

## A GNOSTIC VIEW OF CREATION

Most Gnosticism - and there were many varieties - presents an explanation of the beginning of the world which features a supreme being far higher than the God of the Hebrew Bible. Interestingly enough, he is sometimes identified as Authentia. Sometimes the supreme figure is female rather than male. There are, in fact, a number of spiritual beings, both male and female, usually called "powers". In most versions, each pair procreates other, lower powers.

Ialdabaoth, as the God of Genesis 1-3 is sometimes called, is one of the lower powers. He created the physical world, and that was a grievous mistake. According to the Gnostic view, the material universe is evil, manufactured by a third-rate spiritual being. Thus the God of the Old Testament comes off very badly indeed; both for his creation of a world composed of matter and for his view that he is the supreme sovereign. Ialdabaoth is so blind that he does not even know of the existence of the higher powers: "Ialdabaoth in his arrogance boasted that all these things were under him, and said, 'I am the Father and God, and there is no one above me.' However his mother heard him and shouted out against him, 'Do not lie, Ialdabaoth.'"

When Adam and Eve are placed in the Garden of Eden, they believe that Ialdabaoth is the supreme deity. Here Satan, another of the powers, appears as a great benefactor. He realizes that Adam and Eve, caught in the deception perpetrated by Ialdabaoth, have no knowledge of the Supreme Being of the universe. They cannot attain to him because they do not even know of his existence. Their problem is lack of knowledge, yet they have been forbidden to eat of the tree of knowledge. Assuming the form of a serpent, Satan communicates this wonderful gnosis, or knowledge, to Eve, who then shares it with Adam. The two of them can now seek the Supreme Being who is far above the material world, seek to rise above the earth to his abode in pure spirituality, and seek to escape the unfortunate influence of Ialdabaoth.

"But Ialdabaoth, (the Gnostics said), did not wish the mother above nor the father to be remembered among men. But the serpent persuaded them and brought them knowledge and taught the man and the woman all of the knowledge of the mysteries above. On account of the knowledge which he had revealed to humanity, the father, that is Ialdabaoth, was enraged and hurled him down out of heaven."