2097.0 רֹאשׁ (*rō'sh*) **I, head, top, summit, upperpart, chief, total, sum.**

(2097a) רִאשָׁה (*ri'shâ*) **beginning time, early time** (Exo 36:11, only).

(2097b) רֹאשָׁה (*rō'shâ*) **top, i.e. the topmost stone** (Zech 4:7, only).

(2097c) רִאשׁוֹן (*ri'shôn*) **first, primary.**

(2097d) רִאשֹׁנִי (*ri'shōnî*) **first** (Jer 25:1).

(2097e) רֵאשִׁית (*rē'shît*) **first, beginning, best.**

(2097f) מְרַאֲשׁוֹת (*mᵉra'ăshôt*) **place at the head, head place** (e.g. Gen 28:11, 18; 1Sam 19:13, 16).

The primary meaning of this root is "head. " It is common to all Semitic languages and appears in its root forms and derivatives nearly 750 times. It is used for the "head" as part of the body (Gen 3:15) and by extension for the notion of "chief ' of a family (Exo 6:14), as "chief officer" of the divisions of Israel (Exo 18:25) and the like. The unique Hebraic character of this usage is clear in the OT as the root is rarely applied to chiefs of Gentile nations. It is used also for the top or summit of a geographical feature such as a mountain or hill (Exo 17:9) and the upper part of a building or architectural feature (Gen 11:4; 2Chr 3:15) and as a personification for such features (Psa 24:7, 9). The root was utilized in many colloquial expressions for plant names (Job 10:4) parts or portions of things (Gen 2:10) and terms for artifacts. In this last category is the usage of the root for both "head stone" (Zech 4:7) and "chief corner stone" (Psa 118:22). This passage and usage are carried over into the NT and quoted by Jesus concerning his being rejected by the Jews (Mt 21:42; Lk 20:17; Eph 2:20; 1Pet 2:7). The root is widely used in the OT with other terms in the sense of the superlative, since Hebrew does not have any simple form to express the third degree. There are many examples of this usage (Exo 30:23) where the meaning is "best," "foremost," the uniquely finest, which alone was fit for the service of God. This theological meaning is carried over to the officers of the temple (2Kings 25:18) and the best musicians (Neh 11:17). In most of the versions there are

divergencies in the translation of *rō'sh* when it is used in the sense of "chief" as for example (Num 31:26) and many similar passages KJV reads "chief, " NIV and RSV read "head" but none are completely consistent. The root appears in many passages in the sense of "sum" or "total" (Prov 8:26) RSV "first" with a footnote which cities the difficulty of the Hebrew. The KJV consistently reads "total, " "sum" in passages dealing with the census of Israel (Exo 30:12; Num 1:2 etc.) and the Aramaic form appears in the unusual sense of the "sum" or "substance" of a dream (Dan 7:1). Although many of the usages of the root can be traced back to Akkadian and ultimately to Sumerian, the reliance on the nation's "head" as a high officer or chosen personage is developed in Hebrew to much greater degree than the other languages. The theological use of the root to designate divinely appointed offices in the OT is carried over into the NT in such terms as "head of the church" (Eph 5:23), a title ascribed to Christ.

ri'shôn. First, primary (ordinal number). This adjective, a derivative of the same root as *rō'sh* (q.v.), is cognate to Akkadian *rēštu*. The word occurs over 180 times in the OT in a very wide variety of connotations and contexts. it is used in three distinct senses and a number of special constructions. The overwhelming number of occurrences are best translated "former," "first" of two, of time (Gen 25:25); "previous" (Num 21:26); "former men," "the patriarchs" (Deut 19:14); "former times," "former events" (Isa 41:22). The next most common usage is in the sense of "first," as in "first" of mankind (Job 15:7); "first" day of a ritual (Deut 16:4); "first" to fall in battle (1Sam 14:14); "first" as "briefest" (Ezr 9:6). The third most common usage is in the sense of "before," "formerly" in time (Gen 28:19; Deut 13:10). There are other more specialized usages, "first in command" (2Kings 20:17); "set out first" (Num 10:14); "to preparefirst" (1Kings 18:25). Since the Hebrew orthography at least in later days admitted no easy numerical notation, all ordinals are spelled out and vocalized in the MT. However, there is some scant evidence that there was a notational system for both cardinal and ordinal numbers in use in antiquity.

rē'shît. First, beginning, choicest, first/best of a group. A feminine noun derived from the root *rō'sh*, it appears fifty times in nearly all parts of the OT. The primary meaning is "first" or "beginning" of a series. This term may refer to the initiation of a series of historical events (Gen 10:10; Jer 26:1) but it also refers to a foundational

or necessary condition as the reverence or fear of God (Psa 111:10; Prov 1:7) and the initiation, as opposed to the results, of a life (Job 8:7; Job 42:12). It is used frequently in the special sense of the choicest or best of a group or class of things, particularly in reference to items to be set aside for God's service or sacrifice. The "first fruits" (Lev 2:12; Lev 23:10; Neh 12:44) and "choicest" (Num 18:12) fruits are so distinguished. Difficult usages of the term occur in several passages. In Deut 33:21 the KJV reads "first part" which is followed by JPS, however the RSV, "best of the land" is preferred. In Dan 11:41 the KJV reads "chief of the children of Ammon," but RSV reads "main part of the Ammonites, "the more probable reading is "best of the Ammonites." The most important use of *rē'shît* in the OT occurs in Gen 1:1 where it is combined with the proclitic preposition b (q.v.). There has been a great deal of debate over this use of *rē'shît*. Many commentators both ancient and modern have tried to read the phrase as "when-" rather than "in the beginning" as do several modern versions. The chief modern justification for this interpretation of the root is to relate it to the phrase " *enūma elish*" which begins the Babylonian epic of creation. However there is no evidence to connect the two different terms, the one in Hebrew and the other in Babylonian (see White, W., "Enuma Elish," in ZPEB, II, p. 314). The proper interpretation of *rē'shît* can be deduced from the other occurrences and the witness of all ancient versions. The NT (Jn 1:1) translates the Hebrew and follows the LXX precisely in its reading of (Gen 1:1) the first phrase of the OT. The use of this root leaves no doubt that Gen 1:1 opens with the very first and initial act of the creation of the cosmos.

Bibliography: Bartlett, J.R., "The use of the Word ראשׁ as a Title in the Old Testament, " VT 19:1-10, THAT, II, pp. 701-14. W.W.