

Le Livre des secrets de Jean. Recension brève (NH III,1 et BG,2)

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The *Apocryphon of John* has been called “the Gnostic Bible,” and there is good reason for this. This text preserves the most complete version of the myth drawn on by those who viewed Seth, Adam’s third son, as their ancestor. The author presents nothing less than a history of the universe, starting with the creation of the celestial realms, conceived through the First Thought of the Great Invisible Spirit. This First Thought multiplies until it forms a perfect realm consisting of 22 Aeons, the last of which is Sophia, or Wisdom. Sadly, she is unable to resist the urge to expand on this realm, producing a 23rd Aeon, the Archon. Cast out of the perfect realm but retaining the memory of it, the Archon builds a counterfeit realm, in which is set the knowledge which he took from his mother, Sophia. In the *Apocryphon of John*, all of human history, from the creation of Adam to the promised return of Seth at the end of time, is presented as a war for the liberation of this captive knowledge, a battle in which humans are either oppressors or victims. As its author presents it, the *Apocryphon of John* was written in a period when the universe is still under the domination of the Archon, but in which the “Book of Secrets” has been revealed. Thanks to this book, humanity now has access to the knowledge that will permit the “seeds of Seth” to find the means to return to their true home in the celestial realm.

This version of the Sethian myth, which was brought together in the second century CE, is preserved in two versions. The longer version has received more attention from modern scholars, due to its affinities with the *Gospel of John*. The present volume, by contrast, helps to rectify this imbalance by dealing with the shorter version of the *Apocryphon of John*, which is also older than the long version and has been only very superficially Christianized. In this version, we have an intact version of the Sethian myth that is presented as an interpretation of the Hebrew, Biblical tradition, and that works according to the standards of second temple Jewish interpretive hermeneutics. As such, it is an extremely important work for our understanding of the Jewish origins of the gnostic movement.