Genesis 1:1 – 2:3

^{1:1} In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. ³ Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. ⁶ Then God said, 'Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' ⁷ God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. ⁸ God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day. ⁹ Then God said, 'Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear'; and it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters He called seas; and God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them'; and it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good. ¹³ There was evening and there was morning, a third day. ¹⁴ Then God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; ¹⁵ and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth'; and it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also. ¹⁷ God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ and to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ There was evening and there was morning, a fourth day. ²⁰ Then God said, 'Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens.' ²¹ God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.' ²³ There was evening and there was morning, a fifth day. ²⁴ Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind'; and it was so. ²⁵ God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good. ²⁶ Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' ²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸ God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.' ²⁹ Then God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; ³⁰ and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food'; and it was so. ³¹ God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. ^{2:1} Thus the heavens and the

earth were completed, and all their hosts. ² By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. ³ Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Historical and Cultural Background
- *Genesis vs. Other Ancient Near Eastern Creation Stories*:[1]
  - In the Babylonian *Atrahasis*, the earth arises out of a battle between the god Marduk and the chaos-dragon Tiamat; humans are created to be slaves for the gods to produce their food and feed the temples.
  - In the Egyptian creation myths, there is one supreme god who creates by speaking, makes lesser beings who are personifications of the forces of nature
  - Victory building: In many stories, when a god or hero achieved a victory over one's enemies, he built a temple or palace, and then put his image into it.
  - Image: In the Ancient Near East, a ruler would have his image carved in stone or wood and placed in the lands where he ruled
- *God's Name*: The name for God is 'Elohim,' which is, strangely, a plural form that is grammatically treated as a singular being. The supreme Canaanite deity was named 'El.'
- *Day, Evening, Morning*: The Hebrew word *yom* ('day') can refer to a long amount of time, as in the first verse of the very next section, which collapses all seven 'days' into one: 'In the *day* that the LORD God made earth and heaven' (Gen.2:4). Today, we refer to the 'day of the horse and carriage' as not just a 24 hour period, and 'the dawning of a new day' as not just a literal sunrise.
- *Light before the Sun?*: How could light be created on day 1 before the sun on day 4? Hebrew did not have a past perfect verb tense. So it probably means that God 'had created' the sun on 'day 1' and only did the debris and vapors of the earth settle down sufficiently so that the sun, moon, and stars were sufficiently visible that they could 'rule' the day and night on 'day 4.' Notice that the perspective of this literature is from the earth, not the universe.
- *Rest*: The word refers to a ruler reposing on a throne

---

[1] See the excellent article by Watts, Rikk. "Making Sense of Genesis 1." Stimulus Journal. Volume 12. Number 4. November 2004. Watts, p.8, notes, 'If we ask how ancient peoples might have conceptualised their world, the answer seems to be as a palace temple, such that creation becomes an act of palace-temple building.'

Questions
1. Are these literal 24 hour days? Probably not.
   a. 'Day' here can refer to a long amount of time, as in the first verse of the very next section: 'In the *day* that the LORD God made earth and heaven.' (Gen.2:4) Today, we refer to the 'day of the horse and carriage' as not just a 24 hour period. The Hebrew word 'yom' could serve in the same way.
   b. 'Evening and morning' can refer to the thresholds of a long period of time, not just the sun's setting and rising in the earth's sky.
2. Why do you think God didn't just create everything instantly?
   a. God doesn't seem bothered by taking things in stages
   b. He is not 'efficient' in the sense of that being His highest value.
   c. There is something to be learned about the way He made everything.
3. What patterns do you notice here?
   a. God speaks, then acts. This is an important idea we'll study in depth next time.
   b. God has no rival. He has no enemy. There is no resistance to Him.
   c. The earth and human life do not come from violence, as in other creation stories, but from rational speech and intelligence.
   d. God made the physical world from a certain point in time. This is different from Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as ancient Greek thought, which postulate an eternal world.
   e. God divided the waters in Gen.1:6 like He divided the waters of the Red Sea for Israel in Ex.14. This is poetic but reasonable language for what seems like a separation between water vapors and oceans with atmosphere in between. It seems like there was a lot of water vapor and debris in the atmosphere before.
   f. God sees things and calls them good. The physical world is good. This is different than in ancient Greek views where the physical world is bad, and the soul wants to escape.
   g. God seems happy with what He has made.
   h. God loves to bring order out of chaos
   i. God seems to make a habitation for living things.
   j. God makes living things and empowers them to produce more life after their own kind.
   k. God makes realms on days 1 – 3 and inhabitants/rulers for those realms on days 4 – 6
      i. Light and darkness (day 1) are governed by day and night, sun, moon, and stars (day 4)
      ii. Sky and sea (day 2) are filled by birds and sea creatures (day 5)
      iii. Land (day 3) is filled and governed by animals and humans (day 6)
      iv. God governs all things (day 7)
      v. This is called the Framework Hypothesis, by Meredith Kline
      vi. Illus: moving into the house, preparing it for our children and our family life together
4. Who is God? What does this mean for how you might get to know this God? Genesis challenges:
   a. Hedonism: God clearly has a purpose for life on earth and for us
   b. Hinduism and Buddhism: God is committed to the physical world, doesn't withdraw from it
   c. Pantheism: God is not part of the physical universe, so science won't detect Him
   d. Dualism: God is 100% good; He did not make evil; evil is a perversion of the good, not an equal power, as we'll see later. So you won't discern this God properly by tracing human history because the record of good and evil would make you conclude that God is both good and evil. But He did not begin the world that way.
   e. So the only way to really get to know this God is by listening for His voice. The Scriptures claim to be the breathed-out word of God, and to be a witness of a God who continues speaking.
5. What is the world? The temple of God, which is meant to be filled with His glory, goodness, and life.
   a. The Ancient Near East comparison points show this. In other creation stories, a god or hero defeats an enemy, then builds a palace or temple on that site, and puts his own image in that temple so people would know whose spot this is.
   b. Later on, as the biblical story unfolds, the creation serves as a pattern for the tabernacle and the temple.
      i. The tabernacle was built using materials that were found in Eden (Gen.2).
      ii. The tabernacle was built by an Israelite craftsman named Bezalel with similar craftsmanship that God had when creating in seven days.

