

# Genesis 1:1 and the Revised Translation "When God began to create . . . ."

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The traditional KJV translation of Genesis 1:1-2 is:

***"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form . . . ."***

Since about 1963, some English translations of the Bible have translated Genesis 1:1-2 as:

***"At the beginning of the Creation of the heavens and the earth when the Earth was without form . . ."***

The above translation derives from statements about Genesis 1:1 found in Rashi's commentary on Genesis.<sup>1</sup> Rashi was a Jewish rabbi who lived between 1040 and 1105 A.D. Before considering Rashi's interpretation in detail, we will briefly inform about other interpretations of Genesis 1:1. The traditional view has been that Genesis 1:1 refers to an absolute beginning of the universe, i.e., a creation "out of nothing." God exists before "the heavens and the Earth, and creates the heavens and the Earth, **so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.**"<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, the creation of the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1:1 implies the creation of the matter. This interpretation is affirmed by several New Testament verses, and it is also found in 2 Maccabees 7:28, a Jewish writing dating to about 63 years **before** Christ. The KJV translated 2 Maccabees 7: 28 as:

***"I beseech thee, my son, look upon the heaven, and the earth, and all that is therein, and consider that God made them of things that were not, and so was mankind made likewise; . . . ."***

The traditional interpretation that Genesis 1:1 indicates an absolute creation of the "Heavens and the earth" continued to be affirmed in Christian translations and by most Hebrew commentators and Jewish English translations, up to about 1963.<sup>3</sup> The 1917 Jewish Publication Society (JPS) English translation ignored Rashi's commentary and translated Genesis 1:1-2 as:

***1 "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.  
2 Now the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep;  
and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters."***

For thousands of years, the scientific consensus had been that the universe was eternal, i.e., without beginning or end. The absolute creative beginning of Genesis 1:1 was seen as being contradicted by science. By the 1960s, the 1859 Darwinian idea of evolution, the development of species over time in response to natural forces, had become widely accepted. It relied on the availability of an unlimited amount of past time to allow for a claimed creation of life by these natural forces. Jewish translators had affirmed the traditional view of an absolute creation for, more than 900 years following Rashi's suggestion, and many Jewish commentators continue to do so today. But the New JPS English translation that appeared in 1963 followed Rashi and translated:

***"When God began to create heaven and earth—the earth being unformed and void . . . ."***

Some Christian theologians were amenable to the translation "when," even though it abandoned the absolute beginning. This eventually led to the alteration of some Christian translations.<sup>4</sup> In a sense, the translation "when" brought the Bible and science's 2,000 plus year **assumption** of an eternal universe into agreement.

But, ironically, in the 1960s, the scientific consensus about the age of the universe changed. The discovery of the cosmic background radiation in 1965, a discovery that was subsequently awarded the Nobel Prize in physics in 1978, affirmed that our universe had a beginning. The traditional interpretation, that Genesis 1:1 indicated a beginning of the matter of our universe, was now affirmed by scientific observation.

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<sup>1</sup> Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary translated into English, Vol. 1 Genesis, Dr. A.M. Silbermann Ed.,(Shapiro, Vallentine & CO.) London 1929, page 2.

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 11:3, New American Standard version.

<sup>3</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish\\_Publication\\_Society\\_of\\_America\\_Version](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_Publication_Society_of_America_Version)

<sup>4</sup> The NAB New American Bible (2011) and the NRS New Revised Standard (1989)

The Hebrew of Genesis 1:1 is shown below:

הָאָרֶץ וְאֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא בְּרֵאשִׁית Genesis 1:1  
the land and the heavens God created in beginning ← Hebrew starts here.

The traditional vowel marking for בָּרָא "bara" indicates that this word is a completed action, and the translation "created" indicates that this is a completed action. The word אֱלֹהִים "Elohim," translated God, is a plural word translated singular to agree with בָּרָא "bara" (a masculine singular word). The vowel marking for בְּרֵאשִׁית "in beginning" indicates that בְּרֵאשִׁית is a noun. ב is an attached prefix translated "in." אֵת is a direct object marker that is not translated in English.

