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THE CREATION ACCORDING TO GENESIS

(a) When God set out to create Heaven and Earth, He found nothing around Him but Tohu and Bohu, namely Chaos and Emptiness. The face of the Deep, over which His Spirit hovered, was clothed in darkness.

On the first day of Creation, therefore, He said: 'Let there be light!', and light appeared.

On the second day, He made a firmament to divide the Upper Waters from the Lower Waters, and named it 'Heaven'.

On the third day, He assembled the Lower Waters in one place and let dry land emerge. After naming the dry land 'Earth', and the assembled waters 'Sea', He told Earth to bring forth grass and herbs and trees.

On the fourth day, He created the sun, moon and stars.

On the fifth day, the sea-beasts, fish and birds.

On the sixth day, the land-beasts, creeping things and mankind.

On the seventh day, satisfied with His work, He rested.¹

(b) But some say that after creating Earth and Heaven, God caused a mist to moisten the dry land so that grasses and herbs could spring up. Next, He made a garden in Eden, also a man named Adam to be its overseer, and planted it with trees. He then created all beasts, birds, creeping things; and lastly woman.²

1. *Genesis* 1-11. 3.

2. *Genesis* 11. 4-23.

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1. For many centuries, Jewish and Christian theologians agreed that the accounts of the world's origin given in *Genesis* were not only inspired by God, but owed nothing to any other scriptures. This extreme view has now been abandoned by all but fundamentalists. Since 1876, several versions of Akkadian (that is, Babylonian and Assyrian) Creation Epics have been excavated and published. The longest of these, known as *Enuma Elish* from its initial two words—which mean 'when on high'—is assumed to have been written in the early part of the second millennium B.C. It has survived almost complete on seven cuneiform tablets containing an average

of 156 lines apiece. The discovery did not altogether astonish scholars familiar with Berossus's summary of Creation myths, quoted by Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea; for Berossus, born in the fourth century B.C., had been a priest of Bel at Babylon.

2. Another version of the same Epic, written both in Babylonian and Sumerian as a prologue to an incantation for purifying a temple, was discovered at Sippar on a tablet dated from the sixth century B.C. It runs in part as follows:

*The holy house, the house of the gods, in a holy place had not yet
been made;
No reed had sprung up, no tree had been created;
No brick had been laid, no building had been erected;
No house had been constructed, no city had been built;
No city had been made, no creature had been brought into being;
Nippur had not been made, Ekur had not been built;
Erech had not been made, Eana had not been built;
The Deep had not been made, Eridu had not been built;
Of the holy house, the house of the gods, the habitation had not
been made;
All lands were sea.*

*Then there was a movement in the midst of the sea;
At that time Eridu was made, and Essagil was built,
Essagil, where in the midst of the deep the god Lugal-du-kuda
dwells;
The city of Babylon was built, and Essagil was finished.*

*The gods, the spirits of the earth, Marduk made at the same time,
The holy city, the dwelling of their hearts' desire, they proclaimed
supreme.*

*Marduk laid a reed on the face of the waters,
He formed dust and poured it out beside the reed;
That he might cause the gods to dwell in the dwelling of their
hearts' desire,
He formed mankind.*

*With him the goddess Aruru created the seed of mankind.
The beasts of the field and living things in the field he formed.
The Tigris and Euphrates he created and established them in their
place;
Their name he proclaimed in goodly manner.
The grass, the rush of the marsh, the reed and the forest he
created,
The green herb of the field he created,*

*The lands, the marshes and the swamps;
The wild cow and her young, the wild calf, the ewe and her young,
the lamb of the fold.*

*Orchards and forests;
The he-goat and the mountain goat . . .*

The Lord Marduk built a dam beside the sea.

*Reeds he formed, trees he created;
Bricks he laid, buildings he erected;
Houses he made, cities he built;
Cities he made, creatures he brought into being.
Nippur he made, Ekur he built;
Erech he made, Eana he built.*

3. The longer Creation Epic begins by telling how 'when on high the heavens had not been named', Apsu the Begetter and Mother Tiamat mingled chaotically and produced a brood of dragon-like monsters. Several ages passed before a younger generation of gods arose. One of these, Ea god of Wisdom, challenged and killed Apsu. Tiamat thereupon married her own son Kingu, bred monsters from him, and prepared to take vengeance on Ea.

The only god who now dared oppose Tiamat was Ea's son Marduk. Tiamat's allies were her eleven monsters. Marduk relied upon the seven winds, his bow and arrow and storm-chariot, and a terrible coat of mail. He had smeared his lips with prophylactic red paste, and tied on his wrist a herb that made him proof against poison; flames crowned his head. Before their combat, Tiamat and Marduk exchanged taunts, curses and incantations. When they came to grips, Marduk soon caught Tiamat in his net, sent one of his winds into her belly to tear out the guts, then brained and shot her full of arrows. He bound the corpse with chains and stood victoriously upon it. Having chained the eleven monsters and cast them into prison—where they became gods of the underworld—he snatched the 'Tablets of Fate' from Kingu's breast and, fastening them upon his own, split Tiamat into halves like a shell-fish. One of these he used as firmament, to impede the upper waters from flooding the earth; and the other as a rocky foundation for earth and sea. He also created the sun, the moon, the five lesser planets and the constellations, giving his kinsmen charge over them; and finally created man from the blood of Kingu, whom he had condemned to death as the instigator of Tiamat's rebellion.

4. Much the same account appears in the Berossian summary though Bel, not Marduk, is its divine hero. In the corresponding Greek myth, perhaps of Hittite provenience, Mother Earth created the giant Typhon, at whose advent the gods all fled to Egypt, until Zeus boldly killed him and his monstrous sister Delphyne with a thunderbolt.