1. 'I have filled him with the Spirit of God in *wisdom*, in *understanding*, in *knowledge*, and in all kinds of craftsmanship' (Ex.31:3)
2. 'The LORD by *wisdom* founded the earth, by *understanding* He established the heavens. By His *knowledge* the deeps were broken up and the skies drip with dew.' (Pr.3:19 – 20)

iii. God rested on the seventh day, within His movement to fill the creation, and God rested in the sanctuary (tabernacle, then temple), within His movement to fill the sanctuary and then the earth with His glory. Many Jewish commentators, ancient and modern, connect Sabbath and Sanctuary.[2]

iv. Later, the temple was built in seven years by King Solomon (1 Kings 7:51). The Jewish midrash *Pesikta Rabbati* 6 points out that the parallel between creation in seven days and temple in seven years indicates both parallelism and sequence. They are parallel in that both are temples. They are sequential in that Solomon's temple as God's 'resting place' on earth, as interpreted by Jewish commentators, as the fulfillment of creation's purpose from Genesis 1:

> 'All the work was completed' indicates why he was named Solomon (*Shelomoh*), for God completed (*hishlim*) the work of the six days of creation through him.'[3]

6. Who are we?
   a. Unique image-bearers of God, not slaves that have to produce food for God. God made us to be living image-bearers, in a living temple-palace! Only ones created in his image (1:26 – 28). The idea of images and idols in the Ancient Near East. A suzerain would have his image carved and left in the place of his vassal to say that he rules in this place. His image doesn't merely mean that we look like him. In terms of the Covenant, we become his representatives on the earth, to rule in His name.
   b. Co-creators of life through our physical bodies, in the marriage of male and female
   c. We are meant to fill the earth; being like God means bearing more life like God made human life
   d. Co-rulers of the earth under God
   e. We are the only thing in all creation called "very good." (1:31). God placed humanity in a special place, at the top of the creation order
   f. We are priests in His temple, residents of His palace. People are the focal point of all creation. In the Ancient Near Eastern religions, deities created people for slave labor, to meet their needs. But God created us for relationships and intimacy. This passage has items that are specific to marriage, but has other applications that can be extended to all relationships.
   g. God is a relational person. (1:26). "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness." God is in community with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We are made in His likeness, with His communal aspects.
   h. In particular, marriage of male and female, bears the image of God. The only way for us to bring forth life, like God, is through *heterosexual* marriage. The only way for us to demonstrate God's community within Himself is through *monogamous, binding* marriage.
   i. Verbal, as we will see in Genesis 2
   j. This does not mean that God wanted only human beings as inhabitants of the world. We are not the sole purpose of God's creation. We are stewards of it, and that includes all other forms of life.

7. What does this mean for human dignity?
   a. Notice that Genesis 1:27 is a poem.

> God created man
> in His own image,
> in the image of God

---

[2] See Berman, Joshua. *The Temple: Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995. Chapters 1 and 2. See especially the bibliographic references in footnote 15 from chapter 1, on page 211.

