

# Christianity and Gnosticism

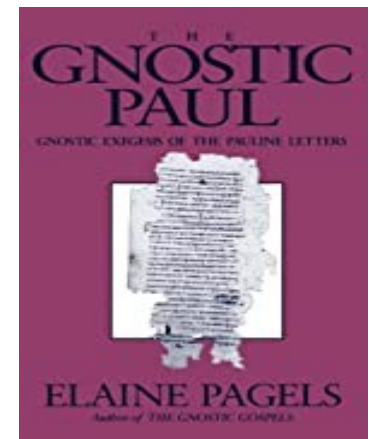
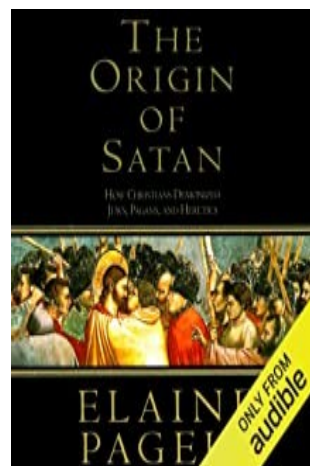
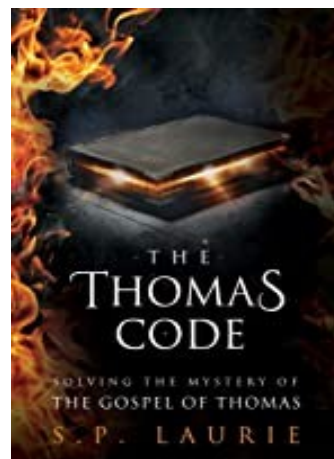
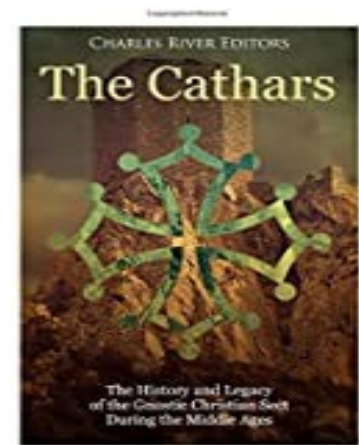
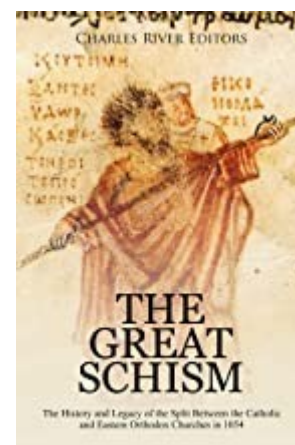
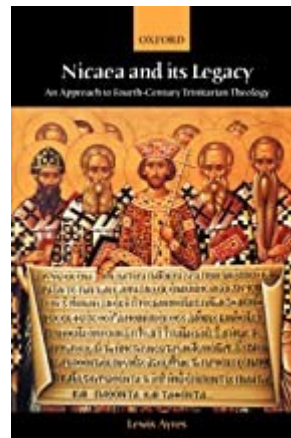
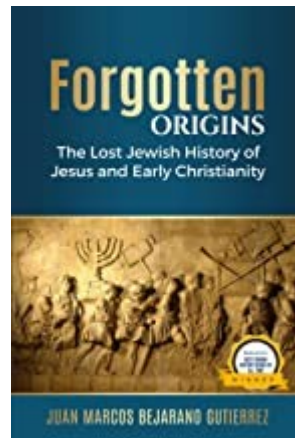
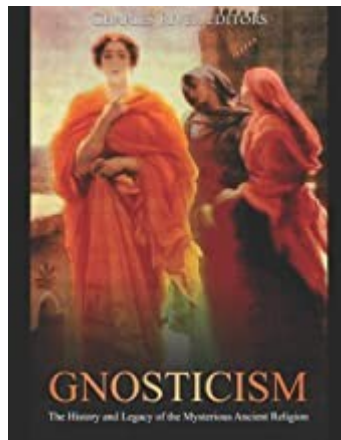


