

# Gnosticism

## BASIC TENETS AS THEY APPLY TO THE BIBLICAL RECORD

**History:** This heretical philosophy takes its root in Christian truth, but is heavily influenced by Jewish mysticism, Persian mythology, and Greek philosophy. They added their own false gospels and apocalyptic literature – often by female authors. It's origins may be found before the coming of Christ, but the movement flowered around the middle of the second century, and some of the greatest Christian apologists wrote to refute their teachings. It found its way into the non-orthodox churches of Syria and Persia, as well as the Coptic church in Egypt and Northern Africa, such that Mohammed believed this to be Christianity in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century and denied its message. Below are listed the major teachings of this heresy:

- 1. Creator:** The supreme god is a distant one, but another inferior being of power was tricked into creating the world and emanating and scattering the original "light" into the creation. He is a jealous and temperamental being, called the **demiurge**, who is considered to be the god of the Old Testament.
- 2. Creation:** As creation is a diluting of the original "light" and good, matter is evil and redemption can only be achieved by leaving the material world behind.
- 3. Christ:** A divine messenger of light, an emanated being commonly identified as the **Logos**, adopted various forms to reveal the nature of this reality, and in the latter days appeared as the man known as Jesus Christ to set people free by giving them the "truth". He was never truly human and gave up that form just before the crucifixion, but continues to serve as an ideal and a disseminator of true knowledge.
- 4. Salvation:** Certain human beings, endowed with divine "light" particles, can be awakened to the secret knowledge of this reality, and then work toward enlightenment and release from this world through *gnosis*, or the penetration of "true" and hidden knowledge. They seek help from divine intermediaries and repudiate the physical. For some this means an ascetic existence where pleasure and worldly things are avoided, and for others it means overindulgence in sensuality because the physical doesn't matter anyway. Other humans (carnal) possess no light particles and can never be "saved".
- 5. Divine Beings:** Numerous matched pairs of divine luminaries or *Aeons* emanated from the supreme being and the creator and his consort and dwell in the celestial realms. They represent various levels of knowledge and now assist man on his path to intellectual enlightenment. While knowledge is chiefly sought after, wisdom (connected with a feminine being known as *Sophia*), takes a lesser place and is often connected with inspiring the process. The serpent is regarded as an agent of knowledge.
- 6. The After Life:** After death, Gnostics shed their mortal form and continue to purge away any taint of their material existence as they journey through spiritual realms to ultimate union with the original heavenly fullness or *pleroma*.

**Today:** Although this ancient philosophy has largely disappeared, elements of it can be found in modern cults like Christian Science and Mormonism, as well as the New Age religions.

**Note:** Facts taken from an article in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, by G.L. Borchert.