5. The first account of Creation (*Genesis* i. 1–ii. 3) was composed at Jerusalem soon after the return from Babylonian Exile. God is here named 'Elohim'. The second account (*Genesis* ii. 4–22) is also Judaeic, possibly of Edomite origin, and pre-Exilic. Here God was originally named 'Yahweh', but the priestly editor has changed this to 'Yahweh Elohim' (usually translated as 'the Lord God'), thus identifying the God of *Genesis* i with that of *Genesis* ii, and giving the versions an appearance of uniformity. He did not, however, eliminate certain contradictory details in the order of creation, as will be seen from the following tables:

<i>Genesis</i> i	<i>Genesis</i> ii
Heaven	Earth
Earth	Heaven
Light	Mist
Firmament	Man
Dry Land	Trees
Grasses and Trees	Rivers
Luminaries	Beasts and Cattle
Sea-beasts	Birds
Birds	Woman
Cattle, Creeping things, Beasts	
Man and Woman	

Jews and Christians have always been puzzled by these contradictions, and tried to explain them away. The seven-day scheme in the first account provides the mythical charter for man's observance of the Sabbath; since God, who rested on the seventh day, blessed and hallowed it. This point is expressly made in one version of the Ten Commandments (*Exodus* xx. 8–11). Some early rabbinic commentators observe that the main elements were created in the first three days; and embellished in the second three; and that a close symmetry can be discerned between the first and fourth days, the second and fifth, the third and sixth.

First Day
Creation of the heavens
its separation from
darkness.

Second Day
Creation of the heavens
and separation of the
upper waters from the
lower.

Fourth Day
Creation of the lumi-
naries—sun, moon and
stars—to separate day
from night and season
from season.

Fifth Day
Creation of birds that
fly through the heavens,
and of fish that swim
through the lower waters.

<i>Third Day</i>	<i>Sixth Day</i>
Creation of dry land and establishment of its immobile woods and herbs.	Creation of beasts, men and creeping things that walk on dry land.

6. This scheme, and others like it, prove the rabbis' desire to credit God with systematic thought. Their labours would not have been needed, however, had it occurred to them that the order of Creation was tied to the order of the planetary gods in the Babylonian week, and therefore to the seven branches of the Menorah, or Sacred Candelabrum—both Zechariah in his vision (iv. 10), and Josephus (*Wars* v. 5. 5), make this identification of the Menorah with the Seven Planets—and that God claimed all these planetary powers for Himself. Since Nergal, a pastoral god, came third in the week, whereas Nabu, god of astronomy, came fourth, pasture was given precedence to the stars in the order of Creation. The *Enuma Elish* has the following order: separation of heaven from earth and sea; creation of planets and stars; creation of trees and herbs; creation of animals and fish (but the fifth and sixth tablets are fragmentary); Marduk's forming of man from Kingu's blood.

7. The second Creation account is vaguer than the first, divulges less about the pre-Creation Universe, and has no structure comparable to that of *Genesis* i. In fact, it implies that the work of Creation occupied a single day. The opening statement recalls several Near Eastern cosmogonies, by describing the pre-Creation Universe in terms of the various things which had not hitherto existed. Trees and shrubs were not yet in the earth, grasses and herbs had not yet sprung up because God had not yet sent rain, and there was still no man to till the soil (*Genesis* ii. 5). Then came the great day in which God created the generations of heaven and earth (*Genesis* ii. 4a): a mist rose from the soil (presumably at His command), and watered it. The soil (*adama*) was now in condition for man (*adam*) to be formed from it. God duly breathed life into man's nostrils and gave him a living soul. Then He planted a garden, eastward of Eden, and ordered man to dress and keep it (*Genesis* ii. 6–9, 15).

8. *Genesis* i resembles Babylonian cosmogonies, which begin with the emergence of earth from a primeval watery chaos, and are all metaphorical of how dry land emerges annually from the winter floods of Tigris and Euphrates. Creation is thus represented as the world's first flowering after the primeval watery chaos: a Spring season, when birds and beasts mate. *Genesis* ii, however, mirrors Canaanite geographic and climatic conditions. The pre-Creation Universe is sun-scorched, parched and barren, as if after a long summer. When finally autumn approaches, the first sign of rain is morning mist risen dense and white from the valleys. Creation as pictured in *Genesis* ii. 4 ff took place on just such an autumn day. The Babylonian version, which made Spring the creative season, was borrowed during the Captivity, and the first of Nissan became a Jewish New Year's day. The

earlier autumnal version, however, required the first of Tishri to be observed as the true New Year's day.

9. Irreconcilable views as to the season of Creation were held by rival Jewish schools from the first century A.D. onward. Philo of Alexandria maintained, with the Greek Stoics, that the Universe had been created in the Spring, and was followed by Rabbi Jehoshua and others. But Rabbi Eliczer preferred the autumnal Creation, and his view gained the upper hand among the Orthodox; it was decided that the first of Tishri had been God's New Year's day. Others, while agreeing on an autumnal Creation, held that God's New Year fell on the twenty-fifth of Elul, and that the first of Tishri, five days later, celebrated Adam's birth.

10. Creation being originally understood in terms of procreation, not fabrication, its central figure was a matriarch. Thus in the Greek myth, Eurynome, Goddess of All Things, rose naked from Chaos, divided sea from sky, danced upon the waves, stirred up the wind, was impregnated by it in the shape of a great serpent named Ophion or Ophioneus, and laid the World Egg. A similar story is told in *Orphic Fragments* 60, 61, 70 and 89: Night, the Creatrix, lays a silver egg from which Love is hatched to set the Universe in motion. Night lives in a cave, displaying herself in triad as Night, Order and Justice.

11. Most Near Eastern myths, however, derive from a time when part, at least, of the matriarch's divine prerogatives had been delegated to her male warrior-escort. This stage is reflected in the *Enuma Elish's* account of how the Universe proceeds from a union between Apsu the Begetter and Mother Tiamat; and in Berossus's account of the Creation—summarized by Alexander Polyhistor—where after El's victory over Tiamat, the Goddess Aruru formed man from El's own blood kneaded with clay.

