

Corpus Gnostica

Brent Paris

Codex I (a)
Burden of Poimandres

“This was a terrible place, a haunted place fixed between the memory of a dead universe and the birth of a new reality.”

The watcher wore a simple white tee shirt and faded blue jeans; he held a weathered shoebox under his arm. In his back pocket was a red bandana. His gaze was fixed on tongs of yellow light, burning an image of eternity into his eyes. He stared straight into the blinding sun as it rose over the hills in the distance. He had resolved to finally end his voyeuristic existence by burning away the two organs that had captured so many haunting images. If he couldn't end his existence, then he could at least be blind to it. He had been awake for so long. Watching everything as it rose only to pass away. He was exhausted and weary, forever walking the path of oblivion. He kept his eyes fixed on the star as it rose in alignment with an old water tower, rusted and abandoned. The tower sat on a grassy hill enclosed by a bent metal fence, now long forgotten, in the place of origins.¹ This was a terrible place, a haunted place fixed between the memory of a dead universe and the birth of a new reality. The shoebox was his only possession. It contained a prisoner, a key of sorts to a door the watcher refused to open. ‘Forget the box,’ he was finished with it. He was finished with its prisoner’s lies. He was finished with its twisted imagination. He was tired of watching the births and deaths of worlds and

¹ This appears to be the watchtower of the east. In hermetic tradition, each watchtower represents one of the four governing elements: fire, earth, air, and water. This tower guards the element of water. (Dyson Teal)

universes, gods and goddesses, saints and sinners. And so he stood beneath the tower trying to forget.

The creature gave a loud thump against the side of the box. It squirmed about, forcing the watcher to press down on the lid. "She was so obsessed by him, she never knew I existed," he whispered. But what did it matter? Their lives had ended long ago. The twilight of the gods was just one of his memories. She was gone, and her lover was gone too. He had given his life to save her. And for what? Nothing was left of the old world except this place, this tower and the rising sun. And the creature, it remained as well. The creature was eternal; it never went away. To the ends of the universe he had carried and abandoned the box. He had thrown it into the hottest suns, and the darkest black holes, but the creature always found its way back.

Finally, he turned away. This staring contest was futile. His memories could never be erased nor his eyes ever blinded. It was his lot as the eternal witness of time. He started down the path away from the tower. He could hear the sounds of hammering in the distance. Resigned, he wandered the dusty path towards the noise. Rising dust shimmered in the morning light. Tumultuous sounds grew louder. He could hear voices and the sound of hammers crashing against nails. Rounding the bend, he saw a building under construction. It was a small structure, a little wooden building partially framed. He watched as workers raised a rafter by rope and pulley to the top of the building. He looked on as they heaved, straining against the rope. He vividly remembered these ugly workers with their hideous clown faces. They wore multi-colored harlequin costumes. His loathing for them was palpable. His attention was

drawn to a figure emerging from the building. He recognized the master builder, the architect in charge of the work.

“I was wondering when you would arrive,” the Architect offered as a greeting. “You’re late.” He stood in the threshold leaning against the doorframe. He was tall, well built, with a well-groomed mane, and keen beastly eyes. He offered the newcomer his hand. The ebony faced watcher refused to take it. Instead, he pressed his arm harder against the shoebox. He could sense the creature becoming anxious, trying to claw its way out. It knew the builder was near. “You’ve brought it back!” the Architect stepped closer. “Oh yes, I suppose I have. But I will not release the monster into your little nightmare. Not this time. I’m ending this horror.” The watcher turned away and walked up to the porch where he sat on a step. He pulled the red bandana from his pocket, wiping his face as he secured the shoebox under his foot. His eyes drifted back down the path. He could see the top of the water tower in the distance behind the trees. The Architect drew closer putting his hand on the watcher’s shoulder. Stooping down, he sat beside his guest. For a few minutes they just sat there on the steps, looking towards the tower under the morning sun. The noises from the workers faded into the background.

The Architect finally broke the silence, “Poimandres, I understand why you hate me and why you loathe the beast. You’ve seen so much suffering. The pain and heartbreak, it’s more than anyone should bear. Look at my stupid workers. Nothing affects them. They build, and they pull down. They’re wreckers of planets and builders of churches in the sky. They simply do my bidding. But you brother, you’re different. You have a choice in the matter.

Your choice means everything. Without the beast, our building remains empty, without a soul. It will remain a meaningless shell, dead and barren. I need the creature. But it's your choice. You can choose to keep the beast confined, but you'll never know for sure what might be. Or you can release it into my building, into a new universe filled with wonder and... boundless potential. The choice is yours alone."

