

Awakening in the Word

By Glenn McWilliams of TK TORAH KEEPERS

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THE OVERVIEW

The first book of the Torah is known by several different names. The Hebrew name of the first book follows the ancient Near East custom of naming a book by its opening word or words. The first word of the Torah is the Hebrew word *Bereshit*, which means “In the beginning.” Since this book opens with the creation narrative, it is also called *Sefer B’ri’at Ha-Olam*, which is “Book of the Creation of the Universe.” Other Hebrew names for this book are *Sefer Ha-Yashar* or *Sefer Ha-Y’sharim*, “The Book of the Upright (Ones),” referring to the lives of the patriarchs whose story is told in this book. This first book is also called *Sefer Toldot*, “The Book of Generations,” in reference to the ten times the phrase “These are the generations of...” is used.¹ The English title “Genesis” is derived from the Greek and Latin titles found in the Septuagint and Vulgate respectively, which may best be translated as “Origins.”

It may be argued that the verses of this particular Torah portion are in reality the most important verses in the Scriptures. It is in these opening verses of the Torah that we first encounter the Creator of the universe and discover His identity and character. All history has its origin in this opening narrative of creation. We also discover the reality that the universe is not a random or serendipitous accident of nature, but the fruit of the expressed will of an infinitely intelligent designer. Through this revelation we come to understand that creation has been endowed with value, meaning, and purpose. In the structure of this narrative we likewise witness that this value, meaning, and purpose is especially and emphatically endowed upon humanity in a very unique calling. It is in these opening verses of the Torah that the family tree of all humanity has its roots and origin.

THE OUTLINE

Bereshit 1:1-2	The creation of the substance of heaven and earth
Bereshit 1:3-5	The creation of light
Bereshit 1:6-8	The creation of the firmament
Bereshit 1:9-13	The creation of dry land and plant life
Bereshit 1:14-19	The creation of the sun, the moon, and the stars
Bereshit 1:20-23	The creation of fish and fowl
Bereshit 1:24-25	The creation of other animal life
Bereshit 1:26-31	The creation of humankind
Bereshit 2:1-3	The creation of the Sabbath

SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why did YHWH wait until Sinai to reveal His instructions to Moses?
2. Who is the Creator?
3. What is the meaning of Elohim, and why is it plural?
4. What is the nature and character of the Creator?
5. Why is the first letter of the Torah significant?
6. What is the purpose of creation?

¹ Genesis 2:4, 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 11:27, 25:12, 25:19, 36:1, 36:9, 37:2

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7. What is the purpose of man? What is the purpose of Israel?
8. What significance is the creation narrative to the children of Israel?
9. What does it mean to be the image of Elohim?
10. What is the meaning of the Sabbath?

THE TEXT Genesis 1:1-2:3

Genesis 1:1 ¶ In the beginning Elohim created the heaven and the earth.² And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of Elohim moved upon the face of the waters.³ And Elohim said, Let there be light: and there was light.⁴ And Elohim saw the light, that *it was good*: and Elohim divided the light from the darkness.⁵ And Elohim called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.⁶ ¶ And Elohim said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.⁷ And Elohim made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.⁸ And Elohim called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.⁹ ¶ And Elohim said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry *land* appear: and it was so.¹⁰ And Elohim called the dry *land* Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and Elohim saw that *it was good*.¹¹ And Elohim said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, *and* the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed *is* in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.¹² And the earth brought forth grass, *and* herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and Elohim saw that *it was good*.¹³ And the evening and the morning were the third day.¹⁴ ¶ And Elohim said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide 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 firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.¹⁶ And Elohim made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: *he made* the stars also.¹⁷ And Elohim set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,¹⁸ And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and Elohim saw that *it was good*.¹⁹ And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.²⁰ ¶ And Elohim said, Let the waters bring forth

abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl *that* may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.²¹ And Elohim created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and Elohim saw that *it was* good.²² And Elohim blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.²³ And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.²⁴ ¶ And Elohim said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.²⁵ And Elohim made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and Elohim saw that *it was* good.²⁶ ¶ And Elohim said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.²⁷ So Elohim created man in his *own* image, in the image of Elohim created he him; male and female created he them.²⁸ And Elohim blessed them, and Elohim said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.²⁹ And Elohim said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which *is* upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which *is* the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein *there is* life, *I have given* every green herb for meat: and it was so.³¹ And Elohim saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, *it was* very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. **2:1** ¶ Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.² And on the seventh day Elohim ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.³ And Elohim blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which Elohim created and made.

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Before we go any further with our in-depth study of the creation narrative, there are some basic truths that we must come to understand. If one holds to the fact that Moses was the author or scribe of the Torah, including the book of Bereshit, then we must likewise accept the fact that this book was written long after the events it records.

- 4004 BCE² Creation
- 2348 BCE The Flood
- 1996 BCE The birth of Abraham
- 1894 BCE The birth of Isaac
- 1836 BCE The birth of Jacob
- 1571 BCE The birth of Moses
- 1491 BCE The Exodus³

If Moses received the revelation of the events of creation from YHWH while on Mount Sinai, this would mean that more than 2,513 years had passed between the time of the events and the time of their being recorded in the book of Bereshit. Two very significant events that transpired during this time are the Flood and the Tower of Babel. While the story of creation may have been passed down from one generation to the next in oral fashion, the catastrophic event of the flood would have possibly stopped the oral tradition dead in its tracks. Here we must consider the reliability of the testimony of Adam and Eve being kept intact for 2,000 plus years. I was blessed to know four of my eight great-grandparents, and yet very few stories of their parents or grandparents are told within my extended family today – and this without the interruption of a catastrophic flood.