12. The Syrian philosopher Damascius (early sixth century A.D.) summarizes a primitive version of the *Enuma Elish* myth, paralleled by the Egyptian Sky-goddess Nut's union with the Earth-god Geb; and by the Greek Sky-god Uranus's union with the Earth-goddess Gaia. Damascius names Tiamat before Apsu, and accords similar precedence to the female of each divine couple he mentions.

13. Were it not for the Tehom-Tiamat parallel, we should never guess that Tehom represents the formidable Babylonian Mother-goddess who bore the gods, was rebelled against by them, and finally surrendered her own body to serve as building material for the Universe. Not even the female gender of the Hebrew name 'Tehom' can be read as significant in this connection, since in Hebrew every noun must either be male or female, and many cosmic terms are female even when lacking the female suffix *ah*, or of ambivalent gender.

14. Yet goddesses were well known to the Hebrews of Biblical times who worshipped in the groves of the Goddess Asherah (*Judges* iii. 7; vi. 25-26, 30; 1 *Kings* xvi. 33; xviii. 19), and bowed down to her images (2

Kings xxi. 7; 2 *Chronicles* xvii. 6, etc.). They also honoured Astarte, the goddess of the Phoenicians and Philistines (*Judges* ii. 13; x. 6; 1 *Samuel* xxxi. 10; 1 *Kings* xi. 5, 33; 2 *Kings* xxiii. 13, etc.). Not long before Nebuchadrezzar's destruction of the Judaean Kingdom (586 B.C.), Jewish women were offering cakes to her as the 'Queen of Heaven' (*Jeremiah* vii. 18): *alias* Anath, whose name survives in the Bible as that of Shamgar's mother (*Judges* iii. 31; v. 6) and of the priestly village Anathot, Jeremiah's home, now Anatha, north of Jerusalem. She had become so dear to Jews of both sexes, that those who escaped to Egypt vowed to serve her with libations and cakes made in her image (*Jeremiah* xliv. 15-19).

15. Though Astarte and Asherah were worshipped by all classes to the very end of the Judaean monarchy, nowhere in the Bible is any hint found of their connexion with El or Elohim—unless God's repudiation in *Ezekiel* xxiii of the lecherous Aholah and Aholibah is directed against these goddesses rather than against Jerusalem and Samaria, the main seats of their worship. Nor does any Hebrew tradition assign to either goddess the rôle of Creatrix. Yet Astarte's dove suggests that she had once been so regarded.

16. The monotheistic editor of the cosmogony in *Genesis* i and ii could assign no part in Creation to anyone but God, and therefore omitted all pre-existing elements or beings which might be held divine. Such abstractions as Chaos (*tohu wa-bohu*), Darkness (*hoshekh*), and the Deep (*tehom*) would, however, tempt no worshippers: so these took the place of the ancient matriarchal deities.

17. Though the revolutionary concept of an eternal, absolute, omnipotent and only God was first proposed by Pharaoh Akhenaten (see 56. 1. 4.), and either adopted by the Hebrews, whom he seems to have protected, or re-invented by them, yet the name 'Elohim' (usually translated as 'God'), found in *Genesis* i, is the Hebrew variant of an ancient Semitic name for one god of many—Ilu among the Assyrians and Babylonians; El among the Hittites and in the Ugaritic texts; Il, or Ilum, among the South Arabians. El headed the Phoenician pantheon and is often mentioned in Ugaritic poems (dating from the fourteenth century B.C.) as 'Bull El', which recalls the golden bull-calves made by Aaron (*Exodus* xxxii. 1-6, 24, 35) and Jeroboam (1 *Kings* xii. 28-29) as emblems of God; and Zedekiah's impersonation of God as an iron-horned bull (1 *Kings* xxii. 11).

18. In *Genesis* ii, the name 'Elohim' is combined with a second divine name pronounced *Yahweh* (usually transcribed as *Jehovah*, and translated as 'Lord') and regarded as an abbreviation of the full name *Yahweh asher yihweh*, 'He causes to be what is' (*Exodus* iii. 14). In personal names, this was further shortened into *Yeho* (e.g., *Yehonathan*, or 'Jonathan'), or *Yo* (e.g., *Yonathan* or 'Jonathan'); or *Yahu* (e.g., *Yirm'yahu* or 'Jeremiah'); or *Yah* (e.g., *Ahiyah*). That *Yahweh* in *Genesis* is given the divine sur-

name *Elohim*, shows him to have become a transcendental God, credited with all the great feats of Creation.

The titles and attributes of many other Near Eastern deities were successively awarded to Yahweh Elohim. For instance, in the Ugaritic poems, a standing epithet of the God Baal, son of Dagon, is 'Rider of Clouds'; *Psalm* LXV. 5 awards it to this Hebrew God, who also, like Baal 'The God of Saphon', has a palace in the 'farthest north' (*yark'the saphon*), imagined as a lofty mountain (*Isaiah* XIV. 13; *Psalm* XLVIII. 3).

19. Moreover, many of the acts attributed in Ugaritic mythology to the bloodthirsty Goddess Anath are attributed in the Bible to Yahweh Elohim. The Ugaritic description of how Anath massacres her enemies:

*She plunged knee-deep in the blood of soldiers,
Neck-high in the gore of their companies,
Until she is sated
She fights in the house . . .*

recalls the second Isaiah's vision of God's vengeance upon Israel's enemies (*Isaiah* LXIII. 3):

*Yes, I trod them in Mine anger,
And trampled them in My fury;
And their lifeblood sprinkled upon My garments,
And I have stained all My raiment . . .*

Prophets and psalmists were as careless about the pagan origins of the religious imagery they borrowed, as priests were about the adaptation of heathen sacrificial rites to God's service. The crucial question was: in whose honour these prophecies and hymns should now be sung, or these rites enacted. If in honour of Yahweh Elohim, not Anath, Baal or Tammuz, all was proper and pious.

