Discovered in the Berlin Gnostic Codex 8502 in 1896 but not published until 1955, the Secret Book (Apocryphon) of John is probably the most widely known of all the Sethian treatises. The popularity and importance of the Secret Book of John in antiquity is clearly evident. It now survives in no fewer than four separate manuscripts, a huge number of copies compared with what we have for most Gnostic texts. Two manuscripts (Nag Hammadi Codices II and IV) contain a somewhat longer version of the Secret Book of John, while the other two (Nag Hammadi Codex III and the Berlin Gnostic Codex 8502) contain somewhat shorter versions. All four codices contain other writings, but in the three Nag Hammadi codices, the Secret Book of John is always the first tractate copied into the codex. In Against Heresies 1.20 the late second-century anti-Gnostic Christian bishop Irenaeus summarized a work very similar to the first part of the Secret Book of John. Although Irenaeus attributed this work to certain “Gnostics,” a later version of Irenaeus’s report by the same title (Against Heresies 2, falsely attributed to Tertullian), ascribed this work to certain “Sethians” (Sethoita’, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus (Summary of Heretical Fables 13) identified these Gnostics as “Barbeloites.” In addition, in his next chapter (Against Heresies 1.30) Irenaeus summarizes a work that features a revision of Genesis 1-9 quite similar to the second part of the Secret Book of John, attributing it to certain “others” (alii) whom Pseudo-Tertullian in Against all Heresies 2 first identified as “Ophites,” and Theodoret (Summary of Heretical Fables 1.14) later identified also as Sethians, although the heavenly Seth plays a role only in the Secret Book of John.

According to Frederik Wisse,1 one of the editors of the standard synopsis of the Secret Book of John, all four manuscripts (Nag Hammadi Codices II, III, and IV, and the Berlin Gnostic Codex) of the Secret Book are copies of independent translations into Sahidic Coptic from earlier Greek exemplars, one a shorter and

the other a longer version (both now lost). The versions in Codices II and IV are independent Coptic recensions of a previous Coptic translation of the original longer Greek version, and the shorter versions contained in Codex III and the Berlin Codex are independent translations of a single Greek exemplar of the shorter version. Aside from the question of the relationship of these two or three recensions of the Secret Book of John to the “Barbeloite” theogony and cosmogony summarized by Irenaeus, there is also the question of the relative priority among all these versions of the underlying myth: not only Irenaeus’s account, but also that of both the two longer (II and IV) and two shorter versions (III and BG) of the Secret Book of John. At present this issue has not been decided, although it is obvious that even the material common to both the longer and shorter versions represents a text that has undergone substantial redaction and incorporated a number of separate sources, such as the introductory negative theology (II 3.17-33) and a short dialogical treatise on the salvation of various sorts of souls (BG 64.14-71.2; II 25.16-27.30). The longer versions differ from the shorter ones principally in their inclusion of the long citation from the Book of Zoroaster (II 15.29-19.10) and a hymnic monologue spoken by Forethought (Pronoia) as a conclusion for the entire work (II 30.11-31.25).

Although much of the material found in the Secret Book of John—arguably the earliest complete version of the “Sethian myth”—is echoed in other Sethian treatises, the concluding Forethought/Pronoia monologue seems actually to have served as the inspiration for the composition of an entire Sethian treatise, namely, Three Forms of First Thought (or Trimorphic Protennoia). One may accordingly conjecture that the shorter recension of the Secret Book of John (BG and NHC III), including the short excursus on the destiny of various sorts of souls, came into existence around 150 CE in the form of a dialogue between the resurrected Christ and his disciple John son of Zebedee. The longer version in Codices II and IV was created basically by the addition of the extended angelic melothesia of the earthly Adam’s material body (from the Book of Zoroaster, II 15.29-19.10) and the inclusion of the Forethought/Pronoia monologue (II 30.11-31.25) at the end of the work and may have been completed during the last quarter of the second century. One may also conjecture a still earlier, non-dialogical version consisting of the theogonic and cosmological material common to the Secret Book of John (BG 29.18-44.19; II 6.10-14.18), Irenaeus’s Against Heresies 1.29, and Three Forms of First Thought 38.16-40.22, which may represent the earliest recoverable form of the Secret Book of John.

The Secret Book contains what purport to be secret teachings revealed by Christ in a postresurrection appearance to the apostle John the son of Zebedee. It thus constitutes a continuation of the Fourth Gospel, whose farewell dialogues between the precrucifixion Jesus and his comprehending disciples Peter, Thomas, and Philip concerning Jesus’s promised return to the Father are now supplemented by John’s postascension encounter with the very Savior who had indeed returned to the Father just as he had predicted. The veiled references to the many rooms of his Father’s house to which the earthly Savior had promised to take his followers are now described in detail, and the unity between the Father
and the Son is now clarified: Jesus is the Father, Mother, and Son; indeed, in his primordial capacity as the blessed Mother-Father, Christ had already raised up the seed of Seth to the Father's many-roomed house, namely, the four eternal realms, or aeons, which he himself had previously prepared before this world had ever come to be. In contrast to a future parousia at the end of days envisioned by John 21 and the Johannine letters, the Secret Book of John portrays this parousia as occurring shortly after the events described in the gospel and in effect challenges the leadership role John 21 assigns to Peter by having the postascension Jesus appoint John as the teacher of his fellow disciples.

Christ's ensuing lengthy discourse, punctuated at certain points by John's requests for clarification, consists of two parts, the Savior's lengthy monologue on theogony and cosmogony and a subsequent dialogue between John and the Savior on anthropogony and soteriology. According to Michael Waldstein, with respect to its rapprochement with Jewish Genesis traditions, the first part tells of pre-Genesis realities and events about which Moses provides no information, and the second offers a rereading of Genesis 1–7. With respect to its rapprochement with Platonic traditions, especially Plato's Timaeus, the Jewish creator god is split "into an 'upper God of pure goodness, who is personally identified as the transcendent God of Middle Platonic theology who retained some central features of the God of Israel, and an evil lower God who was personally identified as the God of Israel, but is portrayed as a parody of the Platonic demiurge.'

In the first part, Christ reveals to John the nature of the supreme deity (the primal divine triad, Father, Mother, and Child), the divine realm brought into being by him (the All or Pleroma of light organized into Four Luminaries, Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithai, and Eleleth), and its relation to the created order—how the creation, with its flaws and shortcomings originated (through the fall of Sophia/Wisdom and the creation of a lower world at the hands of her ill-begotten son, Yaldabaoth, and his demonic underlings) and became dominated by the inferior powers that now control it. This part concludes with Yaldabaoth's boast, "I am a jealous god and there is no other god beside me" (II 13.8–9), which marks the point of transition to the second part of the revelation, a dialogue wherein Christ makes the first of many textual allusions to Genesis. What makes the work distinctively Sethian is the understanding of the Four Luminaries as the respective aeonic dwellings of the archetypal Adam, Seth, his primordial seed (the seven Sethite generations from Seth through Noah), and Seth's postdiluvian progeny.

The second part of the Secret Book of John contains Christ's explanation of the true meaning of Genesis 1–9, revealing how Yaldabaoth created Adam as an initially weak copy, not yet spiritual, of the image of the archetypal human projected below from the divine world. John then asks the first of ten questions, introducing an element of dialogue not found in the first part; and the subject matter shifts

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from theogony and cosmogony to soteriology and anthropogony. This part goes on to reveal how Adam acquired his true spiritual nature and was enlightened by Insight (Epinoia) appearing in the form of the spiritual Eve and by eating of the tree of knowledge, was expelled from paradise, and begot Seth. After a short dialogue on the salvation of various types of souls from the incarnational cycle and on the origin of the wicked spirit, Christ’s revelation concludes with the story of Yaldabaoth’s further enslavement of the human race through the origination of fate, the coming of the flood, and (note the reverse of the biblical order) how intercourse between the angels and human women led to humanity’s sexual enslavement. The Savior then departs to the aeonic world with a reminder that salvation is certain, since the divine Mother has already enlightened her seed.

