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## THE HYPOSTASIS OF THE ARCHONS (II,4)

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*The Hypostasis of the Archons* ("Reality of the Rulers") is an anonymous tractate presenting an esoteric interpretation of Genesis 1-6, partially in the form of a revelation discourse between an angel and a questioner. While the treatise illustrates a wide-ranging Hellenistic syncretism, the most evident components are Jewish, although in its present form *The Hypostasis of the Archons* shows clearly Christian features and thus can be considered a Christian work. Its theological perspective is a vigorous Gnosticism of perhaps Sethian affiliation.

It is generally assumed that *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, like all the other Nag Hammadi texts, is a translation from Greek. The possibility of a Coptic pun on the phrase "beside me" (Is 46:9) and "blind" (*Hyp. Arch.* 86,30; 94,22), as well as the description of animal-headed Rulers (87,29) suggests that the provenance may have been Egypt.

The document is tentatively dated in the third century C.E. It is obviously no later than the fourth century, to which the Nag Hammadi collection is dated. But the well-developed gnostic treatment of the material in this document as well as the midrashic handling of scriptural material argue against an early date. Further, the philosophical orientation of 96,11-14 has been identified as typical of third-century Neoplatonism.

The questions of date and provenance are complicated by the possibility that the work as it stands is a result of a Christian editor's having combined a narrative source (interpreting parts of Genesis) with a revelation discourse concerned with soteriology and eschatology, and placing them both within a Christian framework.

*The Hypostasis of the Archons* is certainly the work of a gnostic teacher instructing an audience. While using previous material, he writes from a position of authority, even in the angelic revelation where a character in the discourse is ostensibly speaking. The audience is a Christian Gnostic community, aware of material of both testaments and accepting the authority of Paul. They are familiar with Jewish literary traditions, including apocalyptic. A traditional function of apocalyptic — providing reassurance for an insecure community — is operative here. *The Hypostasis of the Archons* is thus an esoteric work, written for a self-conscious community which probably felt pressure from a Christian community that defined itself as orthodox and others as heretical.

There is clearly some literary relationship between *The Hypostasis of the Archons* and *On the Origin of the World*, which follows this tractate in Codex II.

Both seem to draw from common sources. The latter mentions a *Book* or *Books of Norea* (102,11, 24-25), to which Epiphanius also refers. It has been suggested that *The Hypostasis of the Archons* is to be identified with that source, but without compelling evidence.

After a brief introduction quoting "the great apostle" Paul, *The Hypostasis of the Archons* offers its mythological narrative. The main characters in the mythological drama which unfolds include the blind ruler Samael, also called Sakla ("fool") and Yaldabaoth, who blasphemes against the divine; the spiritual Woman, who rouses Adam and outwits the rapacious rulers; the Snake, the Instructor, who counsels the man and woman to eat of the fruit forbidden by the rulers; and Norea, the daughter of Eve, a virgin pure in character and exalted in knowledge. On page 93 of the tractate the focus changes somewhat: on center stage now is the great angel Eleleth, who reveals to Norea the origin and destiny of the archontic powers.

*The Hypostasis of the Archons* proclaims, as its title indicates, the reality of the archontic rulers: far from being merely fictitious, imaginary powers, the archons are all too real. These rulers indeed exist. This is a grim reality for the Christian Gnostics, who define their own spiritual nature in opposition to that of the ruling and enslaving authorities. Yet, as this document promises, the Christian Gnostics can have hope, for their spiritual nature will be more lasting than the archons, and their heavenly destiny will be more glorious. In the end the rulers will perish, and the Gnostics, the children of the light, will know the Father and praise him.

## THE HYPOSTASIS OF THE ARCHONS

II 86, 20-97, 23

On account of the reality (*hypostasis*) of the authorities (*eksousiai*), (inspired) by the spirit <sup>1</sup> of the father of truth, the great <sup>1</sup> apostle – referring to the "authorities of the darkness" (Col 1:13) – told us <sup>1</sup> that "our contest is not against flesh and <sup>1</sup> [blood]; rather, the authorities of the universe <sup>25</sup> and the spirits of wickedness" (Ep 6:12). <sup>1</sup> [I have] sent (you) this because you (sg.) inquire about the reality <sup>1</sup> [of the] authorities.