2

THE CREATION ACCORDING TO OTHER
BIBLICAL TEXTS

(a) According to others, God created Heavens, complete with Sun, Moon and stars, by a single word of command. Then, clad in a glorious garment of light, He stretched out the Heavens like a round tent-cloth, exactly cut to cover the Deep. Having confined the Upper Waters in a fold of His garment, He established His secret Pavilion above the Heavens, walling it with a thick darkness like sackcloth, carpeting it with the same, and resting its beams upon the Upper Waters. There He set up His divine Throne.¹

(b) While performing the work of Creation, God would ride across the Deep upon clouds, or cherubs, or the wings of the storm; or catch at passing winds and make them His messengers. He set Earth on immovable foundations: by carefully weighing the mountains, sinking some as pillars in the waters of the Deep, arching the Earth over them and locking the arch with a keystone of other mountains.²

(c) The roaring waters of the Deep arose and Tehom, their Queen, threatened to flood God's handiwork. But, in His fiery chariot, He rode the waves and flung at her great volleys of hail, lightning and thunderbolts. He despatched her monstrous ally Leviathan with a blow on its skull; and the monster Rahab with a sword thrust through its heart. Awed by His voice, Tehom's waters subsided. The rivers fled backwards up the hills and down into the valleys beyond. Tehom, trembling, acknowledged defeat. God uttered a shout of victory, and dried the floods until Earth's foundations could be seen. Then He measured in the hollow of His hand what water was left, poured it into the Sea Bed, and set sand dunes as its perpetual boundary; at the same time making a decree which Tehom could never break, however violently her salt waves might rage—she being, as it were, locked behind gates across which a bolt has been shot.³

(d) God then measured out dry earth, fixing its limits. He allowed Tehom's fresh waters to rise as valley springs, and rain to fall gently on the mountain tops from His upper chambers. Thus He made

grass grow as fodder for cattle; also corn and grapes for the nourishment of man; and the great cedars of Lebanon for shade. He ordered the Moon to mark the seasons; and the Sun to divide day from night and summer from winter; and the stars to limit the blackness of night. He filled the earth with beasts, birds and creeping things; and the sea with fishes, sea-beasts and monsters. He let wild beasts roam about after dark; but once the Sun arose they must return to their lairs.⁴

The Morning Stars, as they watched, burst into a song of praise; and all the sons of God shouted for joy.⁵

(e) Having thus completed the work of Creation, God withdrew to a sanctuary on Mount Paran in the Land of Teman. Whenever He leaves this dwelling place, Earth trembles and mountains smoke.⁶

1. *Psalm* xxxiii. 6; *civ.* 2; *Isaiah* xl. 22 and xliv. 24; *Psalm* civ. 6; *Isaiah* l. 3; *Psalm* xviii. 10-12; 1 *Kings* viii. 12; *Psalms* civ. 3; xciii. 1-2.
2. *Psalm* xviii. 10 and *Nahum* i. 4; *Proverbs* xxx. 4; *Psalm* civ. 3-5; *Isaiah* xl. 12; *Psalm* lxxv. 7.
3. *Psalm* xciii. 3; *Jeremiah* xxxi. 35; *Job* ix. 13; *Psalm* lxxxix. 11; *Job* xxvi. 12-13; *Isaiah* li. 9; *Psalm* civ. 6-8; lxxiv. 13-14; *Nahum* i. 4; *Psalm* xviii. 15-16; *Isaiah* xl. 12; *Psalm* xxxiii. 7; *Jeremiah* v. 22; *Job* xxxviii. 8-11.
4. *Psalm* lxxxiv. 17; *Job* xxxviii. 5; *Psalm* civ. 10-26; *Jeremiah* xxxi. 35.
5. *Job* xxxviii. 7.
6. *Habakkuk* iii. 3; *Psalm* civ. 32.

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1. This third account of the Creation, built up from Biblical references elsewhere than in *Genesis*, recalls not only Babylonian, but Ugaritic and Canaanite, cosmogonies; and notably expands the brief reference to Tohu, Bohu and the Deep. Such a Creator as El, Marduk, Baal, or Jehovah, must first struggle against water—personified by the Prophets as Leviathan, Rahab, or the Great Dragon, not only because the Creatrix whom he displaces is a goddess of Fertility, and therefore of water, but because the matriarchate can be portrayed in myth as a chaotic commingling of the two sexes which delays the establishment of patriarchal social order—like rain pouring down into the sea, which delays the appearance of dry land. Thus male and female principles must first be decently separated, as when the Egyptian cosmocrator Shu lifted the Sky-goddess Nut from her embrace of the Earth-god Geb; or when Yahweh Elohim tore the Upper Male Waters from their embrace of the Lower Female Waters (see 4. e). The Babylonian Marduk, when slicing Tiamat in two, was really parting her from Apsu, God of the Upper Waters.

2. In Ugaritic mythology, Baal fixes the sea bed as the abode of the defeated water, which is treated as both a deity and an element:

*O fisherman . . .
Take a large seine in thy two hands,
Cast it into El's beloved Yamm,
Into the Sea of El, the Benign,
Into the Deep of El . . .*

3. What 'Tohu' and 'Bohu' originally meant is disputed. But add the suffix *m* to Tohu (*thw*) and it becomes Tehom (*thwm*), the Biblical name for a primitive sea-monster. Tehom, in the plural, becomes Tehomot (*thwmwt*). With the same suffixes, Bohu becomes Behom and Behomot (*bhwmwt*), a variant form of Job's Behemoth, the dry-land counterpart of the sea-monster Leviathan. Leviathan cannot be easily distinguished from Rahab, Tannin, Nahash or any other mythical creatures that personify water. The story underlying *Genesis* i. 2 may therefore be that the world in its primeval state consisted of a sea-monster Tohu and a land-monster Bohu. If so, Tohu's identity with Tehomot, and Bohu's with Behemoth (see 6. *n-q*), has been suppressed for doctrinal reasons (see i. 13, 16)—Tohu and Bohu being now read as unpersonified states of emptiness or chaos; and God being made responsible for the subsequent creation of Tehomot (or Leviathan) and Behemoth.