In the long monologue concluding the longer versions of the Secret Book of John (Codices II and IV) Forethought/Pronoia/Barbelo narrates in the first person her three salvific descents into the world of darkness to awaken her “seed” from their heavy sleep induced by the archontic powers and to elevate them into the supernal light by sealing them with “Five Seals.” Several Sethian treatises present this final act of deliverance as a baptismal rite (the Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit, Three Forms of First Thought, Melchizedek, the Revelation of Adam, Zostrianos, and perhaps Marsanes), usually called the Five Seals (Three Forms of First Thought; the longer versions of the Secret Book of John; the Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit; and the untitled text of the Bruce Codex). Thus the ultimate restoration of Seth’s progeny, who continue to live on earth, will be accomplished in the last days; its advent is marked by Barbelo’s final act of raising up her seed by appearing either in her own person or in that of her child (the Word or Autogenes the Self-Generated or Seth or Christ or other similar figures) to reveal to the Sethians of those days—that is, the contemporary readers of the Secret Book—the true account of their spiritual origins and nature.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Secret Book of John

The Teaching of the Savior (1,1–4)

The teaching of the Savior, and [the revelation] of the mysteries [and the things]\(^2\) hidden in silence, things he taught his disciple John.

The Revealer Appears to John (1,5–2,25)

One day when John the brother of James, who are the sons of Zebedee, went up to the temple, it happened that a Pharisee named Arimanius\(^3\) came up to him and said to him, "Where is your teacher, whom you followed?"

I said to him, "He has returned to the place he came from."

The Pharisee said to me, "This Nazarene really has deceived you, filled your ears with lies, closed [your minds], and turned you from the traditions of your ancestors."

When I, John, heard this, I turned away from the temple and went to a mountainous and barren place. I was distressed within, and I asked how the Savior was chosen:

Why was he sent into the world by his Father?
Who is his Father who sent him?
To what kind of eternal realm\(^4\) shall we go?
And why did he tell us, when he spoke, that this eternal realm [to which we shall go]
is modeled after the incorruptible realm,
but he did not teach us what kind of aeon that one is?

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1. Coptic texts: NHC II,1: 1,1–32,10; III,1: 1,1–40,11; IV,1: 1,1–49,25; BG 8502,2: 15,6–77,7. Editions: The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Codex II, 11–41; The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Codex III, 7–44; The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Codex IV, 7–57; Walter C. Till and Hans-Martin Schenke, Die gnostischen Schriften des koptischen Papyrus Berolinensis 8502; Hans-Martin Schenke, Hans-Gebhard Bethge, and Ursula Ulrike Kaiser, eds., Nag Hammadi Deutch, 1,95–150 (Michael Walstein); Michael Walstein and Frederik Wisse, The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II, III, and IV,1 with BG 8502,2. The text is commonly referred to as the Apocryphon of John. The present translation is based mainly on the Coptic text of NHC II (the longer version of the Secret Book of John), and unless otherwise indicated the page numbers refer to the Codex II text. Where lacunae in the Codex II version may be confidently restored on the basis of readings preserved in the other texts, they are not placed within brackets. A few lines omitted from the Codex II text are added from the Codex IV text, the other text representing the longer version of the Secret Book of John. References to the texts of BG 8502 and NHC III, which represent the shorter version, are also included. 2. Or restore to read "[that are]." 3. This name recalls the evil Zoroastrian deity Ahriman. 4. Aeon, here and below.
At the moment I was thinking about this, look, the heavens opened, all creation under heaven lit up, and the world shook. [2] I was afraid, and look, I saw within the light [someone standing] by me. As I was looking, it seemed to be an elderly person. Again it changed its appearance to be a youth. [3] Not that there were several figures before me. Rather, there was a figure with several forms within the light. These forms were visible through each other, and the figure had three forms.

The figure said to me, “John, John, why are you doubting? Why are you afraid? Aren’t you familiar with this figure? Then do not be fainthearted. I am with you always. I am [the Father], I am the Mother, I am the Child. I am the incorruptible and the undefiled one. [Now I have come] to teach you what is, what was, and what is going to come, that you may [understand] what is invisible and what is visible; and to teach you about the [unshakable generation of] the perfect human. So now, lift up your [head] that you may [hear] the things I shall tell you today, and that you may relate them to your spiritual friends who are from the unshakable generation of the perfect human.”

The One (2,25-4,19)

I asked if I might understand this, and it said to me, The One is a sovereign that has nothing over it. It is God and Parent, Father of the All, the invisible one that is over the All, that is incorruptible, that is pure light at which no eye can gaze.

The One is the Invisible Spirit. We should not think of it as a god or like a god. For it is greater than a god, because it has nothing over it and no lord above it. It does not exist within anything inferior [to it, since everything] exists within it, [for it established] itself. It is eternal, since it does not need anything. For it is absolutely complete. It has never lacked anything in order to be completed by it. Rather, it is always absolutely complete in light.

The One is illimitable, since there is nothing before it to limit it, unfathomable, since there is nothing before it to fathom it, immeasurable, since there was nothing before it to measure it, invisible, since nothing has seen it,

5. Perhaps from the Coptic aorom; here the shorter version in BG 5<sup>2</sup> reads oualou, “a child.” 6. Coptic hal, “servant,” probably is a translation of the Greek pais, which can mean “youth” or “servant.” In the present context “youth” is much more likely. On Jesus appearing as a youth or child, cf., e.g., Gospel of Judas 33. 7. The text reads monas, “monad.” The following lines offer a classic statement of divine transcendence formulated in terms of negation. This statement in the Secret Book of John is very similar to that in Allogenes the Stranger and reminiscent also of the via negativa of the Hindu Upanishads, with the insistence that the ultimate is neti neti, “not this, not that.” 8. The text reads “Father” (εἶδος), here and below, for the transcendent Great Invisible Spirit. The translation “Parent” is incorporated here to emphasize that the divine parent transcends gender categories, and the translation of this section seeks to provide an accurate means of addressing issues of gender in the Secret Book of John. For a slightly different translation of a portion of this section, see the note to Allogenes the Stranger 62-64. 9. The last clause is restored from NHC IV.
The Secret Book of John

eternal, since it exists eternally,
unutterable, since nothing could comprehend it to utter it,
unnamable, since there is nothing before it to give it a name.

The One is the immeasurable light, pure, holy, immaculate. It is unutterable, and is perfect in incorruptibility. Not that it is just perfection, or blessedness, or divinity; it is much greater.

The One is not corporeal and it is not incorporeal. The One is not large and it is not small. It is impossible to say, How much is it? What [kind is it]?

For no one can understand it.

The One is not among the things that exist, but it is much greater. Rather, as it is in itself, it is not a part of the aeons or time. For whatever is part of a realm was once prepared by another. Time was not allotted to it, since it receives nothing from anyone: what would be received would be on loan. The one who is first does not need to receive anything from another. It beholds itself in [4] its light.

The One is majestic and has an immeasurable purity.

The One is a realm that gives a realm, life that gives life, a blessed one that gives blessedness, knowledge that gives knowledge, a good one that gives goodness, mercy that gives mercy and redemption, grace that gives grace.

Not that the One possesses this. Rather, the One gives immeasurable and incomprehensible light.

What shall I tell you about it? Its eternal realm is incorruptible, at peace, dwelling in silence, at rest, before everything.

It is the head of all realms, and it is the one who sustains them through its goodness.

We would not know [what is ineffable], we would not understand what is immeasurable, were it not for the one who has come from the Father. This is the one who has told these things to us [alone].