## Subject Four Mysticism East and West ©AlephTalks, 2022

# Information Sources



- Wikipedia

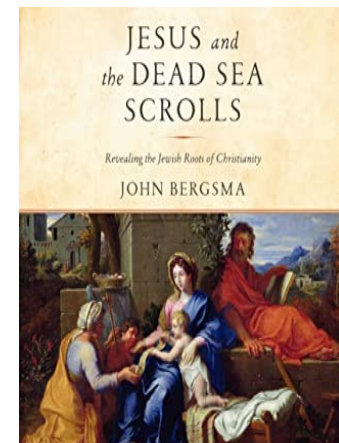
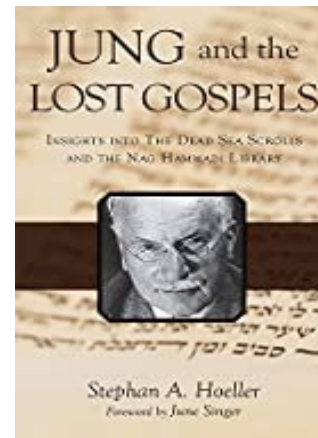
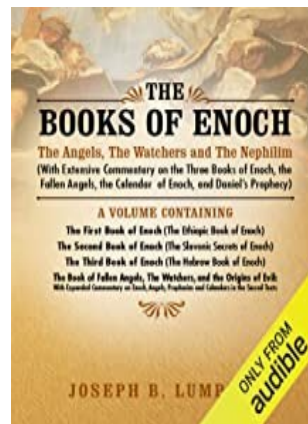
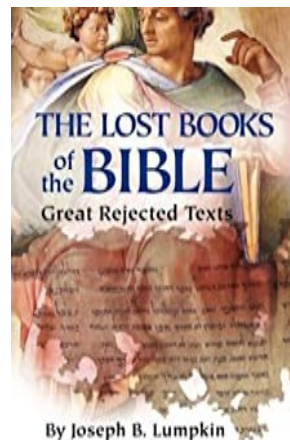
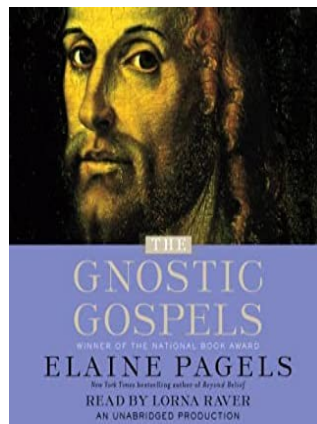
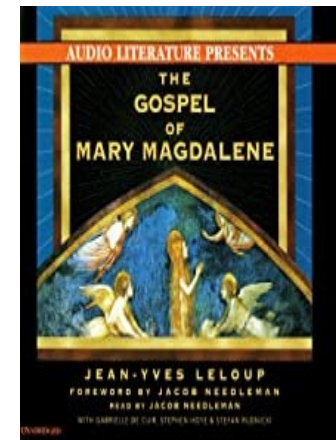
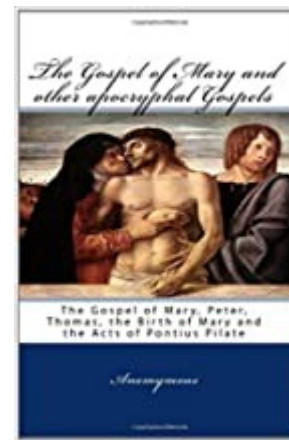
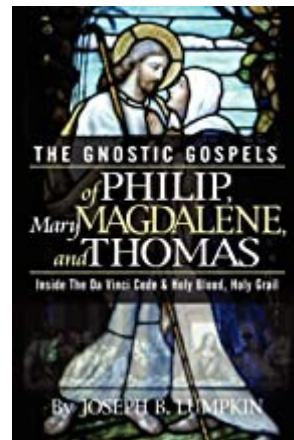
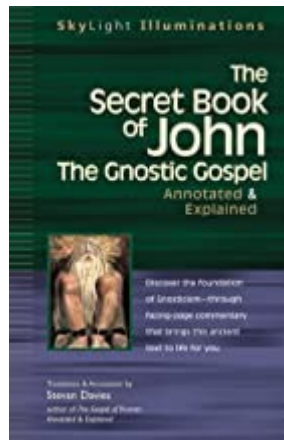
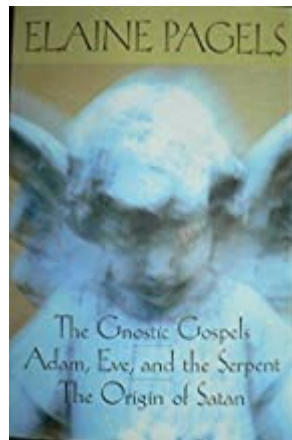




