometimes these other words are verbs that help you tell. Compare the two examples::

1) "The sheep is lost" - the word "is" is a singular verb (It goes with a singular subject; one wouldn't say, for example, "I are lost" - you would use a verb that goes with the singular subject ("I am lost").

2) "The sheep are lost" - the word "are" is a plural verb (again, another word next to our noun "sheep" tells us in this case that plural sheep are meant.

All of this is just basic grammar - and every language has grammar. Biblical Hebrew has its own ways of telling us if elohim means ONE person or many gods. It matches the noun elohim to singular or plural verbs, or with singular or plural pronouns (to use "sheep" again as an example: "Those sheep are white"). The word "those" is what's called a demonstrative pronoun - it automatically tells us that sheep in this sentence is meant to be understood as a **plural**.

In the Hebrew Bible, there are roughly 2500 cases where elohim is used as a singular noun denoting the God of Israel (that figure is arrived at on the basis of grammar and logical context). It isn't a guess. I'll include my familiar illustrations here that are on my website elsewhere:

### Genesis 1:1

בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: **Genesis 1:1**

<sup>KJV</sup> **Genesis 1:1** In the beginning **God created** the heaven and the earth.

In this case elohim is singular because the verb (in red) is 3<sup>rd</sup> masculine singular in its grammar.

### Genesis 1:26-27

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ  
וַיְרִדוּ בְרִגְתַּיִם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ  
וּבְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

<sup>TNK</sup> **Genesis 1:26** And **God said**, "**Let us** make man in **our** image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth."

Elohim (God) is singular because the verb (in red) is 3<sup>rd</sup> masculine singular. So why the plural pronouns “us” and “our”? You know I hold that those speak of the presence of the divine council here. How do I know elohim isn't the referent? Keep going with the next verse:

Gen 1:27 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

<sup>TNK</sup> **Genesis 1:27** And **God created** man in **His image**, in the image of God **He created** him; male and female **He created** them.

Three times we have a singular verb (create; in red; Hebrew bara'). In verse 26 when we read “let US make mankind in OUR image,” if GOD were speaking [as though referring to himself as a plurality or to a group of the elohim, as though that's what the word meant], we'd see PLURAL verbs here in v. 27, but we don't.

And now for a case where elohim should be translated as a plural due to the surrounding grammar: This is really an interesting case, too, for once Jacob says that God (singular EI) appeared to him, and also mentions angels appearing at the ladder vision (“Jacob's ladder”), but here elohim is plural. My view is that he saw the entire council at his vision: God, the elohim, and the angels. It puts Jacob in the line of the prophets (recall that prophets were commissioned by appearances in the council presence; Isa 6, Jer 23:18,22 among others). The passage is also interesting in that we have ha-elohim here for God (elohim plus the attached definite article [the word “the”]). See below for more on this form.

### Genesis 35:7

Gen 35:7 וַיִּבֶן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּקְרָא לְמָקוֹם אֵל בֵּית־אֵל כִּי שָׁם נִגְלוּ אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים בְּבָרְחוֹ מִפְּנֵי אָחִיו:

**Genesis 35:7** There he built an altar and named the site El-bethel, for it was there that **the gods had revealed** Himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

Here ha-elohim is plural in meaning because the verb (in red) is grammatically plural. It should be translated “the gods” because of the corresponding verb. Note Gen 35:1 in contrast:

<sup>TNK</sup> **Genesis 35:1** **God said** to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and remain there; and build an altar there to **the God** who **appeared** to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau."

Genesis 35:1 **וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים** אֶל־יַעֲקֹב קוּם עֲלֵה בֵּית־אֵל  
וּשְׁבִי־שָׁם וַעֲשֵׂה־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לְאֵל הַנִּרְאָה אֵלַיךְ בְּבָרְחָךְ מִפְּנֵי  
עֲשׂוֹ אֲחִיךָ:

The first “God” is elohim and is singular because the verb (in red) is singular. In the phrase “to the god who appeared,” the word God is singular and El, not elohim. The following verb (in red) is singular. So taking 35:1 and 35:7 in tandem, Jacob saw El, the god of Israel, and the gods appeared to him – the council. There’s a lot of coll stuff like this in the Hebrew text that’s missed.

**4) Finally, a note on ha-elohim. This form of elohim with attached article can also be either singular or plural;** it is not always plural. The above Gen 35:7 is an example where it is plural. Below is a clear singular reference.

Deuteronomy 4:35 **אֵתָּה הָרְאִיתָ לְרַעַת כִּי יְהוָה הוּא**  
הָאֱלֹהִים אֵין עֹד מִלְּבָדָיו:

<sup>TNK</sup> **Deuteronomy 4:35** It has been clearly demonstrated to you that the **LORD He** alone is **God**; there is none **beside Him**.

The highlighted word is Yahweh, the LORD, the God of Israel. This is followed by the clause, “for HE [3<sup>rd</sup> singular pronoun in blue] is **ha-elohim**.” That is, He is THE God (par excellence). There is none beside HIM [another singular pronoun]. Ha-elohim here is clearly singular according to the grammar.