Elohim: God or Gods?
by Nehemia Gordon

In the beginning, Elohim created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1

Elohim
masculine plural suffix: "-im"

**Hebrew Nouns**
Hebrew has 4 different forms for adjectives, based on whether the number (singular, plural) and gender (masculine, feminine)
For example, "dog": kelev (m sg), kalbah (f sg), kelavim (m pl), kelavot (f pl)

3 Characteristics of Numerical Plural in Hebrew
1) It receives a plural suffix;
2) It receives a plural verb;
3) It receives a plural adjective.

Singular: The big (sg) dog (he) guarded. shamar hakelev hagadol
Plural: The big (pl) dogs (they) guarded. shamru hakelavim hagedolim

**Hebrew Verbs**
Hebrew has 10 different forms for past tense and future tense verbs, depending on 1) person, 2) number, and 3) gender!
I, you (m sg), you (f sg), he, she, we, you (m pl), you (f pl), they (m), they (f)

**Hebrew Adjectives**
Hebrew has 4 different forms for adjectives, based on whether the noun is number (singular, plural) and gender (masculine, feminine)
For example, "big": gadol (m sg), gedolah (f sg), gedolim (m pl), gedolot (f pl)

Does Elohim have a plural verb and adjective?

**Verb**
Gen 1:1 bara Elohim "Elohim (he) created"
NOT bar'u Elohim "Elohim (they) created".
Elohim appears over 2000 times throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and in virtually every instance it has a singular verb.
Always "And Elohim (he) spoke to Moses"
Never "And Elohim (they) spoke to Moses"

**Adjective**
Ps 7:10 Elohim tzadik "righteous (sg) Elohim"
NOT Elohim tzadikim "righteous (pl) Elohim"

Numerical Plural: 1) plural suffix; 2) plural verb; plural adjective
Majestic Plural: 1) plural suffix; 2) singular verb; singular adjective

Numerical Plural = there is more than one of the noun
Majestic plural = the noun is "great, absolute, or majestic"

For example,
adon "master"
adonim "great master, lord"
"I will imprison the Egyptians in the hand of a harsh lord; and a fierce king shall rule over them" (Isa 19:4). 
adonim kasheh "a harsh (sg) lord (pl)"
NOT adonim kashim "a harsh (pl) lord (pl)"

ba' al "master"
ba‘alim "owner"

"the ox shall be stoned and the ba‘alim (he) will be put to death" (Ex 21:29)

**Elohim as numerical plural**

"Woe to us!  Who shall save us from the hand of these (eleh אֵלֶּה) great (ha’adirim הָאַדִּירִים) gods, these (eleh אֵלֶּה) gods are they (hem הֵם) that (they) smote (hamakim הַמַּכִּים) the Egyptians with every plague in the desert." (1 Samuel 4:8).

**Majestic Plural not referring to YHWH**

"Behold I have made you an Elohim to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet" (Exodus 7:1)

"And they bowed down to Ashtoret the Elohim of the Sidonians, to Kemosh the Elohim of Moab, and to Milkom the Elohim of the children of Amon." (1Ki 11:33)

**YHWH is ONE**

"YHWH is our Elohim, YHWH is one" (Dt 6:4)

"And YHWH will be king over the entire earth; at that time YHWH will be one and his name will be one" (Zech 14:9)

"I am YHWH and besides me there is no savior" (Isa 43:11)

"Is there an Elo‘ah (God) besides me?" (Isa 44:8)

"Who is an Elo‘ah (God) besides YHWH and who is a rock (=savior) besides our Elohim?" (Ps 18:32)

_Eloha_ = singular form of Elohim (47 times)

**3 Instances of "WE, US, OUR"**

1) "Let us make man in our image after our likeness that they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and the animals and over the whole earth and over all the creeping things that creep on the earth." (Gen 1:26)

"And (he) Elohim said" (Gen 1:26)
"And (he) Elohim created man in His image, in the image of Elohim He created him" (Gen 1:27)
NOT "And (they) Elohim created man in their image, in the image of Elohim they created them"
2) "Behold the man has become as one of us, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:22)
"And (he) YHWH Elohim said" (Gen 3:22)
NOT "And (they) YHWH Elohim said"
"And (he) YHWH Elohim sent him from the Garden of Eden" (Gen 3:23)

3) "Let us go down and let us mix up there their language" (Gen 11:7)
"And (he) YHWH said" (Gen 11:6)
"And (he) YHWH scattered them from there across the face of the entire earth" (Gen 11:8)

**Royal We in English**
1) "We are not amused" INSTEAD OF "I am not amused"
2) "by a speaker or writer, in order to secure an impersonal tone, or to avoid the obtrusive repetition of 'I'"
3) "modest we" in which "a person uses a plural form in order not to call attention to himself as an individual."
4) In some dialects of American English "we" is used in place of "I" as a colloquialism, without any connotation of formality or self-magnification. For example, "Give us a chance!" in certain dialects of American English has the meaning of "Give me a chance!".