We will now look at an English translation of Rashi's commentary, in a sequence that aids understanding his interpretive purpose and procedure.<sup>5</sup> The English translation of Rashi's commentary is printed in **bolded** words. The italicized words and (bracketed) words are words added by the translators. Rashi knew that the traditional interpretation was an absolute beginning followed by a sequence of creative actions. To make the argument for interpreting Genesis 1:1 otherwise he asserted:

**The text does not intend to point out the order of the acts of creation -- to state that these were created first; for if it intended to point this out, it should have written, 'בראשונה ברא את השמיים נוו'**

But why did he want to reinterpret Genesis 1:1? Rashi knew that the first Hebrew word is not the בְּרֵאשִׁית he suggested above. Rashi started his commentary about Genesis 1:1 quoting Exodus 12:2. He wrote:

**The Torah which is the law book of Israel should have commenced with the verse (Exod. XII.1) "This month shall be unto you the first of the months" which is the first commandment given to Israel.**<sup>6</sup>

Genesis 1:1 is the opening statement of the history of Israel. But the establishment of the nation takes place under the direction of Moses, starting in Egypt with the Exodus, and Rashi's statement expresses puzzlement about why the Torah does not start with the Exodus.

But, Genesis 1:1 **does** have a relationship to the Exodus from Egypt - a relationship that would not have been apparent to Rashi in the late 1000s A.D. Knowledge about the Egyptian creation stories had been lost, and did not begin to be significantly recovered until the late 1800s - a recovery that continues today.

Genesis 1:1, as traditionally understood, contradicts the Egyptian creation stories at their starting point. The Egyptian creation stories usually begin with darkness, an infinite amount of water, and no land. This is followed by the appearance of a first god, a god that is given different names in different stories. In the Heliopolis version, after the first god appears, he produces the next two gods.<sup>7</sup>

**Genesis 1:1 says:**

1. God first. God exists before matter.
2. **Then** God creates; matter is second.

**The Egyptian stories say:**

1. Water (matter) first. Matter exists before the first Egyptian god appears.
2. **Then** the first Egyptian god appears.

In the context of the Exodus, Genesis chapter one is an explanation of who Yahweh is - i.e., His nature and character as Creator using the name אֱלֹהִים "Elohim."<sup>8</sup> The traditional interpretation of Genesis 1:1 is a direct refutation of the starting condition of the Egyptian creation stories.

Commentaries on Genesis chapter one commonly interpret Genesis 1:14-17 as refuting the ancient view that the sun and moon were gods, had powers, and were to be worshiped. They note that Genesis chapter one does not use the names of these gods, but rather represents the sun and moon as lights created by the God of the Bible and under the control of the God of the Bible.<sup>9</sup> A recent paper has pointed out that the use of the Hebrew אֱלֹהִים "Elohim," in referring to God in Genesis chapter one, has theological significance.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. See footnote 1. The translation is in **bolded** words, and the non-bold italicized words and (bracketed) words were added by the translators.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. See footnote 1. The translation is in **bolded** words, and the non-bold italicized words and (bracketed) words were added by the translators.

<sup>7</sup> An article reviewing the Egyptian creation myths can be found at <https://bible.org/article/genesis-1-2-light-ancient-egyptian-creation-myths>

<sup>8</sup> Genesis chapter two uses the doubled name "Yahweh Elohim," usually translated "Lord God."

<sup>9</sup> Example: Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 1, Genesis 1-5*, (Word Books, Waco, TX), 1987, pages 21-23.

That paper <sup>10</sup> says:

*"The third way the passage proclaims monotheism is subtle but highly effective, especially for ancient readers. It has to do with the use, or rather non-use, of God's personal name. Pagan creation myths always named their gods so that readers could know which god did what. In the Babylonian Enuma elish no fewer than nine separate deities are named in the first two paragraphs."* <sup>11</sup>

and:

*"The author in fact refuses to use the normal Hebrew words for sun and moon, shamash and yarih, which may have been construed as divine names corresponding to Amon-Re in Egyptian tradition."* <sup>12</sup>

## Rashi's Arguments

Rashi argued for his reinterpretation by asserting grammatical arguments and then, apparently sensing weakness in his grammatical arguments, provided a scientific argument as a final "clincher." We will deal with these arguments in reverse order.

### Rashi's Final Argument why Genesis 1:1 "does not intend to teach the sequence of creation."

Near the end of his comments on Genesis 1:1, Rashi dismisses the traditional interpretation with a final argument that "fire and water" appeared before the "heavens and the earth."