# Information Sources



- Wikipedia



# Nag Hammadi Library



- The Nag Hammadi library (also known as the "Chenoboskion Manuscripts" and the "Gnostic Gospels") is a collection of early Christian and Gnostic texts discovered near the Upper Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi in 1945.
- Thirteen leather-bound papyrus codices buried in a sealed jar were found by a local farmer named Muhammed al-Samman. The writings in these codices comprise 52 mostly Gnostic treatises, but they also include three works belonging to the Corpus Hermeticum and a partial translation/alteration of Plato's Republic.
- James Robinson suggests that these codices may have belonged to a nearby Pachomian monastery and were buried after Saint Athanasius condemned the use of non-canonical books in his Festal Letter of 367 A.D. The discovery of these texts significantly influenced modern scholarship's pursuit and knowledge of early Christianity and Gnosticism.

# Nag Hammadi Library



- The contents of the codices were written in the Coptic language. The best-known of these works is probably the Gospel of Thomas, of which the Nag Hammadi codices contain the only complete text. After the discovery, scholars recognized that fragments of these sayings attributed to Jesus appeared in manuscripts discovered at Oxyrhynchus in 1898 (P. Oxy. 1), and matching quotations were recognized in other early Christian sources.
- The written text of the Gospel of Thomas is dated to the second century by most interpreters, but based on much earlier sources. The buried manuscripts date from the 3rd and 4th centuries.

# Gnostic Gospels



- Gospel of Thomas – The Gospel of Thomas (also known as the Coptic Gospel of Thomas) is a non-canonical sayings gospel.
- Gospel of Marcion – 2nd century, potentially an edited version of the Gospel of Luke (see: Marcionism)
- Gospel of Basilides – composed in Egypt around 120 to 140 AD, thought to be a gnostic gospel harmony of the canonical gospels
- Gospel of Truth (Valentinian) – mid-2nd century, departed from earlier gnostic works by admitting and defending the physicality of Christ and his resurrection
- Gospel of the Four Heavenly Realms – mid-2nd century, thought to be a gnostic cosmology, most likely in the form of a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples



# Gnostic Gospels



- Gospel of Mary – 2nd century gnostic text
- Gospel of Judas – 2nd century gnostic text
- Greek Gospel of the Egyptians – second quarter of the 2nd century
- Gospel of Philip, 3rd century gnostic text
- Gospel of the Twelve Apostles– a Syriac language gospel titled the Gospel of the Twelve, this work is shorter than the regular gospels and seems to be different from the lost Gospel of the Twelve.[4]
- Gospel of Perfection – 4th century, an Ophite poem that is only mentioned once by a single patristic source, Epiphanius,[5] and is referred to once in the 6th century Syriac Infancy Gospel
- Coptic Gospel of the Egyptians – also called Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit

# Dead Sea Scrolls



- The Dead Sea Scrolls (also the Qumran Caves Scrolls) are ancient Jewish and Hebrew religious manuscripts first found in 1946/47 at the Qumran Caves in what was then Mandatory Palestine, near Ein Feshkha in the West Bank, on the northern shore of the Dead Sea.
- Dating back to between the 3rd century BCE and the 1st century CE, the Dead Sea Scrolls are considered one of the most important finds in the history of archaeology, and have great historical, religious, and linguistic significance because they include the oldest surviving manuscripts of entire books later included in the biblical canons, along with deuterocanonical and extra-biblical manuscripts which preserve evidence of the diversity of religious thought in late Second Temple Judaism, while at the same times casting new light on the emergence of Christianity and of Rabbinic Judaism.



