



# The Hebrew Cosmogony

This world came into existence out of a chaos of fluid driven by a divine blast: this is the epic beginning of the Book of Genesis: “The earth was chaotic and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and God’s wind moved upon the face of the fluid.” From this primeval matter, in a process of subsequent creations, was born the home of the living.

Already before the birth of our Earth, worlds were shaped and brought into existence, only to be destroyed in the course of time: “Nor is this world inhabited by man the first of things earthly created by God. He made several worlds before ours, but he destroyed them all.”<sup>(1)</sup> The Earth underwent re-shaping: six consecutive remouldings. Heaven and Earth were changed in every catastrophe. Six times the Earth was rebuilt—without entire extirpation of life on it, but with major catastrophes. Six ages have passed into the great beyond; this is the seventh creation, the time in which we live.

According to another tradition, several heavens were created, seven in fact. Also seven earths were created: the most removed being the seventh Erez, followed by the sixth Adamah, the fifth Arka, the fourth Harabbah, the third Yabbashah, the second Tebel and our own land called Heled, and like the others, it is separated from the foregoing by abyss, chaos, and waters.<sup>(2)</sup>

The description permits an interpretation that all the seven earths exist simultaneously; but a deeper insight will allow us to recognize that the original idea did not admit seven concurrent but separate firmaments and worlds in space, but only consecutive in time, and built one out of another: “The seven heavens form a unity, the seven kinds of earth form a unity, and the heavens and the earth together also form a unity.”<sup>(3)</sup> The Hebrew cosmogony in its true sense is a conception of worlds built and reshaped with the purpose of bringing creation closer to perfection. The separation of one world from another by abyss and chaos evidently refers to the cataclysms that separated the ages.<sup>(4)</sup>

## References

1. L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, (Philadelphia, 1925), vol. I, p. 4.
2. Ginzberg, *Legends*, I, 10f.
3. Ginzberg, *Legends*, I, 11.
4. [The notion of a succession of worlds created and destroyed is common to many nations of antiquity. Vicentius Sangermano (*Cosmographia Burmana*, quoted by F. Buchanan, “On the Religion and Literature of the Burmas,” *Asiatick Researches* VI [1799], p. 174, 180) wrote: “The Universe is called by the Burmas *Logha*, which signifies successive destruction and reproduction.... The Burma writings do not conceive of one world, but of an infinite number, one constantly succeeding another; so that when one is destroyed, another of the same form and structure arises....”].