The second event to interfere with the possible transmission of the ancient tales of creation was the confusion of languages, leading to the development of diverse ethnic groups and cultures. It should not surprise us to discover that each ethnic group has within its cultic literature some variation of the creation narrative. It should also not surprise us to discover that a number of these “creation myths” contain similar patterns and details to those in the biblical account.

From Africa come the following stories:

The Ancient One, known as Unkulunkulu, is the Zulu creator. He came from the reeds and from them he brought forth the people and the cattle. He created everything that is: mountains, streams, snakes, etc. He taught the Zulu how to hunt, how to make fire, and how to grow food.

In the beginning there was only darkness, water, and the great Elohim Bumba. One day Bumba, in pain from a stomachache, vomited up the sun. The sun dried up some of the water, leaving land. Still in pain, Bumba vomited up the moon, the stars, and then some animals: the leopard, the crocodile, the turtle, and finally, some men, one of whom, Yoko Lima, was white like Bumba.

² The abbreviation “BCE” means “Before the Common Era,” and refers to the time before Messiah. “CE” means “Common Era,” and refers to the time of Messiah to the present.

³ The Companion Bible, Appendix 50, E.W. Bullinger, Kregel Publications, Pp. 43-53

In the beginning there was nothing but Nzame. This Elohim is really three: Nzame, Mebere, and Nkwa. It was the Nzame part of the Elohim that created the universe and the earth, and brought life to it. While the three parts of Nzame were admiring this creation, it was decided to create a ruler for the earth. So was created the elephant, the leopard, and the monkey, but it was decided that something better had to be created. Between the three of them they made a new creature in their image, and called him Fam (power), and told him to rule the earth. Before long Fam grew arrogant; he mistreated the animals and stopped worshipping Nzame. Nzame, angered, brought forth thunder and lightning, and destroyed everything that was except Fam, who had been promised immortality.

In the beginning, the world was nothing but a quagmire. Nothing could live there. But in the six skies above and the six worlds below dwelled gods, demons, and animals.⁴

From Japan:

Before the heavens and the earth came into existence, all was a chaos, unimaginably limitless and without definite shape or form. Eon followed eon: then, lo! Out of this boundless, shapeless mass something light and transparent rose up and formed the heaven. This was the Plain of High Heaven, in which materialized a deity called Ame-no-Minaka-Nushi-no-Mikoto (the Deity-of-the-August-Center-of-Heaven). Next the heavens gave birth to a deity named Takami-Musubi-no-Mikoto (the High-August-Producing Wonderous-Deity), followed by a third called Kammi-Musubi-no-Mikoto (the Divine-Producing-Wondrous-Deity). These three divine beings are called the Three Creating Deities.⁵

From China:

In the beginning the heavens and earth were still one and all was chaos. The universe was like a big black egg, carrying Pan Gu inside itself. After 18 thousand years Pan Gu woke from a long sleep. He felt suffocated, so he took up a broadax and wielded it with all his might to crack open the egg. The light, clear part of it floated up and formed the heavens; the cold, turbid matter stayed below to form earth. Pan Gu stood in the middle, his head touching the sky, his feet planted on the earth. The heavens and the earth began to grow at a rate of ten feet per day, and Pan Gu grew with them. After another 18 thousand years, the sky was higher, the earth thicker, and Pan Gu stood between them like a pillar 9 million li in height so that they would never join again. When Pan Gu died, his breath became the wind and clouds, his voice the rolling thunder. One eye became the sun and one the moon.⁶

From Maya:

In the beginning were only Tepeu and Gucumatz. These two sat together and thought, and whatever they thought came into being. They thought earth, and there it was. They thought mountains, and so there were. They thought trees and sky and animals. Each came into being. Because none of these creatures could praise them, they formed more advanced beings of clay. Because the clay beings fell apart when wet, they made beings

⁴ Posted on <http://www.dreamscape.com/morgana/uranus.htm> are the creation narratives of many cultures.

⁵ See http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/mitos_creacion/esp_mitoscreacion_9.htm Japan-Creational Myths

⁶ <http://www.dreamscape.com/morgana/ariel.htm>

*out of wood; however these beings caused trouble on earth. The gods sent a great flood to wipe out these beings, so that they could start over.*⁷

In all of these various stories we witness similar elements to those in the biblical narrative of creation, such as primordial chaos, division of water, winds fluttering over the water, the creation of living things from clay, etc. While some modern scholars may use these similarities to challenge the authenticity of the biblical account, I would argue that these similar details help to establish the truth of the biblical account. What becomes evident from these different stories is that at some point in every culture's history, its members stood in the present and questioned where they came from. It is the answer to this question of origin that establishes the character, meaning, and purpose of a culture, as well as its future direction.

While many cultures may have wrested the answer to the question of their origin from various ancient tales and the apparent evidences of nature, this cannot be said of the people of Israel. While elements of the biblical narrative may have been known and passed down through Noah and his descendants, the version that we know and study in the Torah was revealed to Moses some 2,000 years after the events. While we may easily imagine the truth of this story changing with each culture's language and circumstances, these variations were corrected at Mount Sinai.