4. The Babylonian sea-monster corresponding with the Hebrew Tehomot appears as Tiamat, Tamtu, Tamdu and Taawatu; and in Damascius's *First Principles* as Tauthe. Thus the root is *taw*, which stands in the same relation to Tiamat as Tohu does to Tehom and Tehomot. Moreover, that *tehom* never takes the definite article in Hebrew proves it to have once been a proper name, like *Tiamat*. Tehomot, then, is the Hebrew equivalent of Mother Tiamat, beloved by the God Apsu, whose name developed from the older Sumerian Abzu; and Abzu was the imaginary sweet-water abyss from which Enki, God of Wisdom, emerged. Rahab ('haughtiness') is a synonym of Tehomot; in *Job* xxvi. 12 occur the parallel lines:

*By His power He threatened the Sea,
And by His skill He shattered Rahab.*

5. The hovering of the Spirit of God over the waste of waters in *Genesis* i. 2 suggests a bird, and in an early Biblical poem God is compared to an 'eagle hovering over her young' (*Deuteronomy* xxxii. 11). But the word *ruah*, usually translated as 'spirit', originally means 'wind', which recalls the Phoenician creation myth quoted by Philo of Byblus: the prime chaos was acted upon by Wind which became enamoured of its own elements. Another Byblian cosmogonist makes Baou, the female principle, impregnated by this wind. The Goddess Baou, wife to the Wind-god Colpia, was also identified with the Greek Goddess Nyx ('Night'), whom Hesiod

makes the Mother of All Things. In Greece she was Eurynome, who took the Serpent Ophioneus for a lover (see 1. 10).

6. The heretical Ophites of the first century A.D. believed that the world had been generated by a serpent. The Brazen Serpent made, according to Hebrew tradition, by Moses at God's command (*Numbers* xxi. 8-9) and revered in the Temple Sanctuary until the reforming King Hezekiah destroyed it (*2 Kings* xviii. 4), suggests that Yahweh had at one time been identified with a Serpent-god—as Zeus was in Orphic art. Memory of Yahweh as a serpent survived in a late midrash according to which, when God attacked Moses (*Exodus* iv. 24 ff) in a desert lodging place in the dead of night, He assumed the shape of a huge serpent and swallowed Moses as far as his loins. The custom at Jerusalem of killing the sacrificial victims on the north side of the altar (*Leviticus* i. 11; M. Zebahim v. 1-5) points to an early North-Wind cult, like that at Athens. In the original myth, presumably, the Great Mother rose from Chaos; the wind of her advent became a serpent and impregnated her; she thereupon became a bird (dove or eagle) and laid the world-egg—which the serpent coiled about and hatched.

7. According to a Galilean psalm (lxxxix), God created Heaven and Earth, north and south, Tabor and Hermon, only after subduing Rahab and scattering His other enemies. And according to *Job* ix. 8-13, when He stretched out the Heavens and trod upon the sea-waves, the 'helpers of Rahab' stooped beneath Him. These helpers suggest Tiamat's allies in her struggle against Marduk, when he 'subdued' her with a sacred imprecation.

8. Biblical allusions to Leviathan as a many-headed sea-monster, or as a 'fleeing' serpent (*nahash bariah*), or 'crooked' serpent (*nahash aqalaton*), recall the Ugaritic texts: 'If you smite Lotan . . . the crooked serpent, the mighty one with seven heads . . .' and: 'Baal will run through with his spear, even as he struck Lotan, the crooked serpent with seven heads.' The language approximates Biblical Hebrew: Leviathan (*lwytn*) appears as *lotan*; *nsh* *brh* as *bthn* (= Hebrew *pthn*, 'serpent') *lrh*; and *nsh* 'qltwn, as *bthn* 'qltn in Ugaritic (ANET 138b).

9. Tiamat's mate Apsu, a personification of the Upper Waters, has been correlated (by Gunkel and others) with the Hebrew term *ephes*, meaning 'extremity, nothingness'. The word usually appears in dual form: *aphsayim* or *aphse eres*, 'the ends of the earth' (*Deuteronomy* xxxiii. 17; *Micah* v. 3; *Psalms* ii. 8; etc.). Its watery connotation survives in a Biblical prophecy (*Zechariah* ix. 10): 'His dominion shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth,' where poetic convention requires that 'the ends of the earth' should also mean 'river', presumably the Ocean Stream. Similarly, in *Proverbs* xxx. 4, *aphsayim* corresponds with 'waters':

*Who hath bound the waters in His garment?
Who hath established all the aphysayim of the earth?*

That the Creator holds the cosmic elements in his fist, or hands, is a favourite theme of Near Eastern myth. God's victory over *ephes* or *aphsayim* has been recorded in *Psalms* lxxvii. 8 and *1 Samuel* ii. 10. *Isaiah* (xlvi. 22), after declaring that God alone created the earth, addresses the *aphsayim* in His name: 'Look unto me and be saved, all ye *aphsayim* of the earth!'

10. Though the Hebrew prophets disguised the names of Apsu, Tiamat and Baou as empty abstractions, yet *Isaiah* xl. 17:

*All the nations are as nothing before Him,
They are accounted by Him as Ephes and Tohu . . .*

immediately follows a passage recalling God's feats in the days of Creation. And in *Isaiah* xxxiv. 11-12, Tohu, Bohu and Ephes are used with plain reference to their mythological meaning, when the prophet predicts Edom's destruction:

*He [God] shall stretch over it
The line of Tohu
And the stones of Bohu . . .
And all her princes
Shall be Ephes . . .*

11. 'He confined Tehom with a bolt and two doors,' refers to a double door and the bolt shot across its wings. The same image occurs in the *Enuma Elish*: after Marduk had killed Tiamat and formed the Heavens from one half of her body, he 'shot a bolt across, and placed watchers over it to prevent Tiamat from letting out her waters.' The text of the *Enuma Elish* suggests that *nahash bariah*, the phrase in *Isaiah* xxvii. 1 and *Job* xxvi. 13 describing Leviathan, could also mean 'the bolted-in serpent'. *Bariah*, without any change in vocalization, means 'bolted, shut in', as well as 'fleeing'.