10. The parallel passages in the shorter version of the Secret Book of John in BG 8502, 24 and NHC III,5 and in Allogenes the Stranger 63 read “he is not a creature.” The differences here may be related to a confusion of the Greek terms poion, “what kind,” and poieis, “creature.” 11. Gnosis.
Barbelo Appears (4.19–6.10)

This Father is the one who beholds himself in the light surrounding him, which is the spring of living water and provides all the realms. He reflects on his image everywhere, sees it in the spring of the Spirit, and becomes enamored of his luminous water, [for his image is in] the spring of pure luminous water surrounding him.13

His thought became a reality, and she who appeared in his presence in shining light came forth. She is the first power who preceded everything and came forth from his mind as the Forethought14 of the All. Her light shines like the Father’s light; she, the perfect power, is the image of the Perfect and Invisible Virgin Spirit.15

She, [the first] power, the glory of Barbelo,17 the perfect [5] glory among the aeons, the glory of revelation, she glorified and praised the Virgin Spirit, for because of the Spirit she had come forth.

She is the first Thought, the image of the Spirit. She became the universal womb, for she precedes everything,

the Mother-Father,19
the first Human,
the holy Spirit,
the triple male,20
the triple power,
the androgynous one with three names,
the aeon among the invisible beings,
the first to come forth.

Barbelo asked the Invisible Virgin Spirit to give her Foreknowledge, and the Spirit consented.21 When the Spirit consented, Foreknowledge appeared and

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12. Here and elsewhere the word “Father” is used for clarity of translation when the Coptic uses only a personal pronoun. 13. The Father gazes into the water and falls in love with his own image in a manner that calls to mind Narcissus in Greek mythology (see Ovid Metamorphoses 3.402–510). 14. Pronoia, here and below. 15. Lit., “his.” 16. Through this love of the Father for his own image the Father’s thought (ennoia) emanated, and the First Thought or Forethought (pronoia) comes from the mind of the Father: the divine Mother, Barbelo. The Father thus produces an entity independently, without the aid of a lover. Other gods who are credited with acts of independent procreation include the Greek god Zeus, who produces Athena, the daughter of Metis (Wisdom or Skill), from his head alongside the River (or Lake) Triton (see Hesiod Theogony 886–900, 924–29), and the Egyptian god Atum, who mates with his hand and spits—i.e., he produces the seed of life by means of masturbation. On Sophia conceiving independently, cf. Secret Book of John II, 9–10. 17. Barbelo is the divine mother and the first emanation of the Father of the All in Sethian texts. She is also described as the Forethought of the Invisible Spirit. The name Barbelo may derive from Hebrew, and a possible translation is “God [cf. ‘el] in (b-) four (ar[b]ai),” with reference to the tetragrammaton, the ineffable four-letter name of God. 18. Lit., “him” or “it,” here and below. 19. The text has ἀρετοπατέω, probably a term for an androgynous parent. 20. This is a term of praise, in which maleness symbolizes all that is heavenly, like the divine Father, and maleness is amplified by being so three times over. Similar themes occur in Gospel of Thomas 114, the Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit, the Three Stèles of Seth, and other texts. 21. Or, throughout this section, “looked on,” “looked on in agreement,” or “nodded in agreement.” Cf. the Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit.
stood by Forethought. This is the one who came from the Thought of the Invisible Virgin Spirit.22 Foreknowledge glorified the Spirit and the Spirit's perfect power, Barbelo, for because of her Foreknowledge had come into being.

She asked again to be given Incorruptibility, and the Spirit consented. When the Spirit consented, Incorruptibility appeared and stood by Thought and Foreknowledge. Incorruptibility glorified the invisible one and Barbelo. Because of her they had come into being.

Barbelo asked to be given Life Eternal, and the Invisible Spirit consented. When the Spirit consented, Life Eternal appeared, and they stood together and glorified the Invisible Spirit and Barbelo. Because of her they had come into being.

She asked again to be given Truth, and the Invisible Spirit consented. Truth appeared, and they stood together and glorified the good Invisible [6] Spirit and its Barbelo. Because of her they had come into being.

These are the five aeons of the Father. They are:

- the first human, the image of the Invisible Spirit, that is, Forethought, which is Barbelo, and Thought,23 along with Foreknowledge,
- Incorruptibility,
- Life Eternal
- and Truth.

These are the five androgynous aeons, which are the ten aeons, which is the Father.24

Barbelo Conceives (6.10–7.30)

The Father25 gazed into Barbelo, with the pure light surrounding the Invisible Spirit, and his radiance. Barbelo conceived from him, and he produced a spark of light similar to the blessed light but not as great. This was the only Child of the Mother-Father that had come forth, the only offspring, the only Child of the Father, the pure light.26 The Invisible Virgin Spirit rejoiced over the light that was produced, that came forth from the first power of the Spirit's Forethought, who is Barbelo. The Spirit anointed it with his own goodness27 until it was perfect, with no lack of goodness, since it was anointed with the goodness of the

22. The one who comes from the Spirit's thought is most likely Forethought, or possibly Foreknowledge.
23. Or "thinking," "mind." 24. The five are pentas, the "pentad" or "quintet." It consists of Barbelo and the four spiritual attributes Barbelo requested. Since they are androgynous, they can also be called the ten (dekas). The five or the ten are the same as the Father in emanation. 25. Lit., "He." 26. Spiritual intercourse between the Father and Barbelo produces a Child of light. In the longer version of the Secret Book of John, the Father is considered to be the active procreative force. In the shorter version found in BG 8502 and NHC III, Barbelo is the one who gazes into the Father or the pure light, and then she gives birth. 27. Lit., "He (or it) anointed it with his own goodness." The Coptic reads μακάα, here and below, from the Greek khrístos ("good") or khríastos (christós, "anointed"). The text apparently maintains that the divine Child is both good and anointed.
Invisible Spirit. The Child stood in the presence of the Spirit as the Spirit anointed the Child. As soon as the Child received this from the Spirit, it glorified the holy Spirit and perfect Forethought. Because of her it had come forth.

The Child asked to be given Mind as a companion to work with, and the Spirit consented. When the Invisible Spirit consented, [7] Mind appeared and stood by the anointed, and glorified the Spirit and Barbelo.

All these beings came into existence in silence.

Mind wished to create something by means of the word of the Invisible Spirit. Its Will became a reality and appeared, with Mind and the light, glorifying it. Word followed Will. For the anointed, the divine Self-Generated, created everything by the Word. Life Eternal, Will, Mind, and Foreknowledge stood together and glorified the Invisible Spirit and Barbelo, for because of her they had come into being.

The holy Spirit brought the divine Self-Generated Child of himself and Barbelo to perfection, so that the Child might stand before the great Invisible Virgin Spirit as the divine Self-Generated, the anointed, who honored the Spirit with loud acclaim. The Child came forth through Forethought. The Invisible Virgin Spirit set the true, divine Self-Generated over everything and caused all authority and the truth within to be subject to it, so that the Child might understand everything, the one called by a name greater than every name, for that name will be told to those who are worthy of it.

The Four Luminaries (7,30–8,28)

Now from the light, which is the anointed, and from Incorruptibility, by the grace of the Spirit, the Four Luminaries that derive from the divine Self-Generated gazed out in order to stand [8] before it. The three beings are:

will,
thought,
life.

The four powers are:

understanding,
grace,
perception,
thoughtfulness.

28. Lit., "He stood in his presence as he anointed him." 29. Nous, from Greek, here and below (the Coptic meeue is also used). 30. Or "Christ," here and below (pekhrs). 31. Lit., "it" or "him"; possibly "the anointed." 32. Here begins creation by the word, as in Genesis 1 and John 1 as well as the Egyptian creation text, the Memphite cosmogony, in which Ptah is described creating by means of the spoken word. 33. Or "Self-Engendered," "Self-Conceived," "Autogenes," here and below. 34. Lit., "he" or "it," here and below. 35. Or "whom the Spirit honored." 36. Or "appeared" (in BG 850a, 33).
Grace dwells in the eternal realm of the luminary Harmozel, who is the first angel. There are three other aeons with this eternal realm:

- grace,
- truth,
- form.