# Dead Sea Scrolls



- Most of the scrolls are held by the State of Israel in the Shrine of the Book at the Israel Museum, but some of them had been taken to Jordan and are now displayed at The Jordan Museum in Amman. Ownership of the scrolls, however, is claimed by the State of Palestine.
- Many thousands of written fragments have been discovered in the Dead Sea area. They represent the remnants of larger manuscripts damaged by natural causes or through human interference, with the vast majority holding only small scraps of text. However, a small number of well-preserved, almost intact manuscripts have survived – fewer than a dozen among those from the Qumran Caves. Researchers have assembled a collection of 981 different manuscripts – discovered in 1946/47 and in 1956 – from 11 caves.

# Dead Sea Scrolls



- The 11 Qumran Caves lie in the immediate vicinity of the Hellenistic-period Jewish settlement at Khirbet Qumran in the eastern Judaeian Desert, in the West Bank. The caves are located about one mile (1.6 kilometres) west of the northwest shore of the Dead Sea, whence they derive their name.
- Archaeologists have long associated the scrolls with the ancient Jewish sect called the Essenes, although some recent interpretations have challenged this connection and argue that priests in Jerusalem, or Zadokites, or other unknown Jewish groups wrote the scrolls.

# Dead Sea Scrolls



- Most of the texts use Hebrew, with some written in Aramaic (for example the Son of God Text; in different regional dialects, including Nabataean), and a few in Greek. Discoveries from the Judaean Desert add Latin (from Masada) and Arabic (from Khirbet al-Mird) texts. Most of the texts are written on parchment, some on papyrus, and one on copper.
- Scholarly consensus dates the scrolls from the last three centuries BCE and the first century CE, though manuscripts from associated Judaean Desert sites are dated as early as the 8th century BCE and as late as the 11th century CE.
- Scholarly consensus dates the Qumran Caves Scrolls from the last three centuries BCE to the first century CE. Bronze coins found at the same sites form a series beginning with John Hyrcanus (in office 135–104 BCE) and continuing until the period of the First Jewish–Roman War (66–73 CE), supporting the radiocarbon and paleographic dating of the scrolls.



# Dead Sea Scrolls



- There are 225 biblical texts included in the Dead Sea Scroll documents, or around 22% of the total, and with deuterocanonical books the number increases to 235.
- The Dead Sea Scrolls contain parts of all but one of the books of the Tanakh of the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament protocanon. They also include four of the deuterocanonical books included in Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Bibles: Tobit, Sirach, Baruch 6 (also known as the Letter or Epistle of Jeremiah), and Psalm 151.
- The Book of Esther has not yet been found and scholars believe Esther is missing because, as a Jew, her marriage to a Persian king may have been looked down upon by the inhabitants of Qumran, or because the book has the Purim festival which is not included in the Qumran calendar.

# Christianity



- Christianity is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. It is the world's largest religion, with about 2.5 billion followers. Its adherents, known as Christians, make up a majority of the population in 157 countries and territories, and believe that Jesus is the Son of God, whose coming as the messiah was prophesied in the Hebrew Bible (called the Old Testament in Christianity) and chronicled in the New Testament.
- Christianity remains culturally diverse in its Western and Eastern branches, as well as in its doctrines concerning justification and the nature of salvation, ecclesiology, ordination, and Christology. The creeds of various Christian denominations generally hold in common Jesus as the Son of God—the Logos incarnated—who ministered, suffered, and died on a cross, but rose from the dead for the salvation of mankind; and referred to as the gospel, meaning the "good news". Describing Jesus' life and teachings are the four canonical gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, with the Old Testament as the gospel's respected background.