12. Paran, on which God took up His abode according to *Habakkuk* iii. 3, is one of several mountains in Teman ('the South-land') which He is said to have thus honoured; the others being Horeb, Sinai and Seir (*Exodus* iii. 1; *Deuteronomy* xxxiii. 2). From Paran He would ride out vengefully on the wings of the storm (*Zechariah* ix. 14). The mountainous wilderness of Paran, Zin and Kadesh, where the Israelites wandered for forty years, and where God appeared to them in fire (*Exodus* xix. 1-3 and 16-20), had associations not only with Moses, but with Elijah (*1 Kings* xix. 8), and Abraham (see 29. g).

MYTHICAL COSMOLOGY

(a) So great was the work accomplished at the Creation that a walk from east to west across the Earth would take a man five hundred years — if he lived to finish it; and a walk from north to south would take him another five hundred years. These distances correspond with those from Earth to the First Heaven, and from the First Heaven to its summit. As for Earth itself — one-third of its surface is desert, one-third sea, and the remaining third habitable land.¹

Some reckon the width of Earth as 6000 parasangs, namely 18,000 miles, in all directions; and the height of the sky as 1000 parasangs, or 3000 miles.² Others believe Earth to be even larger: Egypt, they say, measures 400 by 400 parasangs, or 1200 by 1200 miles; yet Egypt is one-sixtieth the size of Ethiopia, Ethiopia one-sixtieth of the Earth's surface, Earth one-sixtieth of Eden, and Eden one-sixtieth of Gehenna. Thus Earth is to Gehenna as a small lid to an immense pot.³

Eastward of the habitable world lies the Garden of Eden, abode of the righteous. Westward lie the Ocean and its islands; and behind them the Desert, a parched land where only snakes and scorpions crawl. Northward stretch Babylonia and Chaldaea, and behind them are storehouses of Hell-fire and storehouses of snow, hailstones, fog, frost, darkness and gales. Here live demons, harmful spirits, the host of Samael; here also is Gehenna, where the wicked are confined. Southward lie the Chambers of Teman, storehouses of fire, and the Cave of Smoke, whence rises the hot whirlwind.⁴

(b) According to others, the East is the quarter from which light and heat spread across the world; the West contains the storehouses of snow and hailstones from which cold winds blow; dews and rains of blessing come from the south; the north breeds darkness.⁵

God fastened down the firmament to the rim of Earth on the east, south and west, but left the northern part loose, announcing: "Should anyone say 'I am God!', let him fasten down this side too, in proof of his godhead."⁶

(c) The seven Earths, separated from one another by intervals of

whirlwind, are named in ascending order: *Ereş*, *Adama*, *Harabha*, *Siyya*, *Yabbasha*, *Arqa*, *Tebhel* and *Heled*.⁷

(d) *Arqa*, the Fifth Earth, contains Gehenna and its seven layers, each with its storehouses of darkness. The highest of these is *Sheol*, and beneath lie others named Perdition, The Lowest Pit, The Bilge, Silence, The Gates of Death and The Gates of the Shadow of Death. The fire of each layer is sixty times fiercer than that immediately below. Here the wicked are punished, and angels torture them.⁸

Tebhel, the Sixth Earth, contains hills, mountains, valleys and plains, inhabited by no fewer than three hundred and sixty-five kinds of creatures. Some have the heads and bodies of oxen, but are endowed with human speech; others have twin heads, four ears and four eyes, twin noses and mouths, four hands and four legs, yet only one trunk. When seated they look like two people; but when they walk, like one. As they eat and drink, the twin heads quarrel and accuse each other of taking more than a fair share; nevertheless, they pass for righteous beings.⁹

Heled, our own Earth, the seventh, needs no description.¹⁰

(e) Opinions vary as to whether there are two, three, seven or ten Heavens;¹¹ but doubtless their number agrees with that of the seven Earths.¹² The Firmament covers Earth like a dome-shaped lid;¹³ its edges touch the surrounding Ocean. The hooks of Heaven are sunk in these waters.¹⁴

An Arab once led Rabba bar Bar-Hana to the very edge of Earth, where the Firmament is fastened down. Rabba had brought a basketful of bread and, since this was the hour of prayer, set it on the heavenly window-ledge. Later he looked in vain for the basket, and asked: "Who has stolen my bread?" The Arab answered: "No man, but the wheel of the Firmament has turned while you prayed. Wait until tomorrow, and you will eat bread again."¹⁵

Some describe Earth as a hall open only to the north; because once the Sun, moving from east to west, has reached the north-western corner, it turns and goes upwards and backwards, this time behind the dome of the Firmament. Thus, since the Firmament is opaque, the Sun's return journey causes night upon Earth. After reaching the east, however, it passes once more below the dome of the Firmament, and shines for all mankind.¹⁶

(f) Rabbi Shimon ben Laqish names the seven Heavens as follows: *Wilson*, *Raqi'a*, *Shehaqim*, *Zebhul*, *Ma'on*, *Makhon*, and *'Arabhoth*.¹⁷ They are all fixed and vaulted over Earth, one above the other, like the skins of an onion; except only *Wilson*, the lowest, which

shades the uppermost earth from the heat. At daybreak, therefore, *Wilon* stretches across the sky; but at sundown is rolled away to enable the Moon and stars to shine from *Raqi'a*, the Second Heaven.¹⁸