[ Note: The italicized words and the (bracketed) Hebrew words and verse numbers were added by the translators.]

**... if it is so (that you assert that this verse intends to point out that heaven and earth were created first), you should be astonished at yourself, because as a matter of fact the waters were created before heaven and earth, for, lo, it is written, (v.2) "The spirit of God was hovering on the face of the waters," and Scripture had not yet disclosed when the creation of the waters took place - consequently you must learn this that the creation of the waters preceded that of the earth. And a further proof that the heavens and earth were not the first thing created is that the heavens were created from fire (אש) and water (מים), from which it follows that fire and water were in existence before the heavens. Therefore you must needs admit that the text teaches nothing about the earlier or later sequence of the acts of Creation.** <sup>13</sup>

In the above, Rashi has unknowingly, but partially, endorsed the order of the Egyptian creation stories - water appeared first. He missed the explicit contradiction of the starting condition of the Egyptian creation stories. In saying that "the heavens were created from fire and water" he apparently relied on an interpretive tradition (Baraita) found in the Babylonian Talmud.<sup>14</sup> Rashi had completed a commentary on the Babylonian Talmud prior to his commentary on Genesis and the other Books of Moses.

## Rashi's Grammatical Argument

Prior to his final argument, Rashi had made a grammatical argument for interpreting Genesis 1:1 in a way that differed from the traditional interpretation. Rashi first stated his conclusion, and observed that the construction of Genesis 1:1 and its use of בראשית "in beginning" as the first word of the sentence was unusual.

**The text does not intend to point out the order of the acts of Creation -- to state that these (heaven and earth) were created first; for if it intended to point this out, it should have written, 'בראשונה ברא את השמים נוו' "At first God created etc." And for this reason: Because, whenever the word בראשית occurs in Scripture, it is in the construct state, E.g., (Jer. XXVI.1) "In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim" . . .** <sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> John P. Dickson, The Genesis of Everything: An historical account of the Bible's opening chapter, ISCAST Online Journal 2008, Vol. 4, page12. [http://www.iscast.org/journal/articles/Dickson\\_J\\_2008-03\\_Genesis\\_Of\\_Everything.pdf](http://www.iscast.org/journal/articles/Dickson_J_2008-03_Genesis_Of_Everything.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> John P. Dickson, The Genesis of Everything: An historical account of the Bible's opening chapter, ISCAST Online Journal 2008, Vol. 4, page12. [http://www.iscast.org/journal/articles/Dickson\\_J\\_2008-03\\_Genesis\\_Of\\_Everything.pdf](http://www.iscast.org/journal/articles/Dickson_J_2008-03_Genesis_Of_Everything.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. page 14. See footnote 6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. See footnote 1. The translation is in **bolded** words, and the non-bold italicized words and (bracketed) words were added by the translators.

<sup>14</sup> Babylonian Talmud, chagigah section 12a, "In a Baraita it is taught: 'fire and water; this teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, brought them and mixed them one with the other and made from them the firmament.'"

<http://archive.org/details/chagigahbabyloni00unknuoft>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. See footnote 1. The translation is in **bolded** words, and the non-bold italicized words and (bracketed) were added by the translators.

In the forgoing, Rashi has given one example of a formalistic patterned use of בְּרֵאשִׁית to say "At the Beginning of. . . ." the reigns of four different kings – a use that appears four times in Jeremiah to start a new chapter. Repeated formalistic use by a single author effectively amounts to one witness, insufficient to decide the issue.

The assertion that בְּרֵאשִׁית **must be** in the construct has been contested. The construct is a relationship between Hebrew words that convey the meaning "of," a word Hebrew does not have. Some words can easily be identified as construct because of a change in spelling, and some words cannot be so identified as a construct, because the spelling and the vowel marking do not change. רֵאשִׁית "beginning" is a word for which the spelling and vowel marking do not change.

To support his argument, Rashi proposed בְּרֵאשִׁית be a construct - unless the writer omitted a word. This comment has been interpreted as asserting בְּרֵאשִׁית be a construct form - unless it was written בהֲרֵאשִׁית, including ה - the prefix indicating "the."<sup>16</sup> In addition, Rashi wanted to change the vowel marking of בָּרָא "bara" to בְּרָא "bero."