Poimandres thought about the Architect's words. Why had he even bothered to come back? Perhaps it would have been better if he had stayed away from the church and the builder. But of course he'd already tried, many times. He had finally come back because he was so lonely. "I will never release the creature again. Its mind is too deranged; its horrors too great," the dark watcher sniffed. "I understand brother, but we can still just sit for a while and visit," the Architect offered. Poimandres nodded, and asked for a bottle of water. He noticed the Architect was still wearing a white leather apron as they sat quietly drinking.² Eventually curiosity overcame him, and he broke the silence, "Architect, why do you build? I know you only through your works, but I have no idea what motivates you?" The Architect shifted on the step. He didn't answer at once, but seemed to meditate on the question. He drew on some long distant memory, buried under the fog of his lonely existence. The watcher looked into the builder's feline eyes. They appeared thoughtful, pensive, still pondering the question. Perhaps he'd never asked himself why he was driven to build. Perhaps the sorrow was too great. Or perhaps he simply didn't know.

² In Freemasonry a Master Mason wears a white leather apron. (Dyson Teal)

Finally the builder found an answer, "Poimandres, I've never had a choice. I can only do what I do; I build because it's in my nature to build. Listen closely, before you make your finally decision, there's one secret which you've never understood. Brother, the one whose memory has seared a hole into your heart, the one you lost so long ago, she was my daughter. Poimandres, on the day she died in my arms, I became the Architect." The builder was quiet again. The dark faced watcher's mind returned to her once more. She was the one he had followed and loved, and yet she had never suspected he was watching. It was so long ago. Why did she go away? "Why have the gods left us?" the watcher cried without thinking. The Architect was startled, "Poimandres, don't you understand?" "Understand what?" "Poimandres, there was a place before time, even before this timeless place. In that ancient realm I lived with my daughter and the parental gods. Have you forgotten the origins of time before beginnings?" "Please Architect," the watcher begged, "Tell me about this time before time. I can't get her out of my mind. I've given up trying to forget, so please tell me, what really happened?"

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex I (b)
Origin of Time

"Our bodies were like inert shadows cast upon a transparent realm of dreams."

The Architect reached into a cooler by the doorway and pulled out a fresh bottle of water. He took a sip and began; "I remember the brackish fumes carrying the smell of decay from the dark waters to my nostrils. A thick molasses dripped from the pole, as I steered my canoe through the stygian night. Alien noises filled my ears with the freakish yells of hungry insects and unknown beasts. Sweat beaded my body, soaking my clothing with the dank smell of a million nights. My eyes were fixed on the horizon, fixed on the only object in that ghastly sky. It was larger than any star. Its lazy rays rising in smoky waves, lapping from the orb into the darkness of space."

"Its placid glow cast dire silhouettes from Cyprus trees hung with moss. No breeze moved across this watery world. The only movement on the face of those silent waters was the gentle ripple made by the passage of my canoe, and the breaking of the watery film by my pole, as I pushed forward towards the horizon. Every night," the Architect continued, "I smelled his putrid breath as he followed me. I could never escape his impatient eyes. He never gave up his pursuit. He circled my canoe, swimming slowly around me, sometimes leaving a wake that caught the shimmering light from the star above. Sometimes I would turn and feel his gaze. I watched as he swam half surfaced, gracefully twisting his body, his reptilian eyes glazed with emptiness."

"The horizon was the end of days, it was the very dawn of creation. On that last night before creation, I saw a faint light glowing before me, a light half

hidden behind tall Cyprus trees and hanging moss. I steered my canoe towards the light as the shadows of a bayou dwelling emerged from the methane vapors of the swamp. Built atop stilts in the water, the dwelling was old, decrepit, and falling apart. The cabin had an old tin roof rusted, a porch made of rough cut planks, a crudely framed door, with a dingy blanket tacked up covering the hole. An oily rusted lantern hung from the tar pitched rafters of the porch. Sounds echoed from this place as my boat drew near, the sounds of voices mingled with the smell of cheap bourbon.” The Architect turned to Poimandres, half wondering if he were still listening, or if he had already made his decision, and left. The watcher was still there, his attention focused.

The builder continued, “On the night before creation, I heard the voices of my family coming from the cabin porch. I heard my father’s voice, as he sat in his rocker looking over the watery gloom. He was weathered with leathery skin; he wore tattered clothing. His face was scarred; it revealed great wisdom. He had lost his right eye in an ancient battle, but he saw everything clearly through his left. In his hands were an old tin banjo and a jug of Cajun bourbon. He rocked slowly, humming an old spiritual, singing the words to my mother. I wish I could recall the words, but now all I remember are their muffled melodies.”

“Like a jewel in the darkest night, my mother glistened in the lantern light. Her skin was perfectly smooth like a statue cut from ebony. She was wearing white linen, and held a single red rose between her fingers. Her face was as black as the darkest waters of the swamp. Her hair had a bluish hue with silvery streaks, and her eyes? Where were her eyes? For in her eye sockets

there were only two deep round portals opening to the universe. A billion stars looked back to my father from her heavenly gaze. And of course, Poimandres, there was one more member of my family on the porch, my lovely daughter.”