Their chief is blind; <sup>1</sup> [because of his] power and his ignorance <sup>1</sup> [and his] arrogance he said, with his <sup>30</sup> [power], "It is I who am God; there is none <sup>1</sup> [apart from me]."

When he said this, he sinned against <sup>1</sup> [the entirety]. And this speech got up **87** to incorruptibility; then there was a voice that came <sup>1</sup> forth from incorruptibility, saying, <sup>1</sup> "You are mistaken, Samael" – which is, "god <sup>1</sup> of the blind."

His thoughts became blind. And, having expelled <sup>5</sup> his power – that

is, the blasphemy he had spoken <sup>1</sup> the abyss, his mother, at Wisdom). And she established with its power – after the power by starting from the <sup>1</sup> invisibility

As incorruptibility <sup>1</sup> looked, an image appeared in the water. She came enamored of her. <sup>15</sup> But which had appeared to them – since beings that merely possess a spirit – for <sup>1</sup> the above.

This is the reason why "the region (etc.)": <sup>1</sup> so that, by entirety into union with the light, said, "Come, <sup>25</sup> let us create

They modelled their creature. Now the rulers . . . <sup>1</sup> body the face of a beast. They had modelled their [man], <sup>1</sup> after their had appeared [to them] <sup>1</sup> in

They said, "[Come, let] us we have modelled, [so that] and we may seize it with the understanding the force of C he breathed into <sup>1</sup> his face; a remained <sup>5</sup> upon the ground arise because of their power (in blowing), that they might appeared <sup>1</sup> to them in the water its power.

Now all these (events) came entirety. Afterwards, <sup>1</sup> the spirit descended and came to dwell with soul. <sup>1</sup>

It called his name Adam ground. A voice <sup>1</sup> came forth Adam; <sup>1</sup> and the rulers gathered and all the <sup>1</sup> birds of heaven a

is, the blasphemy he had spoken – <sup>1</sup> he pursued it down to chaos and <sup>1</sup> the abyss, his mother, at the instigation of Pistis <sup>1</sup> Sophia (Faith Wisdom). And she established each of his offspring <sup>1</sup> in conformity with its power – after the pattern <sup>10</sup> of the realms that are above, for by starting from the <sup>1</sup> invisible world the visible world was invented.

As incorruptibility <sup>1</sup> looked down into the region of the waters, <sup>1</sup> her image appeared in the waters; <sup>1</sup> and the authorities of the darkness became enamored of her. <sup>15</sup> But they could not lay hold of that image, <sup>1</sup> which had appeared to them in the waters, <sup>1</sup> because of their weakness – since beings that merely possess a soul <sup>1</sup> cannot lay hold of those that possess a spirit – for <sup>1</sup> they were from below, while it was from <sup>20</sup> above.

This is the reason why “incorruptibility <sup>1</sup> looked down into the region (etc.)”: <sup>1</sup> so that, by the father’s will, she <sup>1</sup> might bring the entirety into union with the light. The rulers (*archontes*) laid <sup>1</sup> plans and said, “Come, <sup>25</sup> let us create a man that will be soil from <sup>1</sup> the earth.” They modelled their creature <sup>1</sup> as one wholly of the earth.

Now the rulers . . . <sup>1</sup> body . . . they have . . . female . . . is . . . <sup>1</sup> with the face of a beast. They had taken [some soil] <sup>30</sup> from the earth and modelled their [man], <sup>1</sup> after their body and [after the image] <sup>1</sup> of God that had appeared [to them] <sup>1</sup> in the waters.

They said, “[Come, let] us <sup>1</sup> lay hold of it by means of the form that we have modelled, [so that] <sup>35</sup> it may see its male counterpart [. . .], **88** and we may seize it with the form that we have modelled” – not <sup>1</sup> understanding the force of God, because of <sup>1</sup> their powerlessness. And he breathed into <sup>1</sup> his face; and the man came to have a soul (and remained) <sup>5</sup> upon the ground many days. But they could not <sup>1</sup> make him arise because of their powerlessness. <sup>1</sup> Like storm winds they persisted (in blowing), that they might <sup>1</sup> try to capture that image, which had appeared <sup>1</sup> to them in the waters. And they did not know <sup>10</sup> the identity of its power.