We should also recall that the ancestors of these diverse people groups all came from Noah and his sons. At one point in their history, they all knew and believed in the one true Elohim. Over time, however, most of these people groups fell to superstitions, myths, and polytheism. Some may be surprised to discover that even the ancient Hebrew people assimilated the cultures around them and held varying beliefs about creation and the number of *elohim*. We must remember that the ancient Hebrew people were not always monotheistic.

Genesis 31:30-32 *And now, though thou wouldst needs be gone, because thou sore longedst after thy father's house, yet wherefore hast thou stolen my elohim?* ³¹*And Jacob answered and said to Laban, Because I was afraid: for I said, Peradventure thou wouldst take by force thy daughters from me. ³²With whomsoever thou findest thy elohim, let him not live: before our brethren discern thou what is thine with me, and take it to thee. For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them.*

Genesis 35:2-4 *Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange elohim that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: ³and let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto Elohim, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. ⁴And they gave unto Jacob all the strange elohim which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.*

Joshua 24:2 *And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith YHWH Elohim of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other elohim.*

Because of this cultural drifting from the truth into polytheistic myths and legends concerning the beginning of the universe, we may understand the Creator's desire to reestablish the truth upon Mount Sinai. We may ask why the Creator waited until Sinai to reveal the truth of His identity as the sole Creator of the universe. As we have already stated above, the answer to this question of origin establishes a culture's character, meaning, purpose, and direction. We should, therefore, see in this revelation of the story of creation a direct relationship between the Creator and the children of Israel, their character, identity, meaning, purpose, and future. Also at issue in the story of creation is the sovereignty of the Creator. Like bookends

⁷ <http://www.dreamscape.com/morgana/cordelia.htm#MAY>

around the details of the creation narrative is the proclamation that Elohim is the sole Creator of all that is seen and unseen.

Genesis 1:1 *In the beginning Elohim created the heaven and the earth.*

Genesis 2:3 *And Elohim blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which Elohim created and made.*

This single declaration establishes Elohim as being the sole Creator, Owner, and Sovereign of the universe. Elohim created the universe, ordered the universe, and is free to do with it what He wills, as was made evident in the later narrative concerning the flood.

Genesis 6:5-7 *And YHWH saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶And it repented YHWH that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart. ⁷And YHWH said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth Me that I have made them.*

Likewise, the psalmists eloquently declare the sovereignty of the Creator.

Psalms 24:1 *The earth is YHWH'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.*

Psalms 50:12 *If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is Mine, and the fulness thereof.*

Psalms 89:11 *The heavens are Thine, the earth also is Thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, Thou hast founded them.*

Psalms 95:3-5 *For YHWH is a great Elohim, and a great King above all elohim. ⁴In His hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is His also. ⁵The sea is His, and He made it: and His hands formed the dry land.*

It is in the reality of the Creator's sovereignty that we see the importance of Moses receiving this corrective revelation at Mount Sinai. If the Creator of the universe is likewise the Sovereign of the universe, then He has the right to apportion His creation however, whenever, and to whomever He wills.

Rashi cites Rav Yitzchak, who says that since the Torah is primarily a book of laws, it should have begun with the commandment of the new moon (Exodus 12:2), the first law that was addressed to all of Jewry as a nation. He explains that the reason for the Torah's narrative of creation is to establish that Elohim is the Sovereign of the universe: "He declared to His people the power of His works in order to give them the heritage of the nations (Psalms 111:6)." If the nations accuse Israel of banditry for seizing the lands of the seven nations of Canaan, Israel can respond, "The entire universe belongs to Elohim. He created it and He granted it to whomever He deemed fit. It was His desire to give it to them and when it was His desire, to take it from them and give it to us."⁸

Here we witness the intrinsic connection between the narrative of creation and the children of Israel. Given that the revelation of creation was given to Moses at Mount Sinai clearly indicates that the truth of this narrative was specifically intended to influence, shape, and direct the very character, purpose, and mission

⁸ The Schottenstein Edition Interlinear Chumash, Bereishis/Genesis, ArtScroll Mesorah Publication, Pg. 2

of those who would enter the covenant and identify themselves as the children of Israel. For those who do identify themselves as having “crossed over” into the covenant, this creation narrative is not merely the quaint story of our history; it is a navigational marker to direct us into the future. While this revealed narrative does indeed recount the creation of all humanity, we should understand that the purpose of YHWH revealing this narrative to Moses was to instruct us in our unique mission as the covenant people of YHWH Elohim. Therefore, as we study this story, let us pay particular attention to the revelation of our Creator, His character, His manners, and His mind, as well as to our unique purpose and calling in creation.

We have already stated that a primary purpose of the creation narrative is to reveal and establish the sovereignty of YHWH Elohim over the whole universe. The narrative establishes this fact by clearly indicating Elohim alone as the sole Creator of all that is seen and unseen. Unlike the creation myths of other cultures, the biblical narrative clearly indicates that nothing existed before the Creator. The biblical narrative does not speak of the origin of the Creator, thus declaring Him to be eternal; nor does it speak of any other *elohim* besides He who created the Heavens and the Earth. This raises, of course, an interesting question concerning the very identity of the creator or creators of the universe. The opening verse of this narrative begins:

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning elohim created the heaven and the earth.

