In the Beginning
God Created the Heavens and the Earth
1: 1

DIG: Why is there no room for evolution in this verse? Which came first? Matter or God? What Hebrew word is used for **God** throughout the first chapter? Because **Elohim** is a plural noun, what conclusion can we come to? What theologies does **1:1** refute? Why is the verse so important?

REFLECT: How significant is it to you that you were created rather than merely being the result of some cosmic accident? How does being created change the purpose for your life? How special does it make you feel to know that **God** had you specifically in mind before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4)?

Parashah 1: B'resheet (In the Beginning) 1:1-6:8
(see my commentary on Deuteronomy **Af** – Parashah)

This is the foundational verse of the Bible. If **Genesis** is the foundational book, and **Chapter 1** is the foundational **chapter**, then **verse 1** is the foundational **verse**. It is the foundation of all foundations and thus it is the most important verse in the Scriptures. If you really believe **Genesis 1:1**, then you will not find it difficult to believe anything else recorded in the Bible. That is, if **God** really **created** all things, then **He** controls all things and can do all things.[5]

On February 5, 1971, Apollo 14 commander Edgar Mitchell placed on the moon a microfilm packet containing a complete Bible and one **verse** of the Bible written out in sixteen different languages: **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.** This is a summary statement that introduces the Bible and will be explained in more detail from **1:2** to **2:3.** But it is vitally important that if we are to ever fully understand anything in the Bible, or in the world in general, that we must first understand this verse. Therefore, let us consider each word in this foundational verse.

In the beginning: This is one Hebrew word *bereshith.* The Gospel of **John** starts with the same words: **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning (John 1:1-2). Elohim** made everything but Himself. **He** has always existed. Moses understood this when he wrote: **Before the mountains were born or You brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God (Psalm 90:2).** Some modern translators, trying to find a way to

accommodate both evolution and creation and account for billions of years in the creation story, have suggested a weaker translation of *bereshith* to mean, "In the beginning when **God** created," "In the beginning of **God's** creating," or "When **God** began to create."[6] Although Hebrew scholars recognize that this is a grammatically permissible translation, the context does not allow it. The purpose is clearly to tell about **the beginning** of all things, whereas this kind of faulty translation only raises more questions than it answers.

One could hardly think of a better way to begin the Bible than with these moving words, where **Elohim** teaches us that **He** is **the Creator** of all that exists and **He** brought the world into existence a long time ago. No one knows exactly when **the beginning** was. But the TANAKH is far more interested in the *fact* of creation than the *time* of creation.[7]

God: The first mention here of the divine name is the Hebrew **Elohim**, the name of **God** that stresses the idea of *omnipotence and sovereignty*. **He** is the **God** of creation and destruction. This is clearly indicated by the fact that from **1:1** to **2:4** the word **Elohim** is used 35 times alone.[8] **He** has no **beginning** because **He** is **the beginning**. **He** existed before all things. This fact is brought to light only in the Bible. All other religions and philosophies begin, not with **God**, but with preexisting matter or energy in some form. But for believers, the Bible starts with **God** and *then* matter is brought into existence. **Elohim** is the name used throughout the first chapter of **Genesis**.[9]

The word **Elohim** in its Hebrew form is a plural noun. The **-im** ending makes it a masculine plural. Because it is a plural noun, it opens the door to plurality in **the Godhead**. **But this was something the rabbis did not like to deal with because they did not believe in the Trinity.** The word does not *prove* **the Trinity**, but it opens the door. **Elohim** used progressive revelation to reveal **Himself** and **the Trinity** in the Bible. The door is opened in **Genesis** to the possibility of a triune **God**, in **Isaiah 48:16** we have the clearest example of **the Trinity** in the TANAKH, and by the time we get to the Renewed Covenant, the doctrine of progressive revelation is clearly established. The Scriptures teach that **God** is one **(Deuteronomy 6:4; First Corinthians 8:4)**. At the same time the Bible just as clearly teaches that one **God** exists in three **Persons** and is, therefore, also a **Trinity (Matthew 28:19; Second Corinthians 12:14).** And it would seem that all three **Persons** were active in creation from the beginning: **God the Father (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1-2), God the Son**, or **the Word (John 1:3** and **10),** and **the Ruach HaKodesh (Genesis 1:2).**

Based on what **God** is able to do in **1:1**, it tells us two things about **Him**. First, **Elohim** is self-sufficient. There is no need for anyone else or anything else. **He** did not create mankind because **He** needed fellowship because fellowship already existed from all eternity past within **the Godhead**. Secondly, **God** is eternal and unchangeable. The Bible makes no attempt to prove that **God** exists. This opening verse of **Genesis** simply takes this fact for granted, as though it were so obvious that only a fool would say **there is no God (Psalm 14:1).**[10]

Created: The Hebrew verb for create, *bara,* always has **God** as its subject. Only **God** can create, only **Elohim** can call into existence that which did not exist. It is never used of human activity. We can "make" things or "form" things, but we can never *create* things. **The universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible (Hebrews 11:3).** *Bara* is used very sparingly in this chapter. We are told that **God created the heavens and the earth (1:1), the great creatures of the sea (1:21),** and **man (1:27).** So that special verb is reserved for the most crucial items in **Elohim's** program of creation. It is not used indiscriminately.[11]

Bara is used five different ways throughout Scripture. First, *of the universe and its contents* **(Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 40:26** and **28, Isaiah 42:5** and **Psalm 89:12).** Secondly, *of the cosmic forces of nature* **(Isaiah 45:7; Amos 4:13).** Thirdly, *of the creation of living creatures* **(Genesis 1:21** and **27** (three times); **Genesis 5:1-2** (three times); **Genesis 6:7; Deuteronomy 4:32; Psalm 89:47; Isaiah 45:12);** *of Isra'el and the believing remnant* **(Ecclesiastes 12:1; Isaiah 43:1** and **7);** *of the transformation and the renewal of things* **(Numbers 16:30; Psalm 51:10; Isaiah 41:20, 45:8, 57:19, 65:17-18; Jeremiah 31:22).** Therefore, when you see the word *bara,* or **created**, it means that **God created** these, *creatio ex nihilo, from nothing* and **He** did it effortlessly.