The second luminary is Oroiael, who has been appointed over the second eternal realm. There are three other aeons with it:

- Insight,
- perception,
- memory.

The third luminary is Daveithai, who has been appointed over the third eternal realm. There are three other aeons with it:

- understanding,
- love,
- idea.

The fourth eternal realm has been set up for the fourth luminary, Eleleth. There are three other aeons with it:

- perfection,
- peace,
- Sophia.

These are the Four Luminaries that stand before the divine Self-Generated; these are the twelve aeons that stand before the Child of the Great One, the Self-Generated, the anointed, by the will and grace of the Invisible Spirit. The twelve aeons belong to the Child, the Self-Generated, and everything was established by the will of the holy Spirit through the Self-Generated.

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37. Or "and is the first angel." 38. Or "Reflection; "Imagination," "Creativity," "Afterthought," "Epinoia." On pronoia and epinoia e., in Greek mythology, the Titans Prometheus ("forethought") and Epimetheus ("afterthought"), who create human beings, though Epimetheus does his job imperfectly. Prometheus makes the humans stand upright, after the manner of the gods, and he takes fire from the gods and brings it down to earth. For his actions he is punished by being chained to a pillar in the mountains, where a bird of prey eats his liver. Eventually Heracles frees him. 39. Or "before the Child of the great Self-Generated to the Child of the Self-Generated." This could possibly be a reference to Pigeradam, cf. Secret Book of John II, 9.
Pigeradamas and Seth (8.28–9.24)

From the Foreknowledge of the perfect Mind, through the expressed will of the Invisible Spirit and the will of the Self-Generated, came the perfect human, the first revelation, the truth. The Virgin Spirit named the human Pigeradamas, and appointed him to [9] the first eternal realm with the great Self-Generated, the anointed, by the first luminary, Harmozel. Its powers dwell with it. The invisible one gave him an invincible power of mind.

Pigeradamas spoke and glorified and praised the Invisible Spirit by saying,

Because of you everything has come into being,
and to you everything will return.
I shall praise and glorify you,
the Self-Generated,
the eternal realms,
the three, Father, Mother, Child,
perfect power.

He appointed his son Seth to the second eternal realm, before the second luminary, Oroiael.

In the third eternal realm were stationed the offspring of Seth, with the third luminary, Daveithai. The souls of the saints were stationed there.

In the fourth eternal realm were stationed the souls of those who were ignorant of the Fullness. They did not repent immediately, but held out for a while and repented later. They came to be with the fourth luminary, Eleleth.

These are creatures that glorify the Invisible Spirit.

The Fall of Sophia (9.25–10.19)

Now, Sophia, who is the Wisdom of Insight and who constitutes an aeon, conceived of a thought from herself, with the conception of the Invisible Spirit and Foreknowledge. She wanted to bring forth something like herself, without the consent of the Spirit, who had not given approval, without her partner and without his consideration. The male did not give approval. She did not find her part-

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40. Or "Geradamas," here and below. Here BC 8902, 35 reads "Adam" and NHC III.13 reads "Adamas." The name Pigeradamas or Geradamas may mean "Adam the stranger" (Hebrew ger 'adam), "holy Adam" (Greek hier-adamas), or "old Adam" (Greek gerôn) Adam.
41. Lit., "He." 42. Pleroma, here and below. 43. Lit., "Sophia of Insight, being an aeon." 44. Sophia tries to imitate the original precreative act of the Father. This account of Sophia bringing forth by herself seems to reflect ancient gynecological theories about women's bodies and reproduction. In Greek mythology the goddess Hera also imitates Zeus and brings forth a child by herself. According to one version of the myth, the child is the monster Typhon (Homerian Hymn to Pythian Apollo 300–362). According to another, it is the lame deity Hephaistos, whom Hera evicts from Olympus and sends down to the world below (Hesiod Theogony 524–59). Hephaistos is the artisan among the gods and is represented in Egypt by his counterpart Khnum, a ram-headed creator who molds creatures on a potter's wheel. In the Secret Book of John all the evils and misfortunes of this world derive from Sophia's blunder.
ner, and she considered this without the Spirit's consent and without the knowledge of her partner. Nonetheless, she gave birth. [10] And because of the invincible power within her, her thought was not an idle thought. Something came out of her that was imperfect and different in appearance from her, for she had produced it without her partner. It did not resemble its mother and was misshapen. When Sophia saw what her desire had produced, it changed into the figure of a snake with the face of a lion. Its eyes were like flashing bolts of lightning.\(^{45}\) She cast it away from her, outside that realm so that none of the immortals would see it. She had produced it ignorantly.

She surrounded it with a bright cloud and put a throne in the middle of the cloud so that no one would see it except the holy Spirit, who is called the Mother of the living. She named her offspring Yaldabaoth.

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Yaldabaoth's World Order (10,19–13,13)

This is the first ruler, the archon who took great power from his mother. Then he left her and moved away from the place where he was born. He took control and created for himself other aeons with luminous fire, which still exists. He mated with the mindlessness\(^{46}\) in him and produced authorities for himself:

- The name of the first is Athoth, whom generations call the [reaper].\(^{47}\)
- The second is Harmas, who is the jealous eye.\(^{48}\)
- The third is Kalila-Oumbri.
- The fourth is Yabel.
- The fifth is Adonaios, who is called Sabaoth.\(^{49}\)
- The sixth is Cain, whom generations of people call the sun.
- The seventh is Abel.
- The eighth is Abrisene.
- The ninth is Yobel.\([11]\)
- The tenth is Armoupieel.
- The eleventh is Melcheir-Adonein.
- The twelfth is Belias, who is over the depth of the underworld.\(^{50}\)

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\(^{45}\) On the child of Sophia with his eyes flashing, cf. Gospel of Judas 51. \(^{46}\) Or "was amazed in the mindlessness." Yaldabaoth's mating with his mindlessness (aponoia) probably suggests that he masturbated. \(^{47}\) The reading (p)jaio\(\text{[e]a}\) remains tentative. \(^{48}\) i.e., the evil eye (\(\text{pbal 'mpkh\(\text{[o]h}\)}\)). BG 6:52, 40 and NHC III, 66 read "the eye of fire" (\(\text{pbal 'mpkh\(\text{[o]h}\)}\)). \(^{49}\) Adonaios is also mentioned in the Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit, the Second discourse of Great Seth, and the Gospel of Judas. On the first part of this list of names, cf. Gospel of Judas 52. \(^{50}\) The twelve cosmic authorities probably correspond to the signs of the zodiac. On this list of names, cf. Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit III, 59.
Yaldabaoth\textsuperscript{51} stationed seven kings, one for each sphere of heaven, to reign over the seven heavens, and five to reign over the depth of the abyss.\textsuperscript{52} He shared his fire with them, but he did not give away any of the power of the light he had taken from his mother. For he is ignorant darkness.

When light mixed with darkness, it made the darkness shine. When darkness mixed with light, it dimmed the light, and it became neither light nor darkness, but rather gloom.

This gloomy archon has three names: the first name is Yaldabaoth, the second is Sakla, the third is Samael.\textsuperscript{53}

He is wicked in the mindlessness within him. He said, "I am God and there is no other god beside me,"\textsuperscript{54} since he did not know from where his own strength had come.

The rulers each created seven powers for themselves, and the powers each created six angels, until there were 365 angels.\textsuperscript{55} These are the names and the corresponding physiques:

The first is Athoth, and has the face of a sheep.
The second is Eloaios, and has the face of a donkey.
The third is Astaphaioi, and has the face of a hyena.
The fourth is Yao,\textsuperscript{56} and has the face of a snake with seven heads.
The fifth is Sabaoth, and has the face of a snake.
The sixth is Adonin, and has the face of an ape.
The seventh is Sabbataios,\textsuperscript{57} and has a face of flaming fire.