**Royal We in Tanach**
1) "This dream and its interpretation we shall say in the king's presence " (Dan 2:36 [Aramaic])
2) "Why have we been considered as an animal, as stupid (pl) in your eyes" (Job 18:3)
3) "Shall we go to the highlands of Gilead for war or shall I hold back" (2Chr 18:5)
"Go up (singular) and God will deliver into the hand of the king" (2Chr 18:5). Despite
The Heavenly Council

"Lord YHWH does not do anything unless he has revealed His council (sod) to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7)

"Let not my soul come into their assembly (sod), let not my honor be united with their congregation" (Gen 49:6)

"Plans are foiled without council (sod), but they succeed through many advisors" (Prov 15:22)

English: a) council = 'assembly of advisors' b) counsel = 'advice'

"For who among them has stood in the council of YHWH and seen and heard his word? Who among them has listened to His word and heard?" (Jer 23:18)

"(21) I did not send those prophets... I did not speak to them yet they prophesied. (22) Now if they have stood in my council, let them announce my words to My people that they return from their evil way and the wickedness of their actions" (Jer 23:21-22).

"(9) And the Ancient One sat down, His garment like white snow, and the hair of His head like clean wool, His throne flames of fire and its wheels burning fire. (10) A river of fire flowed forth; a million attended Him and a hundred million stood before Him. The judgment began and the books were opened." (Dan 7:9-10)

"(19) And he said, therefore, listen to the word of YHWH. I saw YHWH sitting on His throne and the entire host of heaven standing on His right and His left. (20) And YHWH said, Who will tempt Ahab that he go up and fall in the highlands of Gilead. And one said, 'In this manner' and another said, 'In that manner.' (21) And a certain spirit went forth and stood before YHWH and said, 'I will tempt him'. And YHWH said to him, 'In what manner?' (22) And he said, 'I will go out and be a false spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And He said, 'You shall tempt and be successful. Go and make it so!'" (1Ki 22:19-22).

"Praise Him, all His angels! Praise Him, all His hosts!" (Ps 148:2)

"And it was a certain time, and the sons of God came to stand before YHWH" (Job 1:6; 2:1)

"son of God" = "holy one" = angel
"(1) You are sons of YHWH your God, you shall not cut yourselves nor place a baldness on your head for the dead. (2) Because you are a holy nation to YHWH your God, and YHWH has chosen you to be His chosen people out of all the nations on the face of the earth." (Dt 14:1-2).

"the appearance of the fourth one is like a son of God יְהוָה רֹאֵשׁ (Dan 3:25 [Aramaic]).

"Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Aved-Nego who sent His angel מַלְאָךְ and saved His servants who trusted in Him"(Dan 3:28 [Aramaic])

"May your wonder, O YHWH, be professed in heaven; even your faithfulness in the congregation of holy ones. For who in the heaven compares to YHWH, who is like YHWH among the sons of God? (8) God feared in the great council of holy ones, held in awe by all around Him." (Ps 89:6-8)

**The Divine "We"

"(1) In the year that king Uziyahu died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and elevated, and His train filling the sanctuary. (2) Burning-ones (seraphim) standing above him, six wings each one, with two it covers its face, and with two it legs, and with two it flies. (3) And one called to another and said, "Holy, holy, holy is YHWH of hosts, the entire earth is filled with his glory... (8) And I heard the voice of the Lord saying 'Who shall I send and who shall go for us?' and I said 'Here I am, send me!' And He said, 'Go and say to this people..."' (Isa 6:1-3,8-9)

"Lord YHWH does not do anything unless he has revealed His council סוֹד to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7)"(5) I am YHWH and there is no other; besides Me there are no gods; I have girded you [i.e. protected you] even though you did not know Me. (6) So that they will know from the rising of the sun to the setting that there is none besides Me; I am YHWH and there is no other. (7) The one who forms light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates evil, I YHWH do all these things." (Isa 45:5-7).