# Christianity



- Christianity began as a Second Temple Judaic sect in the 1st century in the Roman province of Judea. Jesus' apostles and their followers spread around the Levant, Europe, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, the South Caucasus, Egypt, and Ethiopia, despite initial persecution.
- It soon attracted gentile God-fearers, which led to a departure from Jewish customs, and, after the Fall of Jerusalem, AD 70 which ended the Temple-based Judaism, Christianity slowly separated from Judaism.
- Emperor Constantine the Great decriminalized Christianity in the Roman Empire by the Edict of Milan (313), later convening the Council of Nicaea (325) where Early Christianity was consolidated into what would become the State church of the Roman Empire (380). The early history of Christianity's united church before major schisms is sometimes referred to as the "Great Church" (though divergent sects existed at the same time, including Gnostics and Jewish Christians).



# Christianity



- The Church of the East split after the Council of Ephesus (431) and Oriental Orthodoxy split after the Council of Chalcedon (451) over differences in Christology,[4] while the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church separated in the East–West Schism (1054), especially over the authority of the bishop of Rome. Protestantism split in numerous denominations from the Catholic Church in the Reformation era (16th century) over theological and ecclesiological disputes, most predominantly on the issue of justification and the primacy of the bishop of Rome.
- Christianity played a prominent role in the development of Western civilization, particularly in Europe from late antiquity and the Middle Ages. Following the Age of Discovery (15th–17th century), Christianity was spread into the Americas, Oceania, sub-Saharan Africa, and the rest of the world via missionary work.

# Christianity



- The four largest branches of Christianity are
  - the Catholic Church (1.3 billion/50.1%),
  - Protestantism (920 million/36.7%),
  - the Eastern Orthodox Church (230 million), and
  - the Oriental Orthodox churches (62 million) (Orthodox churches combined at 11.9%),
- though thousands of smaller church communities exist despite efforts toward unity (ecumenism). Despite a decline in adherence in the West, Christianity remains the dominant religion in the region, with about 70% of that population identifying as Christian. Christianity is growing in Africa and Asia, the world's most populous continents. Christians remain persecuted in some regions of the world, especially in the Middle East, North Africa, East Asia, and South Asia.

# Gnosticism



- Gnosticism (from Ancient Greek: γνωστικός, romanized: gnōstikós, Koine Greek: [ɣnosti'kos], 'having knowledge') is a collection of religious ideas and systems which coalesced in the late 1st century AD among Jewish and early Christian sects.[1] These various groups emphasised personal spiritual knowledge (gnosis) above the orthodox teachings, traditions, and authority of religious institutions.
- Viewing material existence as flawed or evil, Gnostic cosmogony generally presents a distinction between a supreme, hidden God and a malevolent lesser divinity (sometimes associated with the Yahweh of the Old Testament) who is responsible for creating the material universe. Gnostics considered the principal element of salvation to be direct knowledge of the supreme divinity in the form of mystical or esoteric insight. Many Gnostic texts deal not in concepts of sin and repentance, but with illusion and enlightenment.



# Gnosticism



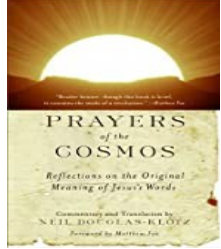
- Gnostic writings flourished among certain Christian groups in the Mediterranean world until about the second century, when the Fathers of the early Church denounced them as heresy. Efforts to destroy these texts proved largely successful, resulting in the survival of very little writing by Gnostic theologians.
- Nonetheless, early Gnostic teachers such as Valentinus saw their beliefs as aligned with Christianity. In the Gnostic Christian tradition, Christ is seen as a divine being which has taken human form in order to lead humanity back to the Light. However, Gnosticism is not a single standardized system, and the emphasis on direct experience allows for a wide variety of teachings, including distinct currents such as Valentinianism and Sethianism. In the Persian Empire, Gnostic ideas spread as far as China via the related movement Manichaeism, while Mandaeism is still alive in Iraq, Iran and diaspora communities.