This is the sevenfold nature of the week.\textsuperscript{58}

Yaldabaoth has many [12] faces, more than all of these, so that he could show whatever face he wanted when he was among the seraphim.\textsuperscript{59} He shared his fire with them, and lorded it over them because of the glorious power he had from his mother's light. That is why he called himself God and defied the place from which he came.

In his thought he united the seven powers with the authorities that were with him. When he spoke, it was done. He named each of the powers, beginning with the highest:

\textsuperscript{51} Lit., "He." \textsuperscript{52} The seven kings probably correspond to the seven planetary spheres (for the sun, the moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn) described by ancient astronomers. \textsuperscript{53} In Aramaic Yaldabaoth probably means "child of chaos" or "child of (S)abaoth," Sakla means "fool," and Samael means "blind god." Here and elsewhere in the text the first two names are spelled "Yaltabaoth" and "Saklas." \textsuperscript{54} Isaiah 45:6-10, 46:9. \textsuperscript{55} The number of angels corresponds to the days in the solar year. \textsuperscript{56} Yao (Iao) is a form of Yahweh, the name of God, especially in Greek. Yao is a power of this world in some Gnostic texts and a son of Yaldabaoth in On the Origin of the World. In this section several of the names derive from Hebrew words, especially words that designate God. \textsuperscript{57} Here the name is spelled "Sabbade." Other versions give the name as Sabbataios or Sabbadaios. Throughout the text the spelling of the names varies in the manuscripts, but only a few of the variant spellings are given here. \textsuperscript{58} The seven powers correspond to the days of the week. \textsuperscript{59} The seraphim are a class of angels, here angels of Yaldabaoth.
First is goodness, with the first power, Athoth.
Second is forethought, with the second power, Eloaio.60
Third is divinity, with the third power, Astaphaio.61
Fourth is lordship, with the fourth power, Yao.
Fifth is kingdom, with the fifth power, Sabaoth.62
Sixth is jealousy, with the sixth power, Adonin.
Seventh is understanding, with the seventh power, Sabbataios.63

Each has a sphere in its own realm.

They were named after the glory above for the destruction of the powers. Although the names given them by their maker were powerful, the names given them after the glory above would bring about their destruction and loss of power. That is why they have two names.

Yaldabaoth64 organized everything after the pattern of the first aeons that had come into being, so that he might [13] create everything in an incorruptible form. Not that he had seen the incorruptible ones. Rather, the power that is in him, that he had taken from his mother, produced in him the pattern for the world order.

When he saw creation surrounding him, and the throng of angels around him that had come forth from him, he said to them, "I am a jealous god and there is no other god beside me."65

But by announcing this, he suggested to the angels with him that there is another god. For if there were no other god, of whom would he be jealous?

Sophia Repents (13.13–14.13)

Then the Mother began to move around. She realized that she was lacking something when the brightness of her light diminished. She grew dim because her partner had not collaborated with her.

I66 said, "Lord, what does it mean that she moved around?"

The Lord laughed67 and said, Do not suppose that it is as Moses said, above the waters.68 No, when she recognized the wickedness that had taken place and the robbery her son had committed, she repented. When she became forgetful in the darkness of ignorance, she began to be ashamed. She did not dare to return, but she was agitated.69 This agitation is the moving around.

The arrogant one took power from his mother. He was ignorant, for he thought no one existed except his mother alone. When he saw the throng of angels he had created, he exalted himself over them.

60. Here the name is spelled "Eloaio." Another version gives the name as Eloaio.
61. Here the name is spelled "Astaphaio." Another version gives the name as Astaphaio.
62. Here the name is spelled "Sanbaoth." Other versions give the name as Sabaoth.
63. Here the name is spelled "Sabbateon." Another version gives the name as Sabbataios.
69. This sentence is restored from NHC IV,21.
When the Mother realized that the trappings of darkness had come into being imperfectly, she understood that her partner had not collaborated with her. She repented with many tears. The whole realm of Fullness heard her prayer of repentance and offered praise on her behalf to the Invisible Virgin Spirit, and the Spirit consented. When the Invisible Spirit consented, the holy Spirit poured upon her some of the fullness of all. For her partner did not come to her on his own, but he came to her through the realm of Fullness, so that he might restore what she lacked. She was taken up not to her own eternal realm, but instead to a position above her son. She was to remain in the ninth heaven until she restored what was lacking in herself.

The Human Appears (14.13–34)

A voice called from the exalted heavenly realm,

Humanity exists and the Child of Humanity.

The first ruler, Yaldabaoth, heard the voice and thought it had come from his mother. He did not realize its source.

The holy perfect Mother-Father, the complete Forethought, the image of the invisible one, being the Father of the All, through whom everything came into being, the first human—

this is the one who showed them and appeared in human shape.

The entire realm of the first ruler quaked, and the foundations of the abyss shook. The bottom side of the waters above the material world was lit up by this image that had appeared. When all the authorities and the first ruler stared at this appearance, they saw the whole bottom side as it was lit up. And through the light they saw the shape of the image in the water.

70. Coptic tbsō ‘mpkake; BG 8502, 46 reads “aborted fetus of darkness” (phouhe mpkake), with reference to Yaldabaoth. 71. This clause is restored from NHC IV.22. 72. Sophia dwells in the ninth sphere, above Yaldabaoth, who occupies the eighth sphere (sometimes called the Ogdoad and identified as the sphere of the fixed stars). Yaldabaoth himself is thus positioned over the seven kings in their seven spheres (sometimes called the Hebdonad; see above). See also the Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth and other Gnostic texts. 73. Or “Man.” 74. Or “Son of Man,” here and below. 75. In the longer version of the Secret Book of John, the figure that appears seems to be that of Forethought; in the shorter version it is that of the Father or first human Pigendamas. 76. Yaldabaoth and his authorities look at the waters above the earth, and from underneath they see the reflection of a human shape in the water.
The Creation of Adam (15,1–19,10)

Yaldabaoth⁷⁷ said to the authorities with him, “Come, let’s create a human being after the image of God and with a likeness to ourselves, so that this human image may give us light.”⁷⁸

They created through their respective powers, according to the features that were given. Each of the authorities contributed a psychical feature corresponding to the figure of the image they had seen. They created a being like the perfect first human, and said, “Let’s call it Adam, that its name may give us power of light.”⁷⁹

The powers began to create:

The first one, goodness, created a soul of bone.
The second, forethought, created a soul of sinew.
The third, divinity, created a soul of flesh.
The fourth, lordship, created a soul of marrow.
The fifth, kingdom, created a soul of blood.
The sixth, jealousy, created a soul of skin.
The seventh, understanding, created a soul of hair.

The throng of angels stood by and received these seven psychical substances from the authorities,⁸⁰ in order to create a network of limbs and trunk, with all the parts properly arranged.