“Sometimes I still dream I’m rowing my canoe from one end of the cosmic abyss to the other. On the final night before creation, I decided to take a break from my travels. I brought my boat up alongside the cabin’s pier. There before the faces of infinity, I saw my daughter, the one you loved. She was wearing a ruffled bluish dress with white lace and tiny slippers. She had the palest complexion with ruby lips and blue eyes. Her hair was golden, her smile innocent. She took the rose from our mother’s hand and placed it in mine. She looked up at me, opening her mouth as if to speak, but instead I heard a desert storm. My face was blistered by hot winds from her mouth as she walked to the edge of the porch.”

“Flushed by this strange heat, I turned away and looked into the lone eye of my father.³ There I saw a bright star rising from his soul, filling the space above his head with radiance. Powerful rays of light poured from his eye, making a golden triangle that framed his body. As this light distracted me, my child wandered closer to the edge of the porch. She bent over to look into the dark waters. She was totally entranced by the reflection of the light from our father’s eye. She leaned over the edge of the porch, down to the watery reflection. But she couldn’t reach it, so she leaned still further, breaking the surface of the water.”

³ Horus-Ra is the one-eyed Egyptian god who lost his eye in combat with his evil uncle Set. The Eye of Horus is the eye over the pyramid on the back of the American dollar bill. (Dyson Teal)

“Now brother the universe was changed forever. In a brief moment of distraction, Apophis struck!”⁴ Darkness leapt from the depths of hell; his crocodilian body sprang out from beneath the water, grabbing her with his claws, and dragging her down in his mouth. I heard a tremendous splash and turned! I saw my daughter, her eyes looking up, sinking to the bottom of the swamp! I jumped into the water and for a brief moment I felt her fingers; they brushed against mine, and then nothing. I couldn’t find her. I swam deeper and deeper, twisting and turning, casting about in the darkness. Fear and desperation overcame me. She was gone. In one thoughtless moment, I had forgotten about the ever-present evil. In one moment, all was lost. And then something echoed in my mind. It was the voice of my father, ‘Osiris, be still. Your fear gives power to the demon.’”⁵ The Architect paused while Poimandres wiped his face with his bandana.

“Where was Sophia? I prayed to the ancient one, the one you carry in the box, and I heard my daughter calling, ‘Father! I’m here. Help me!’ I could feel the parched breath from her cries, and when I opened my eyes, I saw her standing on the dunes of time. I had found her. I took her by the hand. We began walking. On the horizon I could see a mirage of rocky hills baking under a blazing sun. Poimandres, I remember the desert like it was yesterday. It was the place of origins; it was the place where time began. The warm sands sank beneath our feet with every step. We walked towards the hills dominating the

⁴ Apophis is the evil crocodilian god of the underworld in Egyptian religious tradition. (Dyson Teal)

⁵ In this sentence and in the following paragraphs we learn that the Architect is actually the Egyptian god Osiris. (Dyson Teal)

horizon. An acrid breeze struck my face, beating my apron against my legs, rustling Sophie's dress. Our bodies were like inert shadows cast upon a transparent realm of dreams."⁶

"The hills formed an opaque wall blocking our view of the land beyond. Then we saw a valley. But there was an object blocking the way. As we got closer the object became clear. It was a huge desert hare. It was jet black, its ears were raised, and its hind legs stood poised to spring into flight or to cut one's throat with its razor claws. We stopped as close to the giant as we dared, perhaps one hundred yards, no more. We could hear it breathing; its breath was as hot as the parched desert. Its body expanded and contracted with every breath like the bellows of a giant furnace. Its eyes were closed; it appeared to be in sublime meditation."

Poimandres recognized the creature being described. He had lived with the image of the great hare burned into his mind for countless eons. The Architect continued, "Yes brother, I found the beast in the ancient desert, long before you. Its presence was overwhelming. I knelt down on my knees, pulling Sophie closer to my side. I lifted my hands in prayer, beseeching him to awaken. Almost imperceptibly, the great beast's eyes began twitching. When it opened its eyes I saw... boundless potential. The pace of its breathing increased. Then his mouth opened. Every nerve in my body froze. Its voice sounded like the breath of truth."⁷ 'My children,' it paused for a moment to examine us more closely, 'I am without cause, without beginning or end. I am the first cause for

⁶ See the Gnostic gospel *Pistis Sophia* chapter 131. (Dyson Teal)

⁷ Kether is the crown sephiroth in the Kabalistic Tree of Life; it is the emanation of truth. (Dyson Teal)

all that ever has been or will be. I am that I am. I know you both. Your prayers have awakened me from a deep slumber during which I dreamed.’ Brother, my attention, no, my very being was arrested by his words. My gaze was fixed on his fiery eyes, the movement of his mouth, the angle of his ears as he moved. My mind was so absorbed by the ancient one. I no longer noticed Sophie by my side.”

“I was focused on hearing its next words, ‘In my vision, I was a simple hare in a great savannah hiding behind tall elephant grass, quietly watching a frightening scene. I looked out from my hiding place as two weary animals fought in a nearby watering hole. One beast was caked in black mud, a hippopotamus. The other was a lion.’⁸ As I watched, the hippo appeared to have bested the lion in their struggle, having swallowed the lion from his hindquarters halfway up his body. It appeared as if the hