

2097 ראש (rōš) I, *head; top, summit, upper part, chief, total, sum.*

#### Derivatives

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

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

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

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

2097e ראשית (rē' šît) *first, beginning, best.*

2097f מראשות (mē ra'ăšôt) *place at the head, head place* (e.g. Gen 28:11, 18; I Sam 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 (Ex 6:14), as “chief officer” of the divisions of Israel (Ex 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 (Ex 17:9) and the upper part of a building or architectural feature (Gen 11:4; II Chr 3:15) and as a personification for such features (Ps 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” (Ps 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; I Pet 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 (Ex 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 (II Kgs 25:18) and the best musicians (Neh 11:17). In most of the versions there are divergencies in the translation of rōš 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) ASV “first” with a footnote which cites the difficulty of the Hebrew. The KJV consistently reads “total,” “sum” in passages dealing with the census of Israel (Ex 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.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William White, “2097 שֹׁרֵט,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 825.