(g) In *Shehaqim*, a pair of millstones grind manna for the righteous; in *Zebhul* are found the Heavenly Jerusalem, the Temple, and the altar upon which the Archangel Michael offers sacrifices; in *Ma'on*, hosts of ministering angels hymn God's mercy all night long, but fall silent at dawn, thus allowing Him to hear His praises sung by Israel below; *Makhon* contains storehouses of snow and hailstones, lofts of dews and rains, chambers of storms, and caves of fog; in *'Arabhoth* abide Justice, Law and Charity, the treasures of Life, Peace and Blessing, the souls of the righteous, the souls of the yet unborn, the dew with which God will revive the dead, the chariot seen by Ezekiel in a vision, the ministering angels, and the Divine Throne.¹⁹

(h) According to a very different view, the lowest Heaven contains clouds, winds, air, the Upper Waters, the two hundred angels appointed to watch the stars, and storehouses of snow, ice and dews with their guardian angels.

In the Second Heaven complete darkness reigns over the sinners chained there in expectation of Judgement.

In the Third Heaven lies the Garden of Eden, full of marvellous fruit trees, including the Tree of Life under which God rests whenever He comes on a visit. Two rivers issue from Eden: one flowing with milk and honey, the other with wine and oil; they branch out into four heads, descend, and surround the Earth. Three hundred Angels of Light, who unceasingly sing God's praises, watch over the Garden, which is the Heaven to which righteous souls are admitted after death. Northward of Eden stretches Gehenna, where dark fires perpetually smoulder, and a river of flame flows through a land of biting cold and ice; here the wicked suffer tortures.

In the Fourth Heaven are chariots ridden by the Sun and Moon; also great stars, each with a thousand lesser stars as followers, that accompany the Sun on its circuit: four to the right, another four to the left. Of the two winds that draw these chariots, one is shaped like a phoenix, the other like a brazen serpent; though, indeed, their faces resemble those of a lion, and their lower parts those of Leviathan. Each wind has twelve wings. To east and west of this Heaven stand gates through which the chariots pass at their appointed hours.

The Fifth Heaven houses the gigantic Fallen Angels, who crouch there in silent and everlasting despair.

In the Sixth Heaven live seven Phoenixes, seven Cherubim singing God's praises without cease, and hosts of radiant angels engrossed in astrological study; besides other angels who guard the hours, years, rivers, seas, crops, pastures, and mankind, recording for God's attention whatever unusual sights they observe.

The Seventh Heaven, one of ineffable light, holds the Archangels, Cherubim, Seraphim, and divine wheels; here God Himself occupies His Divine Throne, and all sing His praises.²⁰

These seven Heavens and seven Earths are prevented from falling apart and dropping into the Void beneath by immense hooks attached to the rim of each Heaven and linking it with the rim of a corresponding earth. The uppermost Earth has, however, been hooked to the rim of the Second Heaven (not the First, which is no more than a huge folding veil); the Second Earth is hooked to the Third Heaven, and so forth. In addition, each Heaven is similarly fastened to its neighbouring Heaven. The entire structure thus resembles a fourteen-storeyed tower the top storey of which, *'Arabhoth*, hangs on God's arm—though some say that God holds up the Heavens with His right hand, and the Earths with His left.

Every day God mounts a cherub and visits all these worlds, where He receives homage and adoration. On His return journey, He rides on the wings of the Wind.²¹

1. Mid. Konen, 27.
2. B. Pesahim 94a.
3. B. Pesahim 94a.
4. Mid. Konen, 27-31.
5. Num. Rab. 2.10; 3.12; Mid. Konen, 38; Pesiqta Hadta, 49.
6. PRE, ch. 3.
7. Mid. Konen, 32-33. In other sources somewhat different names are given, cf. Zohar Hadash, 20b.
8. Mid. Konen, 30, 35-36.
9. Mid. Konen, 36.
10. Mid. Konen, 36.
11. Gen. Rab. 176-77; B. Hagiga 12b.
12. Cf. Ginzberg, LJ, V. 10.
13. Mid. Konen, 33.
14. PRE, ch. 3.
15. B. Baba Bathra 74a.
16. B. Baba Bathra 25b.
17. B. Hagiga 12b.
18. Mid. Konen, 37.
19. B. Hagiga 12b.
20. 2 *Enoch* III-IX, and parallel rabbinic sources, Ginzberg, LJ, V. 158 ff.
21. Mid. Konen, 33-34.

1. These rabbinical doctrines, mostly borrowed at haphazard from Greek, Persian and Babylonian sources, were meant to impress hearers with the amazing range and complexity of God's works; and the very irreconcilability of any two theories supported this impression. The sages accepted the Biblical concept of a flat earth, and were all baffled by the Sun's re-appearance in the East each morning. One small fragment of mathematical science has slipped in: the measure of the earth's dimensions comes reasonably close to that offered by the Ptolemaic physicist, Eratosthenes of Cyrene, in the third century B.C.

The placing of Gehenna not only in the Underworld, but on earth, and in one of the heavens, is perhaps deliberate: an echo of *Amos ix. 2*—'though they dig into hell, there shall Mine hand take them; though they climb up into heaven, thence will I bring them down.'

2. *Teman* means both 'south' and 'southland'. Esau had a grandson of that name, his father being Eliphaz. A 'chief of Teman' is twice mentioned in a passage that also names Husham of the Southland (*temani*) as a King of Edom. 'Eliphaz the Temanite' (*temani*) was one of Job's comforters; elsewhere the distant 'Southland' appears as a region of mysterious 'chambers' and 'southern whirlwinds'. The late midrash (see *b.*) on these chambers refers either to Yemen in South Arabia, or to Tayma, a settlement in North Arabia, about 250 miles east of the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba.

3. *Hashmal* is a divine substance which, according to the first chapter of *Ezekiel*, provides the fiery splendour of God's Throne and Countenance. The Septuagint translates *electron*, which in Greek is connected with *Elector*, a name for the sun, and thus means 'shining with a golden light'; hence either amber, or amber-coloured *electrum*, an alloy of gold and silver. *Hashmal* is modern Hebrew for 'electricity', because the rubbing of amber to attract particles of dust was, it seems, the earliest experimental use of electricity. But the association of lightning with the power of God being ancient, Ezekiel may have regarded this divine *hashmal* as the source of lightning.

4. In Talmudic times, speculations on the structure of the Universe were called *ma'asse merkabiah*, 'matters of the chariot', because of the divine chariot described by Ezekiel. The Pharisees regarded the study of these matters as dangerous, and several stories are told about learned men who failed to take proper precautions: Ben Azzay died suddenly, Ben Zoma lost his mind, Elisha ben Abuya became a heretic; Rabbi Akiba alone escaped harm by humility and circumspection (*B. Hagiga 14b-16a*).

5. That the entire Universe hangs from God's arms is first quoted in the Babylonian Talmud (*B. Hagiga 12b*): 'Rabbi Yose said: "The earth rests on columns, the columns on water, the water on mountains, the mountains on wind, the wind on the whirlwind, and the whirlwind hangs from God's arm."' But it can hardly be reconciled with His daily visits to each Heaven and Earth.

6. *Eres* means 'earth'; so do *adama* and *arqa* (an Aramaic loan-word); *siyya*, 'dryness'; *yabbasha*, 'dry land'; *harabha*, 'parched land'; *tebhel* and *heled*, 'world'.

Wilson means 'curtain'; *raqi'a*, 'firmament'; *shehaqim*, 'clouds' or 'grindstones'; *zebhu*, 'dwelling'; *ma'on*, 'residence'; *makhon*, 'emplacement'; and *arabhoth*, 'plains'.

GLOSSES ON THE CREATION STORY

(a) God created the Heavens from the light of His garment. When He spread them out like a cloth, they began to stretch farther and farther of their own accord, until He cried 'Enough!' He created Earth from the snow beneath His Divine Throne: throwing some of this on the waters, which froze and turned to dust. Earth and Sea also stretched farther and farther, until He cried 'Enough!'¹

(b) Some, however, say that God wove together two skeins, one of fire and one of snow, for His creation of the world; and two more, of fire and water, for the creation of the Heavens. Others hold that the Heavens were made of snow alone.²

(c) Under the ancient rule of Water such disorder and chaos prevailed that wise men avoid all mention of it. 'Likening God to a king who has built his palace above a vast privy,' they say, 'would be apt but irreverent.'³

(d) God therefore banished Tohu and Bohu from Earth, though retaining them as two of five layers that separate the seven Earths. Tohu may be readily discerned as the horizon's thin green line from which, every evening, Darkness rises across the world. 'Bohu' is also the name given to certain glittering stones sunk in the abyss where Leviathan lurks.⁴

(e) God found the male Upper Waters and the female Lower Waters locked in a passionate embrace. 'Let one of you rise,' He ordered, 'and the other fall!' But they rose up together, whereupon God asked: 'Why did you both rise?' 'We are inseparable,' they answered with one voice. 'Leave us to our love!' God now stretched out His little finger and tore them apart; the Upper He lifted high, the Lower He cast down. To punish their defiance, God would have singed them with fire, had they not sued for mercy. He pardoned them on two conditions: that, at the Exodus, they would allow the Children of Israel to pass through dry-shod; and that they would prevent Jonah from fleeing by ship to Tarshish.⁵

(f) The divided Waters then voiced their agony of loss by blindly rushing towards each other, and flooding the mountain tops. But

when the Lower Waters lapped at the very foot of God's throne, He shouted in anger and trampled them under His feet.⁶

(g) Others say that the Lower Waters, heart-broken at being no longer so close to God, shrieked: 'We have not been found worthy of our Maker's presence,' and tried to reach His throne as suppliants.⁷

(h) On the third day, when God set Himself to gather the Salt Waters in one place—thus letting dry land emerge—they protested: 'We cover the entire world, and even so lack elbow room; would you confine us still further?' Whereupon God kicked their leader Oceanus to death.⁸

(i) These difficulties past, God allotted a separate place to each body of Waters. Yet at the horizon they are parted by no more than the breadth of three narrow fingers.⁹

(j) At times, the Sea still menaces her barrier of sand. A seasoned mariner once told Rabbah of Babylon: "The distance between one wave and its fellow may be three hundred leagues; and each may rise to a height of three hundred leagues also. Not long ago, a wave lifted our ship so close to a small star that it spread to the size of a field on which forty measures of mustard seed might grow. Had we risen higher yet, the star's breath would have scorched us. And we heard one wave call to its fellow: "Sister, is anything left in the world that you have not already swept away? If so, let me destroy it." But the wave answered: "Respect the power of our Lord, sister; we may not cross the barrier of sand by even the width of a thread . . ." "¹⁰

(k) God also forbade Tehom, the sweet Underground Waters, to rise up—except little by little; and enforced obedience by placing a sherd above her, on which He had engraved His Ineffable Name. This seal was removed once only: when mankind sinned in Noah's day. Thereupon Tehom united with the Upper Waters and together they flooded the earth.¹¹

(l) Since then, Tehom has always crouched submissively in her deep abode like a huge beast, sending up springs to those who deserve them, and nourishing the tree roots. Though she thus influences man's fate, none may visit her recesses.¹²

(m) Tehom delivers three times more water to Earth than the rain. At the Feast of Tabernacles, Temple priests pour libations of wine and water on God's altar. Then Ridya, an angel shaped like a three-year-old heifer with cleft lips, commands Tehom: 'Let your springs rise!', and commands the Upper Waters: 'Let rain fall!'¹³

(n) Some say that a gem bearing the Messiah's name—which floated with the wind until the Altar of Sacrifice had been built on