I have intentionally left the word *elohim* in lower case letters in order to highlight a specific point. We must address the issue of the Hebrew term *elohim* (*aleph, lamed, hey, yud, mem*), which appears throughout the creation narrative in the plural form, since we claim that the narrative of creation establishes the sovereignty of a single Creator. The Hebrew term *elohim* is a generic term that refers to one with power or authority. Elohim is neither a name nor necessarily a title. A quick survey of the King James Version of the Bible will help to support this fact.

The word *elohim* is translated in the King James Version of the Bible as “God,” 2,346 times; “gods,” 242 times; “god,” twice; “judge,”⁹ 5 times; “GOD,” once; “goddess,” twice; “great,” twice; “mighty,” twice; “angels,”¹⁰ once; “exceeding,” once; “god-ward,” once; and “godly,” once.¹¹ The ancient Hebrew ideographs also help to substantiate this definition. As we have stated, the word *elohim* may be the plural form of the word *el* (*aleph, lamed*), which means “mighty” or “strong.” The ideograph for the letter *aleph* is a picture of an ox head, conveying the idea of “might,” “strength,” “gentle,” or “first.” The picture for the letter *lamed* is a shepherd’s crook or staff, conveying the idea of authority, protection, or movement. Together these two images read as “strong authority,” “prime mover,” or “gentle protector,” all of which could be understood as attributes of the Creator. The question we are faced with, however, is not the meaning of the word, but its number. If this creation narrative has been given to Israel, then it must be about the deity of Israel who declares Himself to be one.

Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel: YHWH is our Elohim, YHWH is one.

We must now ask, “If the Creator is one, then why use a plural term?” There are several possible answers to this question. Joel M. Hoffman, in his book In the Beginning: A Short History of the Hebrew Language, addresses this question at length.

⁹ The word *elohim* is translated as “judges” in Exodus 21:6, but may well be a reference to the Creator.

¹⁰ The word *elohim* is translated as “angels” in Psalm 8:5, but is, in the opinion of this author, an erroneous translation. Nowhere else in the Scriptures is the word *elohim* ever translated as “angels.” I believe the psalmist is stating that man was created a little lower than the Creator, which makes sense contextually.

¹¹ The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Red-Letter Edition, James Strong, LL.D., S.T.D., Thomas Nelson, Pg. 17

One troubling detail, of course, is that the Hebrews, well-known for their insistence on “one God,” seem to have based the name of their deity on the plural word “gods.” Why didn’t they take the singular word el and add a heh to that instead?

One possibility is that the word may have come from an older Akkadian or Phoenician word ilum, which, related to the Hebrew el, meant “god,” not “gods.” If so, elhym is the Hebrew ilum; that is, the Hebrew Elohim, and there is no puzzle. On the other hand, if in fact elhym represents the Hebrew version of the plural word elim, “gods,” we find not only a puzzle but two possible solutions to it, both supported by considerable evidence.

One theory, widely accepted, is that the word elhym goes back to an earlier time in the Hebrew’s history, before they adopted monotheism....In further support of this theory, it is often noted that the other word for “God,” /Adonai/, sounds like the word “my lords.” So both common words for God seem plural. But this theory is problematic, because from what we have seen, the heh could not have been added before the Hebrews started using vowels in their writings, by which time their writings seem to indicate a monotheistic outlook (though the time of their adoption of monotheism is also a matter of some debate).

The second possibility is that the Hebrews’ one God was seen as the equivalent of other cultures’ many gods. In other words, the Hebrews were not (only?) trying to express the concept “God,” but also “gods.” Every culture had their “gods,” and so did the Hebrews. An obvious question, then, was how many gods were in the group “gods.” For some cultures, the answer may have been a vague “many,” or a particular number. For the Hebrews, the answer was “one.” This second theory is buttressed by the well-known passage from Deuteronomy (6:4), usually translated: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God (elyhm), the Lord is One.” This one line has received inordinate attention, owing at least in part to its centrality in Jewish religious practice. The problems with the line are many. The line would make considerably more sense if it read, “...the Lord alone.” And, indeed, this is another common translation. But opponents of that translation are quick to point out that the Hebrew word used for “one” (/exad/) does not mean “alone.” (To this, advocates of the theory counter that we could have a scribal error here.)

At the heart of the problem is the seemingly nonsensical (or at least, tautological, and so superfluous) statement that “Adonai” is “one.” Consider a similar statement: “John Smith is one.” Of course “John Smith” is “one,” because a name always represents one person. Even when lots of people share a name, a particular usage of the name refers to a particular person. Whether “the Lord” is God’s name or a reference to God, the phrase “the Lord is one” seems as odd as “John Smith is one,” (if “the Lord” is God’s name) or as “the president is one” (if “the Lord” is God’s title).

But if, based on what we saw above, elhym meant not only “God” but also the Hebrew equivalent of other cultures’ “set of gods,” then the statement makes sense. It claims first that Adonai is “the Hebrew set of gods,” and then, recognizing that a set of gods generally contains more than one member, adds that this particular set contains but one member.¹²

Supporting the idea that the term *elohim* is attempting to convey the idea of a group of one versus a group of many *elohim*, as with other cultures, is the phrase “Elohim of elohim and Lord of lords.”