# Gnosticism



- For centuries, most scholarly knowledge of Gnosticism was limited to the anti-heretical writings of orthodox Christian figures such as Irenaeus of Lyons and Hippolytus of Rome. There was a renewed interest in Gnosticism after the 1945 discovery of Egypt's Nag Hammadi library, a collection of rare early Christian and Gnostic texts, including the Gospel of Thomas and the Apocryphon of John.
- A major question in scholarly research is the qualification of Gnosticism as either an interreligious phenomenon or as an independent religion. Scholars have acknowledged the influence of sources such as Hellenistic Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Platonism, and some have noted possible links to Buddhism and Hinduism, though the evidence of direct influence from the latter sources is inconclusive.

# New Translation of Lord's Prayer



- O Birther! Father-Mother of the Cosmos,
- Focus your light within us - make it useful:
- Create your reign of unity now -
- Your one desire then acts with ours,
- as in all light, so in all forms.
- Grant what we need each day in bread and insight.
- Loose the cords of mistakes binding us,
- as we release the strands that we hold of others' guilt.
- Don't let surface things delude us,
- But free us from what holds us back.
- From you in born all ruling will,
- the power and the life to do,
- the song that beautifies all,
- from age to age it renews.
- Truly- power to these statements -
- may they be the ground from which all
- my actions grow: Amen.

3/9/22

# Apochryphon of John



- In the beginning there is only the One (the Monad, the Invisible Spirit, or Father of All)
- The first steps of creation follow from an internal process conducted by the One, who upon absorbing its reflection in the living water of the cosmos brings forth the very first creation:  
Forethought/Providence, his own thought becomes its own entity
- Barbelo (feminine or mother-father) is the first emanation of the Father
- Barbelo request four further powers from the One, and is gives Foreknowledge, Incorruptibility, Eternal Life, and Truth
- Barbelo self generates the Child of Light, which requests a power from the One and is given Mind
- The Light produces four Luminaries, each consisting of three Aeons (12 Aeons total)



# Apochryphon of John



- Barbelo and the One help the Light bring forth Primal Man called Geradamas or Ancient Adam, who in turn appoints his son Seth to rule over the Fullness or second eternal realm where the Aeons reside
- The tragic story of Sophia, the last of the initial twelve Aeons, and her offspring make up much of the rest of the Apochryphon of John
- There are two types of worlds, the visible world we perceive with our senses that is mortal, composite and always changing, whereas the world of the Forms is intelligibile, simple and unchanging
- The soul craves to be free of bodily endeavors and reach the unchanging and the rational, whereas the body moves to the realm of sense-perception: body and soul follow fates of separate worlds

# Apochryphon of John



- Philosophy is preparation for death, if death unites with the unchanging and the essential, then philosophers prepare all their sense bounded life to enjoy their real life in the realm of Forms
- What are these Forms? Plato never propounds a systematic theory (Phaedo, Republic, Parmenides, Phaedrus), only sketches; Socrates claims the theory of Forms was his Second Voyage after his materialistic quest to find the initial, more general causes/explanations of things in the world had failed
- Relativism and discrepancy seem to vanish where we consider these terms by themselves (equality, justice, temperance et al) which are stable, unchanging, permanent. Materialist tendencies cannot explain this discrepancy. Everything making up the physical world is not truly real but instead a show of its corresponding form (e.g. trees)

# Apochryphon of John



- Sophia (Wisdom) seeks to bring forth a new creation like herself but without permission of the Father or her consort. She has enough of the One's power to give birth to the formless Yaldabaoth, the creator of the material cosmos, who is the first Archon (no direct connection to the One and thus ignorant of the spiritual realms of the Fullness that lie above them)
- Sophia hides Yaldabaoth in a lower sphere of existence (now the One, the Aeons, or Yaldabaoth can see one another). Yaldabaoth looks downward and sees a murky abyss, and seeks to create but lacks proper tools or knowledge, creating a flawed Cosmos.
- The creation story is a pattern of downward progression from perfect form of existence and spirit to its perverted offspring, matter. Each step is slightly imperfect than the preceding one. Yaldabaoth is Yahweh.

