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- **Nag Hammadi** - The Nag Hammadi library 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.
- From their writings we know the efforts Christian leaders made to battle gnostic teachings, but only since the discovery of the texts at Nag Hammadi have we been able to study the original gnostic writings themselves. From these manuscripts we have learned the profound challenge gnosticism posed to the early church.
- What effects do our culture's views on many hot button topics like abortion, homosexuality, sexual promiscuity, gender identity have on Christian congregations and individuals?

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- The gnostic movement taught a duality between the material and spiritual worlds: that physical matter was evil and the spirit was good. This “anti-cosmic” view informed their radical thoughts regarding the Creator in the Old Testament.
- Gnostics viewed Him as an imperfect being who created this imperfect cosmos and who originally emanated from a perfect Higher Power.
- Providing a definition of what is "gnostic" is extremely difficult because it wasn't a single movement but was often labelled by the individual leaders of various groups, like Sabellius or Valentinus.

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- The following are some general tenets of Gnosticism:
- The experience of a completely other-worldly, distant, supreme God;
- The introduction of a distinct creator God or assistant: within the Platonic tradition he is called 'craftsman' -Greek demiurgos - and is sometimes described as merely ignorant, but sometimes also as evil;
- Consequently, a common gnostic belief is that the world and matter were also evil.
- The dilemma is that a divine element slumbers in human beings of one class as a divine spark and can be freed from its bondage to the material world.

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- Knowledge ('gnosis') about this state can be gained only through a redeemer figure who descends from a higher sphere to enlighten humankind and ascends back to it again;
- Redemption depends on whether one gains the secret knowledge of 'that God (or the spark) in them'
- The Bible presents a sharp contrast to this as we see in Ps 8.
- After creating all things, the Lord looked over His cosmos carefully, "And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31a).

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- According to Genesis 3:17-18, after Adam and Eve disobeyed God He put the whole world under a curse which the church has always believed wasn't just limited to "farming" but described a world no longer in harmony with us but chaotic and unpredictable.
- Gnostic ideas of this cosmos (good in the spiritual realm and evil in the physical) may have first appeared a long time ago, but we can still hear their echo today.
- In what ways does evolutionary thinking more clearly align with Gnosticism's presumptions than the biblical description of a cosmos created "very good," but later cursed through sin?

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- In 1 Corinthians 15:26, the apostle Paul wrote, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”
- If the earth and life are hundreds of millions to billions of years old how does this passage contradict evolutionary thinking?
- Describe some of the ways Jesus demonstrated His divine concern for the world He created (both mankind and nature).
- If you want to understand the controversy created by Christianity in a society where Platonic/gnostic thinking was common look at Hebrews 2:9-15.
- Further if you want to understand why Jews had a hard time with a crucified Messiah look at Deut 21:22-23.

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- Knowing those two passages you can begin to understand what Paul is saying in 1 Cor 1:19-23.
- We are just beginning to be re-immersed in gnostic beliefs as the church loses its central place in western culture.
- Many world religions also believe in that divine spark in each of us:
- Ātman is a Sanskrit word that means inner self or soul. In Hindu philosophy, Ātman is the first principle, the true self, the essence of an individual. In order to attain liberation (end the cycle of rebirth), a human being must acquire self-knowledge, which is to realize that one's true self (Ātman) is identical with the transcendent self Brahman.

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- In contrast, the Bible teaches that when Jesus Christ returns on Judgment Day, He will raise our bodies and make them glorious and immortal forever. At the same time He will lift the curse from creation, so we may live in a perfect new heaven and a new earth. (See Romans 8:21 and 2 Peter 3:13.)
- All of this is still about salvation – how is a person truly saved...is it secret knowledge that releases us or what Christ has done? What part does the cross play in Gnostic theology?
- Let's take a look at a few sections of Gnostic writing.
- Why are people perpetually drawn by “secret” knowledge and groups (Masons, Skull and Bones at Yale, the Knights Templar...etc.)?

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- The texts that we have been referencing today and those that are in the Bible study section of our website can be found online at <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/nhl.html>.
- There you have access to many other gnostic and apocryphal writings that not only came from the find at Nag Hammadi but others that had been known before.