¹² In the Beginning: A Short History of the Hebrew Language, Joel M. Hoffman, New York University Press, Pp. 42-43

Deuteronomy 10:17 For YHWH (your) **Eloheycha** is **Elohey** (of) **ha-elohim**, and **Adonai** (of) **ha-adonim**, a great **el**, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward.

Psalms 136:2 O give thanks unto **Elohay ha-elohim**: for His mercy endureth for ever.

It is also possible that the term *elohim* is in fact the plural form of the Hebrew word *eloahh*, which corresponds to the Aramaic term *elahh*, which likewise means “Elohim” or “deity.” If this is the etymology of the word *elohim*, then it is also possible that the plural form is simply the plural of “majesty” or “grandeur.” Nahum M. Sarna, in his commentary on Bereshit, writes,

The term for God used here and throughout the present account of Creation is “elohim.” This is not a personal name, but the general Hebrew word for deity. It can even refer to pagan gods. Although plural in form, only rarely is it not constructed with a singular verb or adjective. The plural form may signify majesty, or serve to intensify the basic idea. The preference for the use of “elohim” in this chapter rather than the sacred divine name YHVH may well be conditioned by theological considerations; the term “elohim,” connoting universalism and abstraction, is most appropriate for the transcendent God of Creation.¹³

Here Sarna mentions a dominant clue to help in discerning when we should understand the word *elohim* in a plural sense as “gods,” and when in a singular, majestic sense as “God.” We should note that the verb “created” used in the opening verse is in the third person singular form, clearly identifying the Creator as one.

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning **Elohim** (plural of majesty) (**He**) created (third person singular) the heavens and the earth.

Thus, from a careful reading of the Scriptures in their original language we begin to unfold the revelation of the sovereign Creator of the universe. The name *EI* or *Elohim* is descriptive of both the creative and sovereign nature of the Creator. By virtue of His sovereign ownership of the universe, *Elohim* is both just and right in judging the earth. The name *EI* or *Elohim* is most often associated with the Creator’s attribute of righteous judgment.

There are some scholars who seek to separate *Elohim* from *YHWH* as being two mutually exclusive attributes of one infinite being. Since the name *YHWH* is so intimately connected with Israel’s deliverance and redemption, this name tends to be used to convey the Creator’s attributes of faithfulness, mercy, and love. While these two names do convey different aspects of the Creator and are utilized for separate literary purposes, lest we give the impression that *Elohim* and *YHWH* are two distinct beings, we should be careful not to overemphasize the difference between these two names. The testimony of Scripture is quite clear. *YHWH* is in fact the memorial name of the Creator of the universe.

Exodus 20:11 For in six days **YHWH** made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore **YHWH** blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Exodus 31:17 It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days **YHWH** made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed.

2 Kings 19:15 And Hezekiah prayed before **YHWH**, and said, O **YHWH Elohim** of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, Thou art the **Elohim**, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; Thou hast made heaven and earth.

¹³ JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis, Nahum M. Sarna, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1989, Pg. 5

***Psalm 115:15** Ye are blessed of YHWH which made heaven and earth.*

***Psalm 121:2** My help cometh from YHWH, which made heaven and earth.*

***Psalm 134:3** YHWH that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.*

***Isaiah 37:16** O YHWH of hosts, Elohim of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, Thou art the Elohim, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: Thou hast made heaven and earth.*

We should take notice of the fact that the name “YHWH” does not appear in the opening narrative of creation. Instead, the narrative consistently uses the more generic “Elohim.” The name “YHWH” first appears in Bereshit 2:4, at the beginning of the second portion of the creation narrative. There are many scholars who use these two primary names of the Creator to identify what they believe are two different traditions or sources for the creation story. This theory is called the “Documentary Theory.” These “enlightened” scholars deny the authorship of Moses, teaching instead that the Old Testament was written by numerous groups of people from different backgrounds: the Yahwists, the Elohist, the Priestly, and the Deuteronomist. This theory is often identified simply as J, E, P, and D. To refute this theory is beyond the scope of this teaching. In brief, let me just point to the use of the names “Jacob” and “Israel” to describe the same person. These two names allude to two different aspects of the same man. “Jacob” tends to refer to the earthly man, while “Israel” refers to the spiritual man.

***Genesis 48:2** And one told **Jacob**, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and **Israel** strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed.*

Here we witness that the earthly man, Jacob, is on his death bed in Egypt; yet, it is Israel, the spiritual man, who strengthens himself for the purpose of blessing his son. The two names clearly represent two attributes of the same person, and both are part of the same tradition and source. No reputable scholar would claim that these two titles represent two separate traditions concerning the patriarch: the J (Jacob) source and the I (Israel) source.

The same may be said of YHWH and Elohim. Since the name YHWH is most associated with the redemption and deliverance of the children of Israel, it seems appropriate that the more generic name “Elohim” would be used in the opening story of the creation of the whole universe, indicating that the Creator is Elohim or “Sovereign” of all people, and not just the eventual people of Israel. Also evident in this use of the generic term “Elohim” is the idea that the Creator is somewhat hidden or veiled by His creation. To most of the world the Creator remains a nameless, nebulous, and anonymous power, known only through the evidence of His works.

***Romans 1:19-20** Because that which may be known of Elohim is manifest in them; for Elohim hath shewed it unto them. ²⁰For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and divine nature; so that they are without excuse.*

Sadly, this combination of ignorance on the part of man and the veiled nature of the Creator led to the idolatry celebrated by most of humankind.