[3] Quoted by Berman, Joshua. 15. Berman also names the midrash *Pesikta De-Rav Kahana* (Buber ed.), 5b – 6a in footnote 16 from chapter 1, on page 212.

He created him;
        male and female
He created them.

OR, possibly, if we work not just with semantics but with concepts already evident:

God created man	God created humanity
in His own image,	a life-giving union of Spirit and Word
in the image of God	divine 'God' is a plurality of persons
He created him	human 'him' is a plurality of persons
male and female	a life-giving union of male and female
He created them.	God created humanity

    b. Paul might have had this in mind when he writes in Ephesians, 'We are His poema' (Eph.2:10), God's workmanship.

    c. Application: Each one of our lives is a unique poem. Your dignity is that you are a poetic masterpiece being written by God and you.

    d. Illus: working at Intel, a woman who said she was having trouble with the coffee cup holder on her computer

    e. Illus: *Go the Distance*, in Disney's Hercules movie, seems to me to speak to a longing in our hearts that we were made for something more, someplace more, someone more

I have often dreamed	Down an unknown road	But to look beyond the glory is the hardest part
Of a far off place	To embrace my fate	For a hero's strength is measured by his heart
Where a hero's welcome	Though that road may wander	
Would be waiting for me	It will lead me to you	Like a shooting star
Where the crowds will cheer	And a thousand years	I will go the distance
When they see my face	Would be worth the wait	I will search the world
And a voice keeps saying	It might take a lifetime	I will face its harms
This is where I'm meant to be	But somehow I'll see it through	I don't care how far
		I can go the distance
I'll be there someday	And I won't look back	Till I find my hero's welcome
I can go the distance	I can go the distance	Waiting in your arms...
I will find my way	And I'll stay on track	
If I can be strong	No I won't accept defeat	
I know every mile	It's an uphill slope	I will search the world
Will be worth my while	But I won't lose hope	I will face its harms
When I go the distance	Till I go the distance	Till I find my hero's welcome
I'll be right where I belong	And my journey is complete	Waiting in your arms

    8. Who is God? What is He like?

        a. How else could He have introduced Himself? In the beginning, God commanded… God demanded worship… God was supreme thought… But no, it is God created. God is about life. When God argues later in Scripture of why He is worthy of devotion, it is because He is Creator, He is life, and He is on the side of life.

        b. This is the beginning of God's self-revelation to humanity.

        c. He is the one who brings order out of chaos, light out of darkness, and life out of Himself. There is a lot of application here for counseling for your brokenness, discernment for your future, hope for your life. God can take all of that.

        d. He is the one who hovers over and present over creation. God is never elsewhere and otherwise engaged. He is always present.

        e. He is the one who creates by speaking, ten times. Is God's word trustworthy? Yes. He gives us a symphony on why we can trust Him in His word.

    1. [1:3] Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light.

2. ^{1:6} Then God said, 'Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.'
3. ^{1:9} Then God said, 'Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear'; and it was so.
4. ^{1:11} Then God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them'; and it was so.
5. ^{1:14} Then God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; ¹⁵ and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth'; and it was so.
6. ^{1:20} Then God said, 'Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens.'
7. ^{1:22} God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.'
8. ^{1:24} Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind'; and it was so.
9. ^{1:26} Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' ²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.
10. ^{1:28} God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'

Notice how future biblical writers pattern their material after the ten declarations in Genesis 1:1 – 2:3.

	Genesis 1:1 – 2:3	Genesis 5:1 – 6:8	Genesis 11:10 – 30	Genesis 2:4 – 50:26	Exodus 7 – 11	Exodus 19 – 20	Matthew 8 – 9
Ten acts leading up to a new work of God	Ten declarations of Creation; God forms all life	Ten generations from Adam to Noah, new creation	Ten generations from Shem to Abram, new humanity	Ten genealogies of Israel; God forms the nation Israel	Ten plagues; God un-creates Egypt to free Israel	Ten commands; God makes the Sinai covenant, forms new nation	Ten word miracles; Jesus heals people and makes a new humanity

f. He sets the stage for the stars of the show: us and Him! He stops deliberate action in order to deliberate…about us. He blesses us. He endows us with power to do what He will command later. The first thing God does is BLESS. It's like Jesus pronouncing blessing in Mt.5. And Paul reminds us that God first blesses us in Christ in Eph.1:3.

g. God is a plurality of persons? See below. Not based on just the grammar here.

h. God exists in the eternal seventh day, where and when God reigns. It is His rest, meaning His reign for Him and us resting and reigning with Him. We enter into His completed work. From this point on, to be under God's reign means rest for us. God's presence and reign depicted in Ex.24:16 connects to Israel's rest in Ex.33:14. Jesus' presence and reign connects to our rest in Mt.11:28 – 30.