The first one, who is Raphao, began by creating the head,
Abron created the skull,⁸¹
Meniggesstroeth created the brain,
Asterechme the right eye,
Thaspomocha the left eye,
Yeronumos the right ear,
Bissoum the left ear,
Akioreim the nose, [16]
Banen-Ephroum the lips,
Amen the teeth,
Ibikan the molars,

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⁷⁷ Lit., “He.” ⁷⁸ Genesis 1:26. In the Secret Book of John a distinction is made between the image of God and the likeness of the creators. ⁷⁹ Yaldabaoth and his authorities create a psychical man with a psychical body, i.e., they create a soul-man, his body composed entirely of the animating soul. His physical body of flesh and blood will be constructed later. ⁸⁰ Or “and these seven psychical substances were taken by the authorities.” ⁸¹ Or “The first one began by creating the head, Eteraphaope-Abron created the skull.”
Basiliademe the tonsils,
Achcha the uvula,
Adaban the neck,
Chaaman the vertebrae,
Dearcho the throat,
Tebar the right shoulder,
N... the left shoulder,
Mniarchon the right elbow,
...e the left elbow,82
Abitrition the right underarm,
Euanthen the left underarm,
Krus the right hand,
Beluai the left hand,
Treneu the fingers of the right hand,
Balbel the fingers of the left hand,
Krima the fingernails,
Astrops the right breast,
Barroph the left breast,
Baoum the right shoulder joint,
Ararim the left shoulder joint,
Areche the belly,
Phthaue the navel,
Senaphim the abdomen,
Arachethopi the right ribs,
Zabedo the left ribs,
Barias the right hip,
Phnouth the left hip,83
Abenlenarchei the marrow,
Chnoumeninorin the bones,
Gesole the stomach,
Agromauma the heart,
Bano the lungs,
Sostrapal the liver,

82. These words are restored from NHC IV.25.
83. These words are restored from NHC IV.25.
Anesimalar the spleen,
Thopithro the intestines,
Biblo the kidneys,
Roeror the sinews,
Taphreo the backbone,
Ipouspoboba the veins,
Bineborin the arteries,
Aatoimenpsephei the breaths in all the limbs,
Entholleia all the flesh,
Bedouk the right buttock,
Arabeei the left [buttock],\textsuperscript{84}
\ldots the penis,
Eilo the testicles,
Sorma the genitals,
Gormakaiochlabar the right thigh,
Nebrith the left thigh,
Pserem the muscles of the right leg,
Asaklas the muscle of the left,
Ormaoth the right leg,
Emenun the left leg,
Knux the [17] right shin,
Tupelon the left shin,
Achiel the right ankle,
Phneme the left ankle,
Phiouthrom the right foot,
Boabel its toes,
Trachoun the left foot,
Phikna its toes,
Miamai the toenails,
Labernioun \ldots

Those who are appointed over all these are seven in number:

Athoth,
Armas,

\textsuperscript{84} The translation is tentative.
Kalila,
Yabel,
Sabaoth,
Cain,
Abel.85

Those who activate the limbs are, part by part:

the head, Diolimodraza,
the neck, Yammeax,
the right shoulder, Yakouib,
the left shoulder, Ouerton,
the right hand, Oudidi,
the left one, Arbao,
the fingers of the right hand, Lampno,
the fingers of the left hand, Leekaphar,
the right breast, Barbar,
the left breast, Imae,
the chest, Pisandraptes,
the right shoulder joint, Koade,
the left shoulder joint, Odeor,
the right ribs, Asphixix,
the left ribs, Sunogchouta,
the abdomen, Arouph,
the womb, Sabalo,
the right thigh, Charcharb,
the left thigh, Chthaon,
all the genitals, Bathinoth,
the right leg, Choux,
the left leg, Charcha,
the right shin, Arer,
the left shin, Toechtha,
the right ankle, Aol,
the left ankle, Charaner,

85. The last three names are restored from NHC IV,26.
the right foot, Bastan,
it's toes, Archentechtha,
the left foot, Marephnounth,
it's toes, Abrana.

Seven have been empowered over all these:

Michael,
Uriel,
Asmenedas,
Saphasatoel,
Aarmouriam,
Richram,
Amiorps.

Those who are over the senses are Archendekta,
the one who is over perception is Deitharbathas,
the one who is over imagination is Oummaa,
the one who is over arrangement [18] is Aachiaram,
the one who is over all impulse to action is Riaramnacho.

The source of the demons that are in the entire body is divided into four:

heat,
cold,
wetness,
dryness,

and the mother of them all is matter.

The one who is lord over heat is Phloxopa,
the one who is lord over cold is Oroorothos,
the one who is lord over what is dry is Erimacho,
the one who is lord over wetness is Athuro.

The mother of all these, Onorthochras, stands in the midst of them, for she
is unlimited and mingles with them all. She is matter, and by her they are
nourished.
The four principal demons are:
Ephememphi, the demon of pleasure,
Yoko, the demon of desire,
Nenentophni, the demon of grief,
Blaomen, the demon of fear.

The mother of them all is Esthesis-Ouch-Epi-Ptoe.86
From the four demons have come passions:

From grief come jealousy, envy, pain, trouble, distress, hardheartedness, anxiety, sorrow, and others.
From pleasure comes an abundance of evil, vain conceit, and the like.
From desire come anger, wrath, bitterness, intense lust, greed, and the like.
From fear come terror, servility, anguish, and shame.

All these are like virtues and vices. The insight into their true nature is Anaro, who is head of the material soul, [19] and it dwells with Esthesis-Z-Ouch-Epi-Ptoe.87

This is the number of angels. In all they number 365.88 They all worked together until, limb by limb, the psychical and material body was completed. Now, there are others over the remaining passions, and I have not told you about them. If you want to know about them, the information is recorded in the Book of Zoroaster.89

Adam Receives Spirit and Life (19.10–20.28)

All the angels and demons worked together until they fashioned the psychical body. But for a long time their creation did not stir or move at all.

When the Mother wanted to take back the power she had relinquished to the first ruler, she prayed to the most merciful Mother-Father of the All. With a sacred command the Mother-Father80 sent five luminaries down upon the place of the angels of the first ruler. They advised him so that they might recover the mother's power.

They said to Yaldabaoth, "Breathe some of your spirit into the face of Adam, and the body will arise."

86. "Sense perception is not in an excited state" (from Greek, αισθησις ουχ επι πτοε), a philosophical saying (see Bentley Layton, The Gnostic Scriptures, 43). 87. "The seven senses are (or sense perception is) not in an excited state" (again from Greek), another version of the philosophical saying (Bentley Layton). 88. The angels assembling the psychical body parts correspond to the days in the solar year, as above. 89. The precise identification of the Book of Zoroaster remains uncertain, but the title calls to mind the text Zostrianos or else Porphyry's Life of Plotinus 16, where Porphyry refers to other texts written under the name of Zoroaster, including a Book of Zoroaster. 90. Lit., "he" or "it."
He breathed his spirit into Adam. The spirit is the power of his mother, but he did not realize this, because he lives in ignorance. The Mother's power went out of Yaldabaoth and into the psychical body that had been made to be like the one who is from the beginning. The body moved and became powerful. And it was enlightened.

At once the rest of [20] the powers became jealous. Although Adam came into being through all of them, and they gave their power to this human, Adam was more intelligent than the creators and the first ruler. When they realized that Adam was enlightened and could think more clearly than they and was stripped of evil, they took and threw Adam into the lowest part of the whole material realm.

The blessed, benevolent, merciful Mother-Father had compassion for the Mother's power that had been removed from the first ruler. The archons might be able to overpower the psychical, perceptible body once again. So with its benevolent and most merciful Spirit, the Mother-Father sent a helper to Adam—enlightened Insight, who is from the Mother-Father and who was called Life. She helped the whole creature, laboring with it, restoring it to its fullness, teaching it about the descent of the seed, teaching it about the way of ascent, which is the way of descent. Enlightened Insight was hidden within Adam so that the archons might not recognize her, but that Insight might be able to restore what the Mother lacked.

The Imprisonment of Humanity (20,28–22,28)

The human being Adam was revealed through the bright shadow within. And Adam's ability to think was greater than that of all the creators. When they looked up, they saw that Adam's ability to think was greater, and they devised a plan with the whole throng of archons and angels. They took fire, earth, and water, and combined them with the four fiery winds. They wrought them together and made a great commotion.

The rulers brought Adam into the shadow of death so that they might produce a figure again, from earth, water, fire, and the spirit that comes from matter—that is, from the ignorance of darkness, and desire, and their own phony spirit. This figure is the cave for remodeling the body that these criminals put on the human, the fetter of forgetfulness. Adam became a mortal person, the first to descend and the first to become estranged.