Now all these (events) came <sup>1</sup> to pass by the will of the father of the entirety. Afterwards, <sup>1</sup> the spirit saw the soul-endowed man <sup>1</sup> upon the ground. And the spirit came forth from <sup>1</sup> the Adamantine Land; it descended and came to dwell within <sup>15</sup> him, and that man became a living soul. <sup>1</sup>

It called his name Adam since he <sup>1</sup> was found moving upon the ground. A voice <sup>1</sup> came forth from incorruptibility for the assistance of Adam; <sup>1</sup> and the rulers gathered together <sup>20</sup> all the animals of the earth and all the <sup>1</sup> birds of heaven and brought them in to Adam <sup>1</sup> to see what

Adam would call them, <sup>1</sup> that he might give a name to each of the birds <sup>1</sup> and all the beasts.

They took Adam <sup>25</sup> [and] put him in the garden, that he might cultivate <sup>1</sup> [it] and keep watch over it. And the rulers issued a command <sup>1</sup> to him, saying, "From [every] tree <sup>1</sup> in the garden shall you (sg.) eat; <sup>1</sup> yet — [from] the tree of recognizing good <sup>30</sup> and evil do not eat, nor <sup>1</sup> [touch] it; for the day you (pl.) eat <sup>1</sup> [from] it, with death you (pl.) are going to die."

They <sup>1</sup> [...] this. They do not understand what <sup>1</sup> [they have said] to him; rather, by the father's will, **89** they said this in such a way that he <sup>1</sup> might (in fact) eat, and that Adam might <not> regard them as would a man of an exclusively <sup>1</sup> material nature.

The rulers took counsel <sup>1</sup> with one another and said, "Come, let us cause <sup>5</sup> a deep sleep to fall upon Adam." And he slept. <sup>1</sup> — Now the deep sleep that they <sup>1</sup> "caused to fall upon him, and he slept" is Ignorance. — They opened <sup>1</sup> his side like a living woman. <sup>1</sup> And they built up his side with some flesh <sup>10</sup> in place of her, and Adam came to be endowed <sup>1</sup> only with soul.

And the spirit-endowed woman <sup>1</sup> came to him and spoke with him, saying, <sup>1</sup> "Arise, Adam." And when he saw her, <sup>1</sup> he said, "It is you who have given me life; <sup>15</sup> you will be called 'Mother of the living.' <sup>1</sup> — For it is she who is my mother. It is she who is the physician, <sup>1</sup> and the woman, and she who has given birth."

Then the <sup>1</sup> authorities came up to their Adam. <sup>1</sup> And when they saw his female counterpart speaking with him, <sup>20</sup> they became agitated with great agitation; <sup>1</sup> and they became enamored of her. They said to one another, <sup>1</sup> "Come, let us sow our seed <sup>1</sup> in her," and they pursued her. And <sup>1</sup> she laughed at them for their witlessness <sup>25</sup> and their blindness; and in their clutches, she became a tree, <sup>1</sup> and left before them her shadowy reflection resembling herself; <sup>1</sup> and they defiled [it] <sup>1</sup> foully. — And they defiled the stamp of <sup>1</sup> her voice, so that <sup>30</sup> by the form they had modelled, together with [their] (own) image, they made themselves liable to condemnation. <sup>1</sup>

Then the female spiritual principle came [in] <sup>1</sup> the snake, the instructor; and it taught [them], <sup>1</sup> saying, "What did he [say to] <sup>1</sup> you (pl.)? Was it, 'From every tree in the garden <sup>35</sup> shall you (sg.) eat; yet — from [the tree] **90** of recognizing evil and good <sup>1</sup> do not eat?'"

The carnal woman said, <sup>1</sup> "Not only did he say 'Do not eat,' but even <sup>1</sup> 'Do not touch it; for the day you (pl.) eat from it, with death you (pl.) are going to die.'" <sup>1</sup>

And the snake, the instructor, die; for it was out of jealousy your (pl.) eyes <sup>1</sup> shall open recognizing <sup>10</sup> evil and good taken away from the snake earth. <sup>1</sup>

And the carnal woman her husband as well as her soul, ate. And their imperquaintance; and <sup>1</sup> they recognized element, <sup>1</sup> and took fig leaves

Then the chief ruler came — for he did not <sup>1</sup> understand

And Adam <sup>1</sup> said, "I he naked; and I hid." <sup>1</sup>

The ruler said, "Why did you have eaten from the tree <sup>1</sup> to eat? <sup>1</sup> And you (sg.) had

Adam said, "The woman ate." And the arrogant <sup>30</sup>

The woman <sup>1</sup> said, "It [They turned] to the snake powerless, not comprehending had modelled. From that of the authorities; <sup>1</sup> until they fell upon the snake.