Appendix A: Is God a Plurality of Persons?

Copy-pasted from a discussion in a Facebook group called *Learning Hebrew*.
https://www.facebook.com/groups/iLearnHebrea/posts/7109256715768696

One member asked, "Is Elohim plural?"

Another member replied:

You can have plural singular (אֲדוֹנִים) and singular plural (צפרדע). The name Elohim is unique to Hebraic thinking: it occurs only in Hebrew and in no other ancient Semitic language. The masculine plural ending does not mean "gods" when referring to the true God of Israel, since the name is mainly used with singular verb forms and with adjectives and pronouns in the singular (e.g., see Gen. 1:26). However, considering the infinite and onmipresent all in all across all time and space He was, He is, and He will be, the form indeed allows for the plurality within the oneness of God and I am sorry if you do not understand this. I am a Jew and speak Hebrew and understand this because this is how we are taught Hebrew especially when it comes to biblical Hebrew.

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

In the Jewish Scriptures (i.e., the "Old Testament"), the usual Hebrew word for "God" is elohim (אֱלֹהִים). On its own, elohim is a plural form noun. This has misled many to think that it somehow indicates a plurality in God.

The Plural of Excellence
In Biblical Hebrew, the plural usually denotes plurality of number, i.e., multiple instances of that noun. Since elohim is plural in form, it is used in many contexts to refer to multiple "gods". Consider the uses of elohim in the following passages:

Exodus 20:3 There shall not be to you other gods [elohim] before me.

Psalm 82:6 ESV I said, "You are gods [elohim], sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince."

However, in Hebrew, the plural does not always denote plurality of number. Sometimes, the plural form of a noun could be the plural of excellence without any notion of numerical plurality.

This happens for other Hebrew nouns as well. For example, the Hebrew word adon (אָדוֹן) means "lord; master". Its plural form is adonim (אֲדוֹנִים). Because adonim is plural in form, it often refers to multiple "lords" or "masters". However, it is also used in the Jewish Scriptures to refer to singular persons. For example,

Abraham is referred to as the "lord; master" of the servant, using the plural noun adonim (Genesis 24:9, 10, 51).
Potiphar is referred to as the "lord; master" of Joseph, using the plural noun adonim (Genesis 39:2, 3, 7, 8, 16, 19, 20).
The "lord; master" of a concubine is referred to by the plural noun adonim (Judges 19:26, 27).
David called Saul the "lord; master" of the men of Jabesh-gilead (2 Sam. 2:5, 7), using the plural noun adonim.
Nathan called David "our lord; master", using the plural noun adonim (1 Kings 1:11).
Does the plural form noun adonim indicate plurality in any of these persons? Of course not. Rather, these plurals are used to indicate excellence.

Elohim as a Singular "God"
Through the plural of excellence, elohim became the normal Hebrew word for even a singular "god". Throughout the Jewish Scriptures, elohim is used for singular entities without any notion of plurality. Consider the following use of elohim:

1 Samuel 28:12–14 ESV When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul." 13 The king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What do you see?"

And the woman said to Saul, "I see a god [elohim] coming up out of the earth." 14 He said to her, "What is his appearance?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped in a robe." And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and paid homage.

When the woman saw Samuel, she reported that she was seeing an elohim. Does this indicate that Samuel had a plurality within himself? Of course not. Rather, in this passage, elohim means "spiritual being", and refers to the singular entity, Samuel.

Singular or Plural?
Since elohim could be either singular or plural in number, how can we determine which is meant in a given passage? In most cases, the grammar of the text can help. Consider the use of elohim in Genesis 1:1.

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning, God [elohim] created the heavens and the earth.

The Hebrew verb for "created" here is in a form which implies a singular agent. In other words, the noun performing the action of the verb "created" here—namely, elohim—is a singular entity. Therefore, elohim here must be a singular entity, and so it would not be correct to translate this verse as, "In the beginning, gods created the heavens and the earth."

Conclusion
Elohim is the normal Hebrew word for "god", and was used to refer not only to the one true God, but also to individual "gods" and other individual gods-by-extension like spiritual beings.

Addendum: In English, there are words that are the same in both the singular and plural forms: deer, fish, moose, fruit, pants, glasses, water, etc.