

What is Mandaism?

Mandaesim is a form of Gnosticism. It is a false teaching (2 Pe 2:1).¹

K. Rudolph wrote:

A real problem for research in Mandaism is understanding the origin, growth, and development of Mandaean traditions. No scholarly consensus has yet been reached in regard to source analysis and redaction. Such analyses would undoubtedly enable scholars to isolate early traditions and thus to trace their development throughout the extensive and diverse Mandaean literature...²

¹ Gnosticism. A term derived from Gk. gnōsis, 'knowledge'. Until modern times it was applied exclusively to a body of heretical teaching denounced by the church Fathers in the early Christian centuries. But in 20th-century scholarship it has often been applied more loosely to any form of religious belief which emphasizes any kind of dualism and/or the possession of secret knowledge. So, for example, Zoroastrianism, Mandaism, the Hermetic literature, the Dead Sea scrolls and even the NT itself have all been described as 'gnostic'. J.W.D. (1996). Gnosticism. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p. 415). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

² "...Here only a brief summary of the main lines of Mandaean thought [which] can be presented. The cosmology is marked by a strict (gnostic) dualism between a "world of light" (alma dnhura) and a "world of darkness" (alma dhšuka). The world of light is ruled by a sublime being who bears different names: "Life" (haiyê), "Great Life," "Lord of Greatness" (mara drabuta), "Great Spirit" (mana rabba), "King of Light" (malka dnhura). He is surrounded by a countless number of beings of light (uthrê or malkê), living in "dwellings" (škinata) or "worlds" (almê), performing cultic acts and praising the "Life." The world of light came into being from the "First Life" by way of descending emanations or creations, which are called "Second," "Third," and "Fourth" Life; they also bear personal names, such as Yošamin, Abâthur, and Ptahil. The last one is the later demiurge.

The "World of Darkness" is governed by the "Lord of Darkness" and arose from the "dark waters" (chaos). The main powers of the World of Darkness are a giant monster or dragon with the name "Ur" (probably a polemic transformation of Heb 'ôr, "light") and the evil (female) "spirit" (Ruha). Their offspring are demonic beings (dêvs) and "angels" (malakê). To them belong also the "Seven" (šuba) or the planets (šibiahê), and the "Twelve" (trisar) signs of the Zodiac.

The conflict between light and darkness, life and death, good and evil leads to the creation of the world (tibil) by the demiurge Ptahil with the help of the dark powers. In this process the body of the first man, Adam, is created by the same beings, but his "animating essence" is derived from the World of Light. This "substance of light" in Adam is called "inner (hidden) Adam" (adam kasya, adakas), and it represents the "soul" (nišimta) or "spirit" (mana) in humans, which has to be saved or rescued from the dark, evil body (= world) by heavenly beings of light. The salvation of these "souls" is the main concern of the Mandaean religion. One of its central creeds is the belief in several "messengers," "helpers," or "redeemers" sent by the "Life" in order to inform the pious of their "call" and to save their souls. The dominant figure of these "envoys of light" is the "knowledge of Life" (Manda d Haiyê), who is also called "Son of Life" (Barhaiyê) or "counterpart of Life" (Dmuthaiyê). Beside him stand the three heavenly Adamites, Hibil (Abel), Šitil (Seth), and Anoš (Enosh). Actually the Mandaeans know no "historical" redeemers but only "mythological" ones appearing throughout the ages of the history of the world as a repetition of the first revelation to Adam. Only after the confrontation with early Christianity did they develop the story that one of their messengers (Anoš or Manda d Haiyê) appeared in Jerusalem as an antagonist of Jesus Christ in order to expose him as a liar. In this connection John the Baptist played the role of a true Mandaean "disciple" or "priest" (tarmida). Whether reliable information about the early history of the Mandaeans in relation to the movement of the followers of John the Baptist can be derived from these tales is a problem that remains unsolved. For the Mandaeans John is not the founder of their religion but only one of their prominent representatives." Rudolph, K. (1992). *Mandaism*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 4, p. 501). New York: Doubleday.

Man is not in need of additional knowledge. Man is a sinner in need of a savior (Jn 3:16).

J. H. Bernard wrote:

...[A]ttention has been directed of recent years to the Mandaean and Hermetic literature, as possible homes of the Logos idea.³ Many parallels to Johannine phraseology have been collected from the writings of Lidzbarski, Reitzenstein, and others by Walter Bauer in the last edition of his commentary on the Fourth Gospel. Some of these are striking, especially those from the Mandaean Liturgies: "I am a Word, a Son of Words"; "the Word of Life"; "the Light of Life"; "the First Light, the Life, which was out of the Life"; "the worlds do not know thy Names, nor understand thy Light." There is, however, no evidence that Mandæan teachings had any influence on Christian philosophy in its beginnings.⁴

The apostle John used the term *logos* to describe the Lord Jesus. Jesus was the be all end all—that *raison d'être*, or reason for being—that men had been looking for. Gnostics attempted to pervert and invert scripture—namely John's use of the term *logos* (2 Pet. 3:15–17). John's text cannot mean what it never meant.

P. J. Achtemeier wrote:

Despite its suppression by ecclesiastical authorities in the third and fourth centuries, Gnosticism continued in the guise of Manichaeism and Mandaicism and in various medieval speculative movements...⁵

The body of Christ is called to be like-minded (Phil 2:2). Gnosticism in all of its forms should be rejected (Heb. 13:9).

³ The apostle John described the Lord Jesus as the *logos* (Jn 1:1-3).

⁴ Bernard, J. H. (1929). *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to St. John.* (A. H. McNeile, Ed.) (pp. cxxxviii–cxlv). New York: C. Scribner's Sons.

⁵ "...See also Gospel of Thomas, The; Nag Hammadi; Simon Magus." Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In *Harper's Bible dictionary* (1st ed., p. 350). San Francisco: Harper & Row.