# Apochryphon of John



- The minions of Yaldabaoth wonder that there is some other god besides Yaldabaoth or else whom would he be jealous of?
- Barbelo calls out to the minions from the upper realms and the minions and Yaldabaoth glimpse traces of the perfect human, the One and the upper realms
- The Archons want to make man in the image of God but the only image at their disposal is Yaldabaoth, so they create the biblical Adam, the first mortal human, but he lacks spirits and is immobile
- Yaldabaoth breathes spirit into Adam, but this breath carries some of the powers of Sophia his mother, which in turn possessed some of the powers of Barbelo and the the Father: divine life. Similarly for Eve.
- Yaldabaoth realized he had been tricked into lettering a glimpse of the divine slip into his realm, so he chose to enslave Adam, Eve and their posterity in mortal bodies that would never permit awareness of divine origins.



# Apochryphon of John



- After the soul leaves the body, she is handed over to the archons who have come into being through Yaldabaoth; they bind her with chains and throw her into prison (i.e., reincarnation in another body), and at some point she may awaken from forgetfulness and acquires knowledge and thus attains perfection and salvation.
- Adam and Eve are placed under guard in the Garden of Eden. The Tree of Knowledge represents divine will, and is forbidden to Adam by Yaldabaoth because it is a way for knowledge of the divine realm to penetrate creation and give humans understanding of their true nature
- After Adam and Eve eat from the Tree, they receive knowledge of their origin and destiny to return to the divine realm but are expelled from Eden. Yaldabaoth sires Cain and Abel through Eve, and they serve as demonic powers to restrain the human body. This rape of Eve is the cause for introduction of sexual intercourse by Yaldabaoth, not so he might procreate, but in order to harm the divine Wisdom that he sees has taken root within Eve through the Apple. Wisdom is saved from harm when Barbelo sends divine messengers to remove Wisdom from Eve.

# Apochryphon of John



- Cain and Abel are sons of Yaldabaoth, but Seth is born of Adam and Eve, and it is Seth who is the spiritual father of Gnostics, born in the image of the Son of Man or Light. Seth is the father of all human beings who are born with the spark of divine within.
- The archons give Adam and Eve draughts of water of forgetfulness, which causes them and all those born thereafter to slip into oblivion and lose sight of their origins.
- Next, the sons of God are said to take human women as their wives and give birth to giants. God decides this is evil and feels regret for creating humans, which results in him sending a great flood to wipe the earth clean. Barbelo takes pity and comes to Noah giving instructions to preach the truth to whoever will listen; most ignore him, but a small group, the immovable race, hears the message, and are saved from the flood by a divine cloud, and they survive and attempt to repopulate the world with those like them who are faithful to their true divine narrative.

# Apochryphon of John



- In a twist from the more popular narrative, Yaldabaoth sends his angels to earth to try and mate with surviving women: they resist at first, but eventually the archons deceive the women who mate with evil angels and again lose knowledge of the One.
- The saved people that are referenced in the Archyphon of John are those referred to as posterity, usually thought to mean descendants or those othewise linked to Seth, meaning those who heard the teachings of Noah before the flood.
- The Savior describes the spirit of life that originates with the One and connects humanity to their divine origin, which was mistakenly given by Yaldabaoth, and the counterfeit spirit that comes from below, generated by Yaldabaoth and the rulers through the waters of forgetfulness and evil angels.