They turned <sup>1</sup> to their Adam garden <sup>5</sup> along with his wife are <sup>1</sup> beneath the curse.

Moreover they threw man <sup>1</sup> of toil, so that their man and might not have the spirit.

Now afterwards, <sup>1</sup> she bled land. Thereupon he knew Abel; and Abel <sup>15</sup> was a from the crops of his field among <sup>1</sup> his lambs. God loved he did not accept the votive sued Abel his brother.

And the snake, the instructor, said, "With death <sup>1</sup> you (pl.) shall not die; for it was out of jealousy <sup>1</sup> that he said this to you (pl.). Rather your (pl.) eyes <sup>1</sup> shall open and you (pl.) shall come to be like gods, recognizing <sup>10</sup> evil and good." <sup>1</sup> And the female instructing principle was taken away from the snake, <sup>1</sup> and she left it behind merely a thing of the earth. <sup>1</sup>

And the carnal woman took from the tree <sup>1</sup> and ate; and she gave to her husband as well as herself; and <sup>15</sup> these beings that possessed only a soul, ate. And their imperfection <sup>1</sup> became apparent in their lack of acquaintance; and <sup>1</sup> they recognized that they were naked of the spiritual element, <sup>1</sup> and took fig leaves and bound them <sup>1</sup> upon their loins.

Then the chief ruler came; <sup>20</sup> and he said, "Adam! Where are you?" – for he did not <sup>1</sup> understand what had happened.

And Adam <sup>1</sup> said, "I heard your voice and was <sup>1</sup> afraid because I was naked; and I hid." <sup>1</sup>

The ruler said, "Why did you (sg.) hide, unless it is <sup>25</sup> because you (sg.) have eaten from the tree <sup>1</sup> from which alone I commanded you (sg.) not to eat? <sup>1</sup> And you (sg.) have eaten!" <sup>1</sup>

Adam said, "The woman that you gave me, <sup>1</sup> [she gave] to me and I ate." And the arrogant <sup>30</sup> ruler cursed the woman.

The woman <sup>1</sup> said, "It was the snake that led me astray and I ate." <sup>1</sup> [They turned] to the snake and cursed its shadowy reflection, <sup>1</sup> [...] powerless, not comprehending <sup>1</sup> [that] it was a form they themselves had modelled. From that day, **91** the snake came to be under the curse of the authorities; <sup>1</sup> until the all-powerful man was to come, <sup>1</sup> that curse fell upon the snake.

They turned <sup>1</sup> to their Adam and took him and expelled him from the garden <sup>5</sup> along with his wife; for they have no <sup>1</sup> blessing, since they too are <sup>1</sup> beneath the curse.

Moreover they threw mankind <sup>1</sup> into great distraction and into a life <sup>1</sup> of toil, so that their mankind might be <sup>10</sup> occupied by worldly affairs, and might not have the opportunity <sup>1</sup> of being devoted to the holy spirit.

Now afterwards, <sup>1</sup> she bore Cain, their son; and Cain <sup>1</sup> cultivated the land. Thereupon he knew his <sup>1</sup> wife; again becoming pregnant, she bore Abel; and Abel <sup>15</sup> was a herdsman of sheep. Now Cain brought <sup>1</sup> in from the crops of his field, but <sup>1</sup> Abel brought in an offering (from) among <sup>1</sup> his lambs. God looked upon the <sup>1</sup> votive offerings of Abel; but he did not accept the votive offerings <sup>20</sup> of Cain. And carnal Cain <sup>1</sup> pursued Abel his brother.

And God <sup>1</sup> said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" <sup>1</sup>

He answered, saying, "Am I, then, <sup>1</sup> my brother's keeper?"

God said to <sup>25</sup> Cain, "Listen! The voice of your brother's blood <sup>1</sup> is crying up to me! You have sinned with <sup>1</sup> your mouth. It will return to you: anyone who <sup>1</sup> kills Cain will let loose seven <sup>1</sup> vengeancees, and you will exist groaning and <sup>30</sup> trembling upon the earth."

And Adam [knew] <sup>1</sup> his female counterpart Eve, and she became pregnant, and bore [Seth] <sup>1</sup> to Adam. And she said, "I have borne [another] <sup>1</sup> man through God, in place [of Abel]." <sup>1</sup>

Again Eve became pregnant, and she bore [Norea]. <sup>35</sup> And she said, "He has begotten on [me a] virgin **92** as an assistance [for] many generations <sup>1</sup> of mankind." She is the virgin whom the <sup>1</sup> forces did not defile.

Then mankind began <sup>1</sup> to multiply and improve.

The rulers took counsel <sup>5</sup> with one another and said, "Come, let <sup>1</sup> us cause a deluge with our <sup>1</sup> hands and obliterate all flesh, from man <sup>1</sup> to beast."

But when the ruler of the forces <sup>1</sup> came to know of their decision, he said to Noah, <sup>10</sup> "Make yourself an ark from some wood <sup>1</sup> that does not rot and hide in it – you <sup>1</sup> and your children and the beasts and <sup>1</sup> the birds of heaven from small to large – and set it <sup>1</sup> upon Mount Sir."

Then Orea came <sup>15</sup> to him wanting to board the ark. <sup>1</sup> And when he would not let her, she blew upon the <sup>1</sup> ark and caused it to be consumed by fire. Again he <sup>1</sup> made the ark, for a second time.

The rulers went to meet her <sup>1</sup> intending to lead her astray. <sup>20</sup> Their supreme chief said to her, "Your mother <sup>1</sup> Eve came to us."

But Norea turned to <sup>1</sup> them and said to them, "It is you who are the rulers of <sup>1</sup> the darkness; you are accursed. And you did not know <sup>1</sup> my mother; instead it was your female <sup>25</sup> counterpart that you knew. For I am not your descendant; <sup>1</sup> rather it is from the world above that I am come." <sup>1</sup>

The arrogant ruler turned, with all his might, <sup>1</sup> [and] his countenance came to be like (a) black <sup>1</sup> [...]; he said to her presumptuously, <sup>30</sup> "You must render service to us, <sup>1</sup> [as did] also your mother Eve; for I have been given (?) <sup>1</sup> [...]."

But Norea turned, with the might of <sup>1</sup> [...]; and in a loud voice [she] cried out <sup>1</sup> [up to] the holy one, the God of the entirety, <sup>93</sup> "Rescue me from the rulers of unrighteousness <sup>1</sup> and save me from their clutches – forthwith!"

The <great> angel <sup>1</sup> came down from the heavens <sup>1</sup> and said to her, "Why are you crying up <sup>5</sup> to God? Why do you act so boldly towards the <sup>1</sup> holy spirit?"

Norea said, "Who

The rulers of unrighteousness  
is I who am Eleleth,  
presence of the holy spirit  
save you from the grasp  
your root."

– Now as for that  
ance is like <sup>15</sup> fine gold  
mouth cannot bear <sup>1</sup>  
face! <sup>1</sup>

Eleleth, the great angel  
understanding. <sup>20</sup> I am  
presence of the great  
any power over you (I  
<sup>25</sup> of truth; for on its  
authorities will be restored  
and that generation;  
where the virgin spirit  
chaos <sup>1</sup> and to their undoing

But I said, <sup>1</sup> Sir, teach me  
[how] did they come into  
**94** what material, and

And the <sup>1</sup> great angel  
limitless realms <sup>5</sup> dwell  
wanted to <sup>1</sup> create something  
product was a celestial

"A veil exists between  
below; and <sup>1</sup> shadow  
shadow became matter  
what she had created  
fetus. <sup>1</sup> And it assumed  
came <sup>1</sup> an arrogant being  
I have already said, <sup>1</sup>

"Opening his <sup>20</sup> eyes  
<sup>1</sup> and he became arrogant  
none other apart from

"When he said <sup>1</sup> that  
came forth from above  
mistaken, Samael' –

"And he <sup>1</sup> said, 'If