It has often been noted that Rashi's argument (about the form of בְּרֵאשִׁית) is contradicted by the example of Isaiah 46:10 where מֵרֵאשִׁית, "beginning" prefixed by מִ meaning "from," does **not** include the prefix ה "the," and is not in the construct indicating "of."<sup>17</sup> As shown below, the meaning is clearly **not** "from the beginning of the end."

<sup>KJV</sup> Isa. 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done,  
מְגִיד מֵרֵאשִׁית אַחֲרֵית וּמִקְדָּם אֲשֶׁר לֹא נַעֲשׂוּ  
done not that and from eternity end from beginning declaring ← Hebrew starts here.

It has been noted that Isaiah 46:10 is sufficient to contradict Rashi's argument for translating "At the beginning of . . . ." <sup>18</sup> מֵרֵאשִׁית appears in Isaiah 46:10, and in three other verses where it is in the construct relationship with a following noun.<sup>19</sup> Isaiah 46:10 shows that use of a temporal noun as a construct in some verses, does **not** prohibit a non-construct absolute use of that same identically marked word in another verse - thereby contradicting the reasoning Rashi used in his referring to the uses of בְּרֵאשִׁית in Jeremiah. Rashi's final argument that "the waters were created before heaven and earth" was his counter to the example of Isaiah 46:10.

There are other examples that contradict the assertion that a prefixed temporal noun requires the construct meaning "of." The use of the Hebrew word ראש (rosh) is one of the counter examples. ראש (rosh) is the root of the word רֵאשִׁית (beginning)," and as such, the use of ראש with prefixes is relevant to evaluating Rashi's assertion.

Isaiah 40:21 is a verse where מֵרֵאשׁ (ראש meaning first or beginning + מִ meaning from) is translated "from the beginning."<sup>20</sup> The meaning of מֵרֵאשׁ is clearly **not** "from the beginning of."

<sup>KJV</sup> Isaiah 40:21 Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you מֵרֵאשׁ from the beginning?  
have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth?  
הָלוֹא תִדְעוּ הָלוֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ הָלוֹא הִגִּד מֵרֵאשׁ לָכֶם  
to you from beginning been told hath not you heard hath not you known hath not ← Isaiah 40:21  
Hebrew starts here.

The word עוֹלָם "olam" (old, ever, or eternity) also appears without the article "ה," and is not in the construct sequence which indicates "of" in Hebrew sentences.<sup>21</sup> This is illustrated by Jeremiah 2:20.

<sup>KJV</sup> Jeremiah 2:20 "For of old time I have broken thy yoke, and burst thy bands; and thou saidst, . . . ."  
כִּי מֵעוֹלָם שָׁבַרְתִּי עֲלֶיךָ נִתְקַתִּי מִזִּמְתֵּיךָ  
thy bands (and) I burst thy yoke I have broken from old time For ← Jeremiah 2:20  
Hebrew starts here.

In the above, the temporal indicator מֵעוֹלָם "from old time" precedes the perfect verb שָׁבַרְתִּי.

<sup>16</sup> Claus Westermann, Genesis 1~11, Trans. John J. Sucllion, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN)1994, page 94.

<sup>17</sup> F. Delitzsch, A New Commentary on Genesis (Edinburgh, United Kingdom: T & T Clarke), 1888, page 75.

That book, volume 1, is available as a Pdf download at: <http://archive.org/details/anewcommentgenes00deliuoft>

<sup>18</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17 (Erdmans, Grand Rapids, MI) 1990, page 106.

<sup>19</sup> The three other verses are Num. 15:21, Deut. 26:2, 1 Sam. 2:29.

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Heidel, The Babylonian Genesis (U. Chicago Press, 1963 paperback ed.), page 92, and pages 89-96.

Isaiah 41:4 and Ecclesiastes 3:11 are additional examples.

<sup>21</sup> Alexander Heidel, The Babylonian Genesis (U. Chicago Press, Chicago, IL), 1963 paperback ed., page 92, and pages 89-96.

Proverbs 8:23 uses both מְעוֹלָם and מֵרֵאשִׁית . מֵרֵאשִׁית precedes the perfect verb נִסְכַּתִּי .

<sup>KJV</sup> Proverbs 8:23 I was set up from everlasting, מֵרֵאשִׁית from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

מְעוֹלָם
נִסְכַּתִּי
מֵרֵאשִׁית
מִקְדָּמִי
אֲרֶץ
Proverbs 8:23  
Hebrew starts here.

From everlasting
I was set up
from beginning
from before
earth

Rashi also offered the example of Hosea 1:2 to support his grammatical argument, writing:<sup>22</sup>

... which is as much as to say, "At the beginning of God's speaking through Hoshea, . . .

Hosea 1:2 is a verse that uses תְּחִלַּת - a construct form of the word תְּחִלָּה "techillah." <sup>23</sup> תְּחִלַּת is **not** prefixed by ב "in" and is not the word בְּרֵאשִׁית "in beginning." דִּבֶּר is marked as a perfect verb.

... בְּהוֹשֵׁעַ
יְהוָה
דִּבֶּר
תְּחִלַּת
Hosea 1:2  
Hebrew starts here.

to Hosea
Yahweh
speaking
Beginning (of)

Judges 1:1, shown below, illustrates the use the word תְּחִלָּה "techillah" prefixed with ב . This example illustrates that prefixing a temporal noun with ב does **not** produce a construct form. בְּתְחִלָּה appears in nine verses where it is considered an absolute noun.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>KJV</sup> Judges 1:1 Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites **first**, to fight against them?

בּו
לְהִלָּחֵם
בְּתְחִלָּה
הַכְּנַעֲנִי
אֵל
לָנוּ
יַעֲלֶה
מִי
... Judges 1:1
Hebrew starts here.

them
to fight
first
the Canaanites
against
for us
shall go up
Who

**The two translations of Genesis 1:1 being here considered are:**

1. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." ( i.e., the traditional translation)<sup>25</sup>  
**or** a translation reflecting Rashi's interpretation such as that below. The bolded words indicate the modifications.

2. "In the **beginning of** God **creating** the heavens and the earth, **when** the Earth was without form . . . "

Rashi's interpretation required changing the vowel marking of בָּרָא "bara" in Genesis 1:1 to בְּרָא "bero," an infinitive construct meaning "creating," **and** translating the ׀ prefixed first word of Genesis 1:2 as "**when**." Translating "**when** the Earth was without form. . ." makes Genesis 1:1-2 describe a creation out of already-existing matter, abandoning the historic interpretation that Genesis indicated a beginning to the matter of our universe. The first clause of Genesis 1:2 is shown below where I have translated הִיְתָה as "had existed."

וְבָהוּ
תְּהוּ
הִיְתָה
וְהָאָרֶץ
Genesis 1:2

and "bohu"
"tohu"
had existed
and the Earth
Hebrew starts here.

The translation "**when** the Earth was . . .," interprets Genesis 1:2 as telling the condition when the actions of Genesis 1:1 commence. The usual manner in which this is done would be for Genesis 1:2 to **not have a verb** in the first clause as shown above. It would be expected to read:<sup>26</sup>

וְבָהוּ
תְּהוּ
וְהָאָרֶץ
Hebrew starts here.

and "bohu"
"tohu"
and the Earth

But Genesis 1:2 **does** have a perfect verb הִיְתָה following the subject וְהָאָרֶץ "And the Earth."

Fanz Delitzsch, in his 1888 commentary on Genesis, pointed out that:

*"The perfect thus preceded by its subject is the usual way of stating the circumstances under which a following narrative takes place, . . . ."*<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. See footnote 1. In this case the **bolded** words in italics are the translation of Rashi's comment.

<sup>23</sup> תְּחִלַּת and בְּתְחִלַּת appear elsewhere preceding masculine and feminine nouns, and infinitive construct verbs.

<sup>24</sup> The verses are Gen. 13:3, Gen. 41:21, Gen. 43:18, Gen. 43:20, Jdg. 1:1, Jdg. 20:18, 2 Sam. 17:9, Dan. 8:1, Dan. 9:21

<sup>25</sup> Westermann, understands Genesis 1:1 as "a principal sentence," thereby agreeing with the historical translation.

Claus Westermann, Genesis 1~11, Trans. John J. Sucllion, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN)1994. page 97.

<sup>26</sup> Umberto Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Trans. Israel Abrahams, (Magness Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem), 1998, pages 19-20.

