



Bereshit

Bereshit (Genesis) 1:1 - 6:8

Bereshit begins with a description of the creation of the world. Seven Hebrew words, which roughly translate as “*In the beginning, G-d created the Heavens and the Earth*” usher in what scholars have often called the Hebrew revolution. What was so revolutionary about these seven words?

To understand how revolutionary the monotheistic concept was, we need to know about the polytheistic (worship of many gods) culture of the ancient world. All polytheistic cultures share a common belief as to the origins of the world. Nature (according to the various traditions) somehow created the gods, and from the very material that the forces of Nature used to create the gods, created humanity as well. That is why according to the great myths and stories of polytheistic cultures, there are accounts of ordinary humans becoming gods, and gods being demoted to mere human status. The “gods” have human-like needs, desires, rivalries, and passions. Think of the accounts of the gods recorded in Greek mythology, and you will recall the stories about their lives, their origins, their trials, their success and their failures. In the polytheistic accounts, the gods rise and fall, yet Nature remains eternal and all powerful.

The first seven words of the Torah change that paradigm forever. Instead of *Nature* being supreme, its origins unchallenged, now *G-d* is supreme, and needs no explanation or justification. It is *G-d* who literally wills nature into being, and then from “nature” itself, *G-d* creates humanity.

Contrary to the polytheistic view that sees the great divide between Nature, and all else, the Torah posits that the great divide is between the *Creator of the world*, and everything else. This idea leads to the religious viewpoint that replaces polytheism with monotheism, the belief in one supreme, omnipotent *G-d* who, by virtue of His unchallenged power, may dictate a universal code of morality to His subjects, and later, choose one family from among all the people of the earth with whom to establish a special relationship.



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