Consequently, what we have in the first three Hebrew words of the Bible, *bereshith bara Elohim:* **In the beginning God created,** is the foundation of all theology. **God** is seen as self-sufficient and knowable only where **He** chooses to reveal **Himself**. And through the pages of the Bible **He** chose to reveal **Himself** to us and to send **His Son** to buy us back.

The Heavens: This word is the Hebrew *shamayim* that, like **Elohim**, is a plural noun and can be translated either *heaven* or *heavens,* depending on the context or whether it is associated with a singular or plural verb. It does not mean the *stars of* heaven, which were made only on the fourth day of the creation week **(1:16)**. The more common meaning today would be the word *space,* like when we speak of the universe in space and time. There is no other Hebrew word used in this sense in the Scriptures, but the use of *heaven* is widely used with such a concept.

The Earth: The Hebrew had no word for *universe,* so Moses used **the heavens and the earth** instead. It is a biblical way of saying **all things (Isaiah 44:24; Jer 10:16; John 1:3)** since everything that exists is either on **the earth** or in **the heavens**. The Hebrew word for **earth** is *erets* and is often translated **ground** or **land.** Somewhat like the use of the word *heaven*, it can mean either a particular part of **the earth**, like **the land of Canaan** in **12:5,** or it can be translated to mean **the earth** in general, as **let the land produce vegetation** as in **1:11.** This **earth** would become the center of **God's** program: **What is man that You are mindful of Him, the son of man that You care for Him (Psalm 8)?**

1:1 refutes nine different human theologies. (1) **It refutes atheism** (which teaches that there is no **God**) because it assumes the existence of a personal **God**. The universe is not the result of a "Big Bang" but was created by **Elohim**. (2) **It refutes agnosticism** (which teaches that one cannot know if there is, or is not, **God**) because **God** has revealed **Himself** in what **He** has done. (3) **It refutes pantheism** (which teaches the worship of all gods) because **God** is above that which **He** creates. (4) **It refutes polytheism** (which teaches that there are many gods) because only one **God** created all things. (5) **It refutes materialism** (which teaches that physical matter is the only reality) because there is a clear distinction between **God** and **His** material universe. This verse clearly teaches that matter had a beginning and that **Elohim** created it. (6) **It refutes naturalism** (which teaches that all truth comes from "mother nature") because nature itself had a beginning and was created by **God**. (7) **It refutes dualism** (which teaches that the world is ruled by antagonistic forces of good and evil) because **God** was alone when **He** created the world. (8) **It refutes humanism** (which teaches that man is the ultimate reality) because **Elohim**, not man, is the ultimate reality. And (9) **it refutes evolution** (which teaches that after billions of years man evolved from cells, then fish, then animals) because **God** is the instantaneous **Creator** of all things.

The rabbis debated many things that seem absolutely ridiculous and unnecessary. Here is one example. One of those debates was why the first word of the book of Genesis doesn't begin with the first Hebrew letter *Aleph,* **but the second Hebrew letter** *Beth.* **They reasoned that God began with the letter** *Beth,* **because just as it is closed on three sides and open on the fourth, so Elohim enclosed the world on three sides, with the north side remaining open. Furthermore,** *Beth* **stands for the Hebrew word for blessing, while** *Aleph* **stands for the Hebrew word for cursing. God did not want to begin His Torah with a curse, so He began it with a blessing. But** *Aleph* **complained that the Torah should begin with the first letter. God then appeased** *Aleph* **by promising to begin the Ten Commandments with an** *Aleph.* **Therefore, in the first phrase: I am ADONAI your God (Exodus 20:2), the Hebrew word I begins with an** *Aleph.* **This is an example of how fanciful these comments can be.**

This is not merely a stiff and formal statement about creation. Its teaching is intended to encourage us about who we are and where we come from, and its emphasis is oriented toward life rather than death, as **Isaiah** comments on so beautifully: **Heavens above, rain down justice; let the clouds pour it down. Let the earth open, so that salvation springs up, and justice sprouts with it; I, ADONAI, have created it (Isaiah 45:8 CJB).** Here the **heavens** and **earth** are now summoned to bring forth and **pour down** spiritual blessings in heavenly gifts, according to the will and in the power of ADONAI. When the **heavens above rain down justice**, **salvation springs up. God created it,** and it gives **Him** great **pleasure**.

1:1 is a summary statement that will unfold as the whole chapter is read. There are seven Hebrew words with exactly twenty-eight Hebrew letters (4X7).

Before you leave **Genesis 1:1**, you should remind yourself that **God** had you specifically in mind before the foundation of the world! **For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His children through Jesus Christ,** and **He** will continue to **love** us for all eternity in **accordance with His pleasure and will (Ephesians 1:4-5).** Biblical **love**, *agape love* is not an emotion but the nature of the heart to seek the welfare and meet the needs of others **(John 15:13)**. And **to be adopted** into the family of **God** means you are very special to **Elohim**. So on those days when you don't feel very special, you need to believe by faith the reality of your worth to **the Creator** of the universe. You are a child of **the King**.