

# Basilides

The following texts are attributed to Basilides by the patristic writers noted below:

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## 1. Hippolytus, *Refutations*.

There was when naught was: nay, even that "naught" was not aught of things that are. But nakedly, conjecture and mental quibbling apart, there was absolutely not even the one. And when I use the term "was" I do not mean to say that it was ;but merely to give some suggestion of what I wish to indicate, I use the expression "there was absolutely naught". Naught was, neither matter, nor substance, nor voidness of substance, nor simplicity, nor impossibility of composition, nor inconceptibility, imperceptibility, neither man, nor angel, nor God ; in fine, anything at all for which man has ever found a name, nor by any operation which falls within range of his perception or conception.

## 2. Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 4.81.2-4.83.2

{Basilides, in Book 23 of his "Commentaries," speaks of those who suffer punishment as martyrs, with the following words:} I believe that all who experience the so-called tribulations must have committed sins other than what they realize, and so have been brought to this good end. Through the kindness of that which leads each one of them about, they are actually accused of an extraneous set of charges so they might not have to suffer as

confessed criminals convicted of crimes, nor be reviled as adulterers or murderers, but rather might suffer because they are disposed by nature to be Christian. And this encourages them to think that they are not suffering. But even if a person should happen to suffer without having sinned at all - which is rare - still, that person's suffering is not caused by the plotting of some power. Rather, it is analogous to the suffering of a new-born baby, who seems not to have sinned.

{Then, farther along, he adds:} A new-born baby, then, has never sinned before; or more precisely it has not actually committed any sins, but within itself it has the activity of sinning. Whenever it experiences suffering, it receives benefit, profiting by many unpleasant experiences. Just so, if by chance a grown man has not sinned by deed and yet suffers, he suffers the suffering for the same reason as the new-born baby: he has within him sinfulness, and the only reason he has not sinned (in deed) is because he has not had the occasion to do so. Thus not sinning cannot be imputed to him. Indeed, someone who intends to commit adultery is an adulterer even without succeeding in the act, and someone who intends to commit murder is a murderer even without being able to commit the act. Just so, if I see the aforementioned sinless person suffering despite having done no wrong, I must call that person evil by intent to sin. For I will say anything rather than call providence evil. {Then, farther along, he speaks of the Lord outright as of a human being:

Nevertheless, let us suppose that you leave aside all these matters and set out to embarrass me by referring to certain figures, saying perhaps, "And consequently so-and-so must have sinned, since he suffered!" If you permit, I shall say that he did not sin, but was like

the new-born baby that suffers. But if you press the argument, I shall say that any human being that you can name is human; God is righteous. For no one is pure of uncleanness, as someone once said. {Actually, Basilides' presupposition is that the soul previously sinned in another life and undergoes its punishment in the present one. Excellent souls are punished honorably, by martyrdom; other kinds are purified by some other appropriate punishment.

### **3. Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 4.86.1**

We assume that one part of the so-called will of God is to love all; a second is to desire nothing; and a third is to hate nothing.

### **4. Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* 1015B**

Indeed, the Apostle (Paul) has said, "I was once alive apart from the law," [Rom 7:9] at some time or other. That is (Paul means), before I came into this body, I lived in the kind of body that is not subject to the law: the body of a domestic animal or a bird.