Enlightened Insight within Adam, however, was rejuvenating Adam's mind.

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91. Genesis 2:7. Here and below the name Adam is given in the translation in place of the masculine pronouns, since the text maintains that Adam is androgynous. 92. Perhaps parallel to Genesis 2:22. 93. Zoe. Cf. Genesis 3:20: Eve is named Zoe in the Septuagint. 94. Or "offspring." 95. Cf. Three Stoles of Seth 127. 96. Here fiery winds replace air as the fourth element. 97. The scene recalls a workshop in which a statue or a fetter is being forged. Here material spirit replaces air as the fourth element. 98. The description of a human being and a shadow in a cave may derive from the allegory of the cave in Plato's Republic, Book 7. Further, the body as the prison or tomb of the soul is also a well-known Platonic and Orphic teaching.
The archons took Adam and put Adam in paradise. They said, "Eat," meaning, Do so in a leisurely manner. But in fact their pleasure is bitter and their beauty is perverse. Their pleasure is a trap, their trees are a sacrilege, their fruit is deadly poison, and their promise is death.

They put their tree of life in the middle of paradise. shall teach you what the secret of their life is—the plan they devised together, the nature of their spirit. The root of their tree is bitter, its branches are death, its shadow is hatred, a trap is in its leaves, its blossom is bad ointment, its fruit is death, desire is its seed, and it blossoms in darkness. The dwelling place of those who taste of it is the underworld, and darkness is their resting place.

But the archons lingered in front of what they call the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which is enlightened Insight, so that Adam might not behold its fullness and recognize his shameful nakedness.

But was the one who induced them to eat.

said to the Savior, "Lord, was it not the serpent that instructed Adam to eat?"

The Savior laughed and said, The serpent instructed them to eat of the wickedness of sexual desire and destruction so that Adam might be of use to the serpent.

The first ruler knew Adam was disobedient to him because of enlightened Insight within Adam, which made Adam stronger of mind than he. He wanted to recover the power that he himself had passed on to Adam. So he brought deep sleep upon Adam.

I said to the Savior, "What is this deep sleep?"

The Savior said, It is not as Moses wrote and you heard. He said in his first book, "He put Adam to sleep." Rather, this deep sleep was a loss of sense. Thus the first ruler said through the prophet, "I shall make their minds sluggish, that they may neither understand nor discern."

The Creation of Eve (22,28–23,35)

Enlightened Insight hid herself within Adam. The first ruler wanted to take her from Adam's side, but enlightened Insight cannot be apprehended. Although darkness pursued her, it did not apprehend her. The first ruler removed part of Adam's power and created another figure in the form of a female, like the image of Insight that had appeared to him. He put the part he had taken from the power of the human being into the female creature. It did not happen, however, the way Moses said: "Adam's rib."

Adam saw the woman beside him. At once enlightened Insight appeared and removed the veil that covered his mind. He sobered up from the drunkenness of darkness. He recognized his counterpart and said, "This is now bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh."

For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and will join himself to his wife, and the two of them will become one flesh. For his partner will be sent to him, and he will leave his father and his mother.

Our sister Sophia is the one who descended in an innocent manner to restore what she lacked. For this reason she was called Life— that is, the Mother of the living—by the Forethought of the sovereignty of heaven and by [the Insight that appeared] to Adam. Through her have the living tasted perfect knowledge.

As for me, I appeared in the form of an eagle upon the tree of knowledge, which is the Insight of the pure enlightened Forethought, that I might teach the human beings and awaken them from the depth of sleep. For the two of them were fallen and realized that they were naked. Insight appeared to them as light and awakened their minds.

Yaldabaoth Defiles Eve (23,35–25.16)

When Yaldabaoth realized that the humans had withdrawn from him, he cursed his earth. He found the woman as she was [24] preparing herself for her husband. He was master over her. And he did not know the mystery that had come into being through the sacred plan. The two of them were afraid to denounce Yaldabaoth. He displayed to his angels the ignorance within him, and he threw the humans out of paradise and cloaked them in thick darkness.

The first ruler saw the young woman standing next to Adam and noticed that enlightened Insight of Life had appeared in her. Yet Yaldabaoth was full of ignorance. So when the Forethought of the All realized this, she dispatched emissaries, and they stole Life out of Eve.

The first ruler defiled Eve and produced in her two sons, a first and a second: Elohim and Yahweh.

Elohim has the face of a bear,
Yahweh has the face of a cat.
One is just, the other is unjust.
He placed Yahweh over fire and wind,
he placed Elohim over water and earth.

112. Genesis 2:23. 113. Genesis 2:24. The manuscript includes an instance of dittography here. 114. Zoe, Genesis 3:20. 115. This clause is restored from NHC IV.36. 116. Gnosis. 117. The Savior appears as a heavenly bird; the eagle is the bird of Zeus. Cf. the Hymn of the Pearl, in which the royal letter flies as an eagle and becomes a voice of revelation. 118. Genesis 3:7, 10–11. 119. Genesis 3:22–24. 120. Zoe. 121. Eloim and Yawe, two names of God in the Hebrew scriptures. Elohim is a word that means God (though plural in form and ending); Yahweh is the name of God (based on the tetragrammaton, the ineffable four-letter name).
He called them by the names Cain and Abel, with a view to deceive.122

To this day sexual intercourse has persisted because of the first ruler. He planted sexual desire within the woman who belongs to Adam. Through intercourse the first ruler produced duplicate bodies, and he blew some of his false spirit into them. He placed these two rulers123 over the elements so that they might rule over the cave.124

When Adam came to know the counterpart of his own foreknowledge, he produced a son like [35] the child of humanity. He called him Seth, after the manner of the generation in the eternal realms.125 Similarly, the mother sent down her spirit, which is like her and is a copy of what is in the realm of Fullness, for she was going to prepare a dwelling place for the eternal realms that would come down.

The human beings were made to drink water of forgetfulness126 by the first ruler, so that they might not know where they had come from. For a time the seed remained and helped so that when the spirit descends from the holy realms, it may raise up the seed and heal what it lacks, that the entire realm of Fullness may be holy and lack nothing.

On Human Destiny (25,16–30,11)

I said to the Savior, “Lord, will all the souls then be led safely into pure light?”

He answered and said to me, These are great matters that have arisen in your mind, and it is difficult to explain them to anyone except those of the unshakable generation.

Those upon whom the spirit of life will descend and whom the spirit will empower will be saved, and will become perfect and worthy of greatness, and will be cleansed there of all evil and the anxieties of wickedness, since they are no longer anxious for anything except the incorruptible alone, and concerned with that from this moment on, without anger, jealousy, envy, desire, or greed for anything.

They are affected by nothing but being in the flesh alone, and they wear the flesh as they look forward to a time when they will be met [26] by those who receive them. Such people are worthy of the incorruptible, eternal life and calling. They endure everything and bear everything so as to finish the contest127 and receive eternal life.

I said to him, “Lord, will the souls of people be [rejected]128 who have

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122. Genesis 4:1–2. 123. I.e., Elohim and Yahweh. 124. Or *the tomb* (as above). 125. Genesis 4:25; 5:3. 126. The water of forgetfulness recalls the water of the River Lethe in the Greek conception of the underworld. If a thirsty soul drinks of the water of this river, it forgets about its previous lives and thus may be reincarnated in another body. 127. The text reads *pathlon* in all the manuscripts except Codex II, which reads, apparently erroneously, “what is good” (*pagathon*). 128. Here the text reads *senaus[one],* restored from NHC IV 40: BG 820a, 66 and NHC III 34 read “be saved” (*senausijat*).
not done these things, but upon whom the power and the spirit of life have
descended?"