***Romans 1:21-23** Because that, when they knew Elohim, they glorified Him not as Elohim, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²²Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, ²³and changed the glory of the uncorruptible Elohim into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.*

What does become quite clear in this opening narrative of creation is the fact that the invisible Creator desires to reveal Himself and become manifest in His universe. With each thought, act of will, and word spoken, YHWH begins to unveil His invisible nature in visible reality. This truth becomes quite apparent from the very first letter of the Torah.

The Hebrew alphabet contains twenty-two consonants, the first of which is *aleph* and the last of which is *tav* (we will speak more on this in a moment). Prior to the current Hebrew style of letters we are accustomed to seeing in the Tanach, each letter was a picture or ideograph that conveyed a meaning. As we have stated above in the discussion on the name Elohim, the first of these letters, *aleph*, is a picture of an ox head, and is closely associated with or identified with Elohim. What is somewhat surprising is the fact that the Torah does not begin with the first letter, *aleph*, but with the second letter, *bet*. I will suggest two possible reasons for this fact.

While the letter *aleph* is indeed the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, it is a silent or softly aspirated letter; thus, we may see the letter *aleph* as representing the unknown, unrevealed Creator prior to His speaking the universe into existence. Until the Creator willed, acted, and spoke, He remained invisible, silent, and unknowable. Ten times in the narrative of creation we are told that Elohim created by speaking;¹⁴ thus, the revelation of the Torah begins with the letter *bet*, because it is the first letter to have a tangible sound. In the first sound of the first letter of the first word, that which was potential creation hidden within the invisible Creator became tangible, knowable reality. Thus, it is fitting that the Torah would begin not with the silent letter *aleph*, but with the tangible, audible letter *bet*.

Not only does the Torah begin with the letter *bet*, but this first letter is larger than all the other letters. The uninitiated may assume that this is simply a decorative embellishment, as is seen in the illuminated medieval manuscripts; but unlike English and other languages, Hebrew does not employ upper and lowercase letters in its writing system. There are no capital letters in Hebrew. The fact that this first letter is enlarged is to draw our attention to it. Remembering that each letter is also a picture or ideograph that conveys a message, we need now ask, "What is conveyed by the letter *bet*?" The *bet* is a picture of a house or tent. From the very first letter of the Torah we should understand that YHWH is building a dwelling place for Himself. Here we begin to understand the purpose of creation. We should also understand that in Hebraic thinking, to "build a house" is more than just erecting a building. When a Hebrew man wants to build his house, he does so by taking a wife. This is the beginning of a man's household. To truly understand the significance of this revelation in the creation narrative, we must look ahead to understand the significance of a wife.

Genesis 2:18 *And YHWH Elohim said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.*

Genesis 2:23 *And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.*

In these two passages, we see that the wife was to be a flesh and bone helpmate to her husband. If creation, and in particular mankind, is to be the "house of" (*bet*) Elohim, then we are to be a flesh and bone helpmate of the Creator. This is to say that creation, including mankind, is to be the flesh and bone, tangible, manifestation of the Creator. If Elohim is an invisible Spirit, for Him to be known requires Him to reveal Himself in a tangible fashion. Creation, then, is the revelation of the expressed will of the Creator made manifest in tangible elements. Every reality of creation is the revelation of the expressed will of the Creator. All creation begins within the heart, mind, and will of the Creator. This idea or thought of creating is the *aleph* – the silent, potential creation. But once the Creator acts, wills, or speaks – once His heart, mind, and will become realized – this is the *bet* of creation: the first letter with sound. The apostle Shaul

¹⁴ Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29, 30

was correct in pointing to the fact that we can learn much about the invisible, intangible Creator through His tangible creation, as stated earlier. Yeshua likewise pointed to creation as revelation of the Creator.

Matthew 6:26-30 *Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? ²⁷Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? ²⁸And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: ²⁹and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰Wherefore, if Elohim so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*

We may, therefore, consider the lilies of the field, the birds of the air, and the rest of creation as well to discover numerous revelations about our Creator. I will list and discuss ten such revelations gleaned from this portion of the creation narrative.

1. The Creator is preexistent.
2. The Creator is One and therefore Sovereign.
3. The Creator is Spirit.
4. The Creator creates ex nihilo.¹⁵
5. The Creator makes order out of chaos.
6. The Creator makes distinctions.
7. The Creator makes judgments.
8. The Creator creates life; there is no death in Him.
9. The Creator desires to be known.
10. The Creator is loving and good.

Let us now briefly address each of these ten revelations.

As we have seen from the brief excerpts taken from the creation myths of various cultures, many of these narratives include a story about the birth of a creator or what existed before the gods came into existence. The biblical narrative begins and ends with the reality that all creation emanates from the Creator; therefore, nothing existed prior to the Creator. The biblical narrative cannot speak of the origin of the Creator, since He is eternal; therefore, all that can be spoken of is what the Creator did in a moment in time. If everything was created by the Creator, then nothing precedes the Creator. The fact that YHWH created everything from nothing distinguishes Him from many of the pagan deities, which themselves came from some eternal universe. It distinguishes Him as well as from mankind, which exercises its creative abilities over already existing matter. The testimony of the Scriptures is that YHWH created everything from absolute nothing.