In accordance with this, Genesis 1:2 refers to conditions that exist when God says "Let there be light . . ." in Genesis 1:3, and does **not** refer to the conditions that precede Genesis 1:1, under which Genesis 1:1 takes place.

The verb הִיְתָה is a Qal perfect, indicating a completed action. My translation "had existed" in Genesis 1:2 is a past perfect similar to the "had been" of Richard E. Friedman in his 2003 *Commentary on the Torah*.<sup>28</sup> He translates "the earth had been" and says:

*"1:2. the earth had been. Here is a case in which a tiny point of grammar makes a difference for theology. In the Hebrew of this verse, the noun comes before the verb (in the perfect form). This is now known to be the way of conveying the past perfect in Biblical Hebrew."*<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, Friedman adopts Rashi's interpretation of creation out of preexisting matter by translating the prefix הַ on וְהָאָרֶץ (And the Earth) as "when," obtaining the translation "**When the earth had been . . .**" As explained above, translating וְהָאָרֶץ as "when the Earth was . . ." would require omitting the verb הִיְתָה in וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תְּהוֹ וְנִבְהוּ , but the verb הִיְתָה does appear in the Hebrew of Genesis 1:2.

For Christian interpreters, there are additional theological statements found in the New Testament that substantiate the traditional interpretation of Genesis 1:1 - statements that would **not** be considered authoritative by Jewish interpreters such as Rashi or modern Jewish interpreters.

The Gospel of John, written in Greek, starts with ἐν ἀρχῇ which translates as "in the beginning" or "at first." The KJV of John 1:1-3 is shown below:

- <sup>1</sup> **In the beginning** (ἐν ἀρχῇ) was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- <sup>2</sup> The same was **in the beginning** (ἐν ἀρχῇ) with God.
- <sup>3</sup> All things were **made** (ἐγένετο) by him; and without him was not any thing **made** (ἐγένετο) that was made.

The ἐν ἀρχῇ used in John 1:1-2 are the same two Greek words used in the Septuagint translation of the first verse of Genesis. By using these words, John substantiates that the Christian view endorses the traditional interpretation of a beginning to the heavens and the Earth. John 1:3 further substantiates this interpretation by using the Greek word ἐγένετο (e-ge-ne-to) which has the meaning of a "coming into being."

Some recent translations of John 1:3 have emphasized this meaning by translating ἐγένετο as "came into being." The NAS (New American Standard) translation is one of these and this verse is shown below.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>NAS</sup> John 1:3 All things (ἐγένετο) **came into being** by Him, and apart from Him nothing (ἐγένετο) **came into being** that (γένουεν) **has come into being**<sup>31</sup>

Hebrews 11:3 is another verse affirming the absolute creation of Genesis 1:1.

<sup>NIV</sup> Hebrews 11:3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

Amazingly, if one is willing to question the vowel marking of the Hebrew text, as Rashi did, for Genesis 1:1, then Rashi's example of Hosea 1:2 is itself subject to dispute. This occurs because the second word דְּבַר may be a perfect verb as presently marked, or a construct noun, or an infinitive construct. All these forms exist, and are written with the same letters, but vowel-marked differently. The vowel markings were added much later, but prior to Rashi's commentary.

דְּבַר appears 188 times marked as a noun in the construct sequence דְּבַר־יְהוָה "word of the Lord."

And דְּבַר appears 81 times marked as a perfect verb in the verb-noun sequence דְּבַר־יְהוָה commonly translated "Lord had spoken," or "Lord had said," and 10 times as דְּבַר , an infinitive construct.

The Septuagint translated the sequence of the first three words of Hosea 1:2 as a construct sequence, with דְּבַר being understood as a **construct noun**.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. See foot note 12, Page 77. My underlining of *a following narrative* .

<sup>28</sup> Richard E. Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah*, (Harper Collins, 10 East 53 Street, New York, NY), 2003, page 6.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. See foot note 16.

<sup>30</sup> Other translations that similarly translate ἐγένετο in John 1:3 are the NRS, NJB, NAU, NAB and the Darby Bible (1884/1890).

<sup>31</sup> ἐγένετο and γέγονεν are different tense forms of the same Greek word.

Examples of construct noun sequences using plural and singular forms of the noun דְּבַר are shown below:

<sup>KJV</sup> Ecclesiastes 10:13 The beginning of the words of his mouth foolishness: . . . .  
תְּחִלַּת דְּבָרָיו פִּיהוּ סְכָלוֹת Ecclesiastes 10:13  
foolishness his mouth words (of) Beginning (of)

<sup>KJV</sup> Zechariah 9:1 The burden of the word of the LORD in the land of Hadrach, . . . .  
מִשָּׂא דְבַר יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ חֲדָרָךְ Zechariah 9:1  
Hadrach in land (of) Lord word (of) burden (of)

Rashi's interpretation of Hosea 1:2 " . . . *which is as much as to say, "At the beginning of God's speaking through Hoshea, . . . ,"* <sup>32</sup> appears to have interpreted דְּבַר as the infinitive construct דְּבַר - not the perfect verb דִּבֶּר as it is marked.<sup>33</sup>

Including the above interpretation of Hosea 1:2, in making his argument, Rashi has (in effect) altered the vowel markings of two verbs - the verb in Genesis 1:1 and the verb in Hosea 1:2. As traditionally marked, Hosea 1:2 gives evidence that temporal construct forms can be used before perfect verbs, thereby contradicting Rashi's rationale for altering the perfect marking of דִּבֶּר in Genesis 1:1. Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar lists Hosea 1:2 as one of many differing examples of the "wider use of the construct state."<sup>34</sup>

Translating Genesis 1:1 as "**At the beginning of the Creation of the heavens and the earth when the Earth was without form . . .**" or an equivalent, has important theological consequences. Friedman, whose translation of Genesis 1:2 was discussed on the previous page, asserts that "**Creation of matter in the Torah is not out of nothing (creation ex nihilo) as many have claimed.**"<sup>35</sup> More information about "creation out of nothing" can be found in the book "*Creation Out of Nothing*" by Paul Copan and William Lane Craig.<sup>36</sup> Chapters one and two provide an extensive review of Old Testament and New Testament evidence countering the reasoning made for the revised translations that have recently appeared. The foregoing exposition about Rashi's suggestion may serve as useful background for those chapters.

The foregoing exposition focused on the grammatical and theological evidences for the traditional interpretation of Genesis 1:1. Rashi's commentary was included in many printings of the TORAH. And he had suggested that Genesis 1:1 began with the account of the Creation so that:

**. . . should the peoples of the world say to Israel, "You are robbers, because you took by force the lands of the seven nations of Canaan", Israel may reply to them, "All the earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He; He created it and gave it to whom He pleased."**<sup>37</sup>

By the 1950's Israel existed again, and in that context, Rashi's suggested reason for why Genesis 1:1 began with the account of the Creation may have had appeal for defending Israel's right to exist. Rashi lived at the time of the first crusade,<sup>38</sup> and a hope for a return to the Promised Land may have influenced his suggestion quoted above. Elazar Touitou, an Israeli scholar, has noted that "*The exegesis of scripture in the Middle Ages is not purely an intellectual activity for itself, but essentially a taking of position in regard to the social and religious problems of the time.*"<sup>39</sup>

It is my opinion that the traditional translation, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,*" is correct and is to be preferred.

<sup>32</sup> Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary translated into English, Vol. 1 Genesis, Dr. A.M. Silbermann Ed., (Shapiro, Vallentine & CO.) London 1929, page 2.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. See footnote 1. The translation is in **bolded** words.

<sup>34</sup> E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley Ed., Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar (Clarendon Press, Oxford, Second English Edition) 1910, Section §130.d, page 442.

<sup>35</sup> Richard E. Friedman, Commentary on the Torah, (Harper Collins, 10 East 53 Street, New York, NY), 2003, page 6.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation Out of Nothing* (Baker Academic, Grand Rapid, MI) 2004.

<sup>37</sup> See footnote 28. The translation is in **bolded** words, and the non-bold italicized words are words added by the translators.

<sup>38</sup> The first crusade was launched in November 1095 A.D. and led to the capture of Jerusalem in 1099 A.D.

Rashi lived between 1040 and 1105 A.D.

<sup>39</sup> Elazar Touitou, *Rashi's Commentary on Genesis 1-6 in the context of Judeo-Christian Controversy*, Hebrew Union Annual, Vol.61, 1990, pages 159-183. Specific comment on Genesis 1:1 appears on pages 71 and 72. .