He answered and said to me, If the spirit descends upon them, by all means
they will be saved and transformed. Power will descend upon every person, for
without it no one could stand. After birth, if the spirit of life grows and power
comes and strengthens that soul, no one will be able to lead it astray with evil ac-
tions. But people upon whom the false spirit descends are misled by it and go
astray.

I said, "Lord, where will their souls go when they leave their flesh?"

He laughed and said to me, The soul in which there is more power than the
contemptible spirit is strong. She escapes from evil, and through the intervention
of the incorruptible one, she is saved and is taken up to eternal rest. I said,
"Lord, where will the souls go of people who have not known to whom
they belong?"

He said to me, The contemptible spirit has grown stronger in such people
while they were going astray. This spirit lays a heavy burden on the soul, leads her
into evil deeds, and hurl her down into forgetfulness. After the soul leaves the
body, she is handed over to the authorities who have come into being through the
archon. They bind her with chains and throw her into prison. They go around
with her until she awakens from forgetfulness and acquires knowledge. This is
how she attains perfection and is saved.

I said, "Lord, how can the soul become younger and return into its mother's
womb, or into the human?"

He was glad when I asked him about this, and he said to me, You are truly
blessed, for you have understood. This soul will be made to follow another soul in
whom the spirit of life dwells, and she is saved through that one. Then she will
not be thrust into flesh again.

I said, "Lord, where will the souls go of people who had knowledge but turned
away?"

He said to me, They will be taken to the place where the angels of misery go,
where there is no repentance. They will be kept there until the day when those
who have blasphemed against the spirit will be tortured and punished eternally.

I said, "Lord, where did the contemptible spirit come from?"

He said to me, The Mother-Father is great in mercy, the holy Spirit, who in
every way is compassionate, who sympathizes with you, the Insight of en-
lightened Forethought. This one raised up the offspring of the perfect genera-
tion and their thought and the eternal light of the human. When the first ruler

| 129. These clauses are restored from NHC IV, 40. 130. This description of every person is like that of
| Adam moving and standing after receiving spirit from
| Yaldabaoth in Secret Book of John II, 19. 131. Feminine
| pronouns are used for the soul in the translation of
| this part of the Secret Book of John, since the soul
| (psukhē) is commonly depicted as being female in
| Greek and Gnostic literature. 132. The soul is thrown
| into another body and thus is reincarnated. 133. Lit.,
| "nature," Coptic phusia, from Greek. Returning to
| the mother's womb is also a theme encountered in
| John 3-4. |
realized that these people were exalted above him and could think better than he, he wanted to grasp their thought. He did not know that they surpassed him in thought and that he would be unable to grasp them.

He devised a plan with his authorities, who are his powers. Together they fornicated with Sophia, and through them was produced bitter fate, the final, fickle bondage. Fate is like this because the powers are fickle. To the present day fate is tougher and stronger than what gods, angels, demons, and all the generations have encountered. For from fate have come all iniquity and injustice and blasphemy, the bondage of forgetfulness, and ignorance, and all burdensome orders, weighty sins, and great fears.

Thus all of creation has been blinded so that none might know the God that is over them all. Because of the bondage of forgetfulness, their sins have been hidden. They have been bound with dimensions, times, and seasons, and fate is master of all.

The first ruler regretted everything that had happened through him. Once again he made a plan, to bring a flood upon the human creation. The enlightened majesty of Porethought, however, warned Noah. Noah announced this to all the offspring, the human children, but those who were strangers to him did not listen to him. It did not happen the way Moses said, "They hid in an ark." Rather, they hid in a particular place, not only Noah, but also many other people from the unshakable generation. They entered that place and hid in a bright cloud. Noah knew about his supremacy. With him was the enlightened one who had enlightened them, since the first ruler had brought darkness upon the whole earth.

The first ruler plotted with his powers. He sent his angels to the human daughters so they might take some of them and raise offspring for their pleasure. At first they were unsuccessful. When they had proven unsuccessful, they met again and devised another plan. They created a contemptible spirit similar to the spirit that had descended, in order to adulterate souls through this spirit. The angels changed their appearance to look like the partners of these women, and filled the women with the spirit of darkness that they had concocted, and with evil.

They brought gold, silver, gifts, copper, iron, metal, and all sorts of things. They brought great anxieties to the people who followed them, leading them astray with many deceptions. These people grew old without experiencing pleasure and died without finding truth or knowing the God of truth. In this way all creation was forever enslaved, from the beginning of the world until the present day.

The angels took women, and from the darkness they produced children similar to their spirit. They closed their minds and became stubborn through the stubbornness of the contemptible spirit until the present day.

134. In the Greco-Roman world fate (in Greek, heimarmenê, as here, in Coptic, elmarmenê) was considered to be the overwhelming force that determines the destiny of all that is earthly and heavenly. 135. Cf. Genesis 6:5–8:22. 136. Genesis 7:7. 137. Cf. Genesis 6:3–4; 1 Enoch 6–11.
Hymn of the Savior (30:11–31:25)

Now I, the perfect Forethought of the All, transformed myself into my offspring. I existed first and went down every path.\textsuperscript{138}

I am the abundance of light,
I am the remembrance of Fullness.

I traveled in the realm of great darkness, and continued until I entered the midst of the prison. The foundations of chaos shook, and I hid from them because of their evil, and they did not recognize me.

Again I returned, a second time, and went on. I had come from the inhabitants of light—I, the remembrance of Forethought.

I entered the midst of darkness and the bowels of the underworld, turning to my task. The foundations of chaos shook as though to fall upon those who dwell in chaos and destroy them. Again I hurried back to the root of my light so they might not be destroyed before their time.

Again, a third time, I went forth—

I am the light dwelling in light,
I am the remembrance of Forethought—

so that I might enter the midst of darkness and the bowels [31] of the underworld. I brightened my face with light from the consummation of their realm and entered the midst of their prison, which is the prison of the body.

I said, Let whoever hears arise from deep sleep.\textsuperscript{139}

A person wept and shed tears. Bitter tears the person wiped away, and said, “Who is calling my name? From where has my hope come as I dwell in the bondage of prison?”

I said,

I am the Forethought of pure light,
I am the thought of the Virgin Spirit, who raises you to a place of honor.

Arise, remember that you have heard
and trace your root,
which is I, the compassionate.

Guard yourself against the angels of misery,
the demons of chaos, and all who entrap you,

\textsuperscript{138} The concluding hymn of the Savior is found only in the longer version of the Secret Book of John (NHC II and IV). It reflects a hymn of heavenly Forethought, the divine Mother, as Savior. In the present Christianized version of the Secret Book of John readers may understand the Savior to be Jesus. Three descents of the Savior are also described in Three Forms of First Thought. 139. The call to awaken addresses a prototypical sleeper—any person who may awaken to knowledge and salvation.
and beware of deep sleep
and the trap\textsuperscript{140} in the bowels of the underworld.

I raised and sealed the person in luminous water with Five Seals, that death might not prevail over the person from that moment on.

**Conclusion (31.25–32.10)**

Look, now I shall ascend to the perfect realm. I have finished everything for you in your hearing. I have told you everything for you to record and communicate secretly to your spiritual friends. This is the mystery of the unshakable generation. The Savior communicated this to John for him to record and safeguard. He said to him, “Cursed be anyone who will trade these things for a gift, for food, drink, clothes, or anything [32] like this.”

These things were communicated to him in a mystery, and at once the Savior\textsuperscript{141} disappeared. Then John\textsuperscript{142} went to the other disciples and reported what the Savior had told him.

Jesus Christ
Amen\textsuperscript{143}

The Secret Book According to John

\textsuperscript{140} Or “enclosure,” even “garment.” \textsuperscript{141} Lit., “he.” \textsuperscript{142} Lit., “he.” \textsuperscript{143} The shorter versions of the Secret Book of John in BG 8\textsuperscript{92}a and NHC III do not include this overtly Christian concluding statement.