We have already addressed the issue of the plural form *elohim* being the plural of “majesty.” Many have tried to assert that the plural language used in the creation of man is the foundation for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

Genesis 1:26 *And Elohim said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.*

In other words, they believe that the plural language of this text is a discussion between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Others assert that the Creator is speaking to the angelic host and other spiritual beings. This thought is usually supported by using Psalm 8:5 as the proof text.

¹⁵ Ex nihilo is Latin for “out of nothing.”

***Psalm 8:5** For thou hast made him (man) a little **lower than the angels**, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.*

The problem with this argument is the fact that the word for “**angel**” (*mal’ach*) does not appear in this text. Instead, the Hebrew text actually reads,

***Psalm 8:5** For thou hast made him a little lower than **elohim**, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.*

We may note that in the whole of the creation narrative there is no mention of the creation of angels or other spiritual beings. Some postulate that they were created at the time of Genesis 1:1 with the heavens, but this is an argument from silence and cannot be defended.

To refute the Trinity debate we need only look to the creation narrative’s next verse.

***Genesis 1:27** So Elohim created man in **His** own image, in the image of Elohim created **He** him; male and female created **He** them.*

Clearly all of the third person masculine form verbs indicate that the person acting is singular in nature. If YHWH is in fact the Elohim of creation, as identified by the numerous Scripture references listed earlier, then we must likewise accept the testimony of His own revelation that He is in fact ONE.

***Deuteronomy 6:4** Hear, O Israel: YHWH is our Elohim, YHWH is ONE.*

Therefore, the use of the plural name Elohim and the plural language in Genesis 1:26 is merely the plural of “majesty,” and not an indication of a heavenly host or a tri-part nature of the Creator. If YHWH is ONE, then He alone created all that is seen and unseen, and is, therefore, the sovereign owner and ruler of the universe.

This sovereign Creator is also a Spirit.

***Genesis 1:2** And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of Elohim moved upon the face of the waters.*

The Hebrew word *Ruach* (*resh, vav, chet*) can mean “wind,” “breath,” or “spirit.” In all of these various definitions it is clearly describing an invisible, bodiless force. It is the testimony of Messiah Yeshua that substantiates this reality.

***John 4:24** Elohim is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*

As bodiless Spirit, Elohim is without limit in time or space; He is, therefore, truly eternal. While without form or substance, the Creator is not without purpose or will. It is likewise evident from His work that the Creator desires to be known. Each act of creation is an expression of the Creator’s will. In that His works are tangible reveals that the Creator desires to exist in a knowable way. Through His creation, YHWH reveals Himself to be an Elohim of order, distinction, and moral judgment.

We should note that in the beginning, YHWH created the substance of the heavens and the earth.

***Genesis 1:1-2** In the beginning Elohim created the heaven and the earth. ²And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of Elohim moved upon the face of the waters.*

Here we witness that the original creation was substantial, but without form or distinction. The rest of the creation narrative goes on to describe the Creator making divisions and distinctions.

Genesis 1:4 *And Elohim saw the light, that it was good: and Elohim **divided the light from the darkness.***

Genesis 1:6 *And Elohim said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and **let it divide the waters from the waters.***

Genesis 1:18 *And to rule over the day and over the night, and **to divide the light from the darkness:** and Elohim saw that it was good.*

Within the creation itself, the animals and plants would bring forth seed after their own kind. We also see order in the process of creation itself.

Finally, the Narrator employs the device of number symbolism, the heptad, to emphasize the basic idea of design, completion, and perfection. The opening proclamation contains seven words; the description of primal chaos is set forth in twice seven words; the narrative's seven literary units feature seven times the formula for the effectuation of the divine will and the statement of divine approval; and the six days of creation culminate in the climatic seventh.¹⁶

We may also recognize a unique relationship between the first three days of creation and the last three days of creation, all of which culminate in the restful celebration and sanctification of creation on the seventh day.

Group I The Resource		Group II The Utilizer	
<i>Day</i>	<i>Creative Act</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Creative Act</i>
1	Light	4	The luminaries
2	Sky, leaving terrestrial waters	5	Fish and fowl
3	Dry land Vegetation (Lowest form of organic life)	6	Land creatures Humankind (Highest form of organic life) ¹⁷

Also established within the events and order of creation are the roots of the biblical calendar. Clearly it is the will of the Creator to order and measure time through various measurable units.

¹⁶ JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis, Nahum M. Sarna, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1989,

Pg. 4

¹⁷ Ibid.

Genesis 1:14 *And Elohim said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.*

Here, in the very functioning of the planets, we see evidence of order and design. The cycle of the sun gives us the division of day and night. The cycle of the moon gives us the division of months. The cycle of seasons gives us the division of years. Like clockwork, these interrelated cycles declare the orderly nature of the Creator. What should strike us as peculiar in this verse is the absence of one important division of time. Absent from this passage is the measure of weeks! The seven-day period would not find its place in creation until the finish of creation. It is not until the six days of creation were complete that the Creator set His seal or signature upon His work by setting apart the seventh day as a special time of rest.

Genesis 2:1-3 *Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ²And on the seventh day Elohim ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. ³And Elohim blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which Elohim created and made.*

We should be careful to observe that there is no commandment given to man to continually observe the Sabbath. The observation of the Sabbath as a commandment would not appear in the Torah until it was given to the children of Israel as a sign of their participation in the Sinai Covenant.