# Apochryphon of John



- There are three categories of humanity according to the Savior
  - Gnostics: those who received the spirit of life, and by achieving gnosis they have become perfect, worthy of transcendent salvation and eternal life
  - Refusals: those who rejected the secret teachings, and are infused with counterfeit spirit, denied salvation, and recarnate multiple times until they hear the truth and attain salvation
  - Those who turned away: those who gained knowledge of the divine spirit but turned away from it willingly, and are left with no opportunity for redemption, consigned to eternal punishment along with Yaldabaoth and his angels to the end of time
- Christianity focuses on conversion being necessary to save ignorant souls from eternal damnation, while Gnostics believe only apostates are in danger of being punished in the afterlife. If souls die while there are still ignorant, they are allowed the chance to be reborn and exposed to the truth in another life. Salvation is gnosis, damnation is oblivion: knowledge is the key to eternal salvation.



# Apochryphon of John



- The divine spirit of Forethought has come thrice to humanity: once to Seth, once to those who survived the flood, and it came for a third and final time in the form of a human body, presumably Jesus of Nazareth, who would preach the message of salvation and awakening.
- Jesus of Nazareth taught a secret knowledge that was shrouded in allusion, parable, and mysticism. Forethought has Jesus speak in secret teachings so as not to draw the attention of Yaldabaoth and the rulers. The true path toward salvation is based on the secret teachings, not just the surface teachings and parables.
- All of these revelations are taking place after the crucifixion of Jesus. John the Apostle and recipient of the Apochyphon is traveling to Jerusalem and meets a Pharisee (the ruling class) who tries to convince John that Jesus was a deceiver and should turn away from his truth.

# Apochryphon of John



- John is then visited by the Savior who takes three forms: a child, a young person, and an elderly man. Gnostics had a tripartite view of the universe. John is instructed to write it down and protect the knowledge he has been given.
- The Apochryphon is not as much symbolic as it is historical. Much like the Old Testament books of Chronicles, Kings et al., it purports to teach its readers about the past, rather than giving insights or prophecies about the future.
- When compared to the book of Revelation, readers hear prophecies about events that will take place, and use them to shape their understanding and faith in order to achieve salvation. In the Apochryphon of John, salvation comes not from proper orientation towards a coming event, but in properly understanding the nature of the physical world and the forces that created it.
- The God in the Apochryphon is completely removed from humanity; humans are left to try and make sense of the manifestations of that God, which come in the form of aeons like Sophia but also in the offspring of Yaldabaoth. Humanity's confusion is caused by Yaldabaoth.

# Gospel of Judas



- Judas is portrayed as a tragic hero rather than classic betrayer
- Jesus interacts with disciples: follow a God that is not the God of Jesus. Upset at this, the disciples ask why Jesus is mocking them. Jesus challenges them to step forth if they represent the perfect human being but all of them remain confused and skeptical.
- Judas steps forth and professes to know that Jesus is a partner of Barbelo, but Judas is not worthy to speak the name of the One that sent Jesus.
- Jesus reveals more of the cosmic order to Judas, including the aeons, the divine Adam, the race of Seth, et al. In two key ways, this is different from the Apochryphon of John: first, much less attention is paid to female characters (Sophia, Eve et al.), second, Yaldabaoth and his servants were brought into existence by the will of some divine beings in order to rule over the chaos of the material world.
- Despite this, the Old Testament god is inferior, only pseudo-divine, and the only true God is the One who lives in the eternal realm separate from humanity and the physical world.

# Gospel of Judas



- Judas is tragic: he is given knowledge of the divine realm and the truth of the world, but deprived of it. Jesus says “I will tell you the mysteries of the kingdom, not so that you will go there, but so that you will be much grieved.”
- In the New Testament, salvation comes into the world through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, facilitated by Judas's betrayal, which was foretold by Jesus and seemed to require it. Judas gives Jesus over and then suffers and dies for his guilt.
- In the Gnostic Gospel of Judas, Jesus implies that Judas will receive some sort of divine reward for the role Judas played in the betrayal of Christ and Christ's death. Judas is meant to sacrifice the human being within whom Jesus dwells, not the divine Savior himself. This sets off a chain of events that will ultimately release the physical world from its inferiority and re-establish it as the 13<sup>th</sup> heaven, with Judas as its ruler.