

Bythus and His “Family”

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The Gnostics taught that there is a perfect, eternal, invisible, incomprehensible, unknowable, transcendent Aeon¹. They called him by several names including *Proarche*, *Propator* and *Bythus* (meaning “First-Beginning,” “First-Father,” and “Profundity,” respectively). He is also called, *The Unknown Father*. There are other Aeons, emanating by means of thought directly or indirectly from Bythus, including Christ and the God of the Old Testament, but Bythus is above and beyond them all. Bythus is fully known to only one of these lesser Aeons, *Nous* (meaning “Mind,” or “Intelligence”). Most of the rest are aware of the existence of Bythus, but they cannot truly comprehend him. And he is completely unknown to the God of the Old Testament. Although Bythus is the creator of the lesser Aeons, he is NOT the creator of the material universe.

Bythus is perceived by the Gnostics as “masculine.” He has a “feminine” consort named *Ennoëa* (meaning “Thought”). *Ennoëa* also has other names including *Charis* (meaning “Grace”) and *Sige* (meaning “Silence”). Through conjunction, Bythus and *Sige* brought forth an Aeon named *Nous*, to whom we have already referred. Of all the Aeons, *Nous* alone was equal to his Father and alone capable of comprehending Bythus. Like Bythus, *Nous* is masculine. And like Bythus and *Sige*, *Nous* has more than one name. He is also called *Monogenes* (“Only-Begotten”), *Father*, and *The Beginning of all Things*².

Nous was not the only offspring of Bythus and *Sige*. They also produced a female offspring named *Aletheia* (“Truth”). These four Aeons have a special name in Gnosticism. They are called, the *First-Begotten (Primary, or Pythagorean) Tetrad*. “Tetrad” means a set of four. They are also called, the *Root of All Things*. In the course of time, *Aletheia* became the consort of *Nous* and from their conjunction sprang the entire Gnostic Pantheon.

These Aeons dwell in a “place” called the *Pleroma*. The *Pleroma* (“Fullness”) is not a part of the physical universe. It is a “supercelestial,” dwelling of light. It is the Gnostic concept of “Heaven” and is completely outside the physical realm or dimension.

The particular point of emphasis within Gnosticism about Bythus is that he is transcendent, unknowable, and far above all else. He is in a different dimension or reality. The other Aeons in the Gnostic pantheon are the product of his thoughts. They emanate from him. They exemplify aspects,

or attributes, of his being, but they are not him. Bythus does not directly interact with the created universe, but the emanations from him (lesser Aeons), interact on his behalf.

Notes:

1. The term "Aeon" means "self-existent one" or "ever-existing entity." There are a multitude of these beings in Gnostic thought and the reader may think of them as "gods," god-like beings or super-angelic spiritual beings. The Gnostic term "Aeon" will be used throughout this series of articles.

2. One of the difficulties in understanding Gnosticism is this plurality of names of the Aeons. To make things even more complex, some names are used to refer to more than one Aeon. And to make things still more complex, each of the major Gnostic teachers had a different scheme or genealogy of Aeons. It is not necessary, however, to master these schemes in order to understand the basics of Gnosticism.