Exodus 16:25 *And Moses said, Eat that to day; for to day is a Sabbath unto YHWH: to day ye shall not find it in the field.*

Exodus 16:29 *See, for that YHWH hath given you the Sabbath, therefore He giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.*

Exodus 20:8-11 *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: ¹⁰but the seventh day is the Sabbath of YHWH thy Elohim: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: ¹¹for in six days YHWH made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore YHWH blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.*

Exodus 31:13 *Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily My Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am YHWH that doth sanctify you.*

While the noun “Sabbath” does not appear in this passage, only its verbal root, it is clear that this is the foundation of the later commandment to keep the Sabbath. This is made evident by the reference to the events of creation in the later references.

The biblical institution of the weekly Sabbath is unparalleled in the ancient world. In fact, the concept of a seven-day week is unique to Israel, as is also, so far, the seven-day cosmogonic¹⁸ tradition. Both of these phenomena are extraordinary in light of the widespread use of a seven-day unit of time, both as a literary convention and as an aspect of cultic observance in the ancient Near East. The wonderment is compounded by additional data. The other major units of time—day, month, and year—are uniformly based on the phases of the moon and the movement of the sun, and the calendars of the ancient world are rooted in the seasonal manifestations of nature. Remarkably, the Israelite week

¹⁸ The creation or origin of the world or universe

*has no such linkage and is entirely independent of the movement of celestial bodies. The Sabbath thus underlines the fundamental idea of Israelite monotheism: that Elohim is wholly outside of nature.*¹⁹

Thus, we may truly celebrate the Sabbath as the signature and seal of YHWH as sole Creator of the universe and Sovereign over all creation.

Through these various divisions and distinctions, the will and nature of the Creator are made known. We may also note at this time that the Creator made not only divisions and distinctions, but moral judgments as well.

Genesis 1:4 *And Elohim saw the light, that **it was good**: and Elohim divided the light from the darkness.*

Genesis 1:10 *And Elohim called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and Elohim saw that **it was good**.*

Genesis 1:12 *And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and Elohim saw that **it was good**.*

Genesis 1:18 *And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and Elohim saw that **it was good**.*

Genesis 1:21 *And Elohim created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and Elohim saw that **it was good**.*

Genesis 1:25 *And Elohim made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and Elohim saw that **it was good**.*

Genesis 1:31 *And Elohim saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, **it was very good**. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.*

We should recognize in these divisions, distinctions, and moral judgments the very seeds and origin of the Sinai Covenant itself. We may remember here that the very purpose of the calling of Israel was for them to embody YHWH before the eyes of the nations through the keeping of the Torah, with all its distinctions and moral judgments.

Nowhere is the fact that the Creator desires to be known more evident than in the creation of mankind. In the creation of Adam and Eve, YHWH created a being with the capacity to both know and make known the Creator Himself.

Genesis 1:26-28 *And Elohim said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.*
²⁷*So Elohim created man in His own image, in the image of Elohim created He him; male and female created He them.* ²⁸*And Elohim blessed them, and Elohim said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the*

¹⁹ JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis, Nahum M. Sarna, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1989, Pg. 15

fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

It is through Adam and Eve that the Creator would truly be manifest among His creation, declaring man to be the image of Elohim. Here we must take careful note that man was created expressly for the purpose of being the image of Elohim. To be the manifest presence of the Creator required that man would be living and be filled with the Spirit of Elohim; and that he would have a tangible body, creative abilities, free will, and the ability to make distinctions and moral judgments. We should also clearly understand that the manner in which Adam would be the image of Elohim was not in how he would look physically, but in the manner in which he would exercise dominion over creation. It is in the manner of his rule that Adam would fulfill his created purpose to be the image of Elohim. While numerous attributes of the Creator may be discerned through the veil of the rest of creation, it is in the living, breathing, and free-will rule of man that the Creator is most clearly revealed. It is in this unique honor and blessing bestowed upon Adam and Eve that mankind was set apart from the rest of creation. It is the blurring of this distinction that led to the dietary decree given after the flood.

Genesis 9:1-6 *And Elohim blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. ²And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. ³Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. ⁴But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. ⁵And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. ⁶Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of Elohim made He man.*

Here we witness once again the Creator establishing the distinction that was to exist between man and animal. While it was now acceptable for man to kill an animal, it was unacceptable for an animal or a man to kill a man. Clearly man was to be accorded special honor and protection. This unique privilege and honor is explicitly rooted in the reality that man was created to be the image of Elohim.

Two other revelations that we should point out are that there is no mention of death at all in connection with the Creator, nor is there any mention of evil. Neither death nor evil are a part of the Creator. While we do witness YHWH declaring His creation as being "good," and even "very good," we do not witness Him declaring anything that is of Himself to be evil. We may draw the conclusion that the realities of death and evil are contrary to the Creator and to His nature, and are, therefore, the result of separation from the Creator or opposition to His will. We will look at the significance of this reality in later portions. For now let it suffice us to say that death and evil are not attributes of the Creator, nor should they be part of the image borne by man.

In conclusion, let us see that within the verses of this creation narrative are the roots and seeds of all human history, the purpose of man, and the purpose of Israel. We shall often return to these verses to see the foundation of all that we will study in the numerous Torah portions yet to come. I encourage you to study carefully the many revelations contained in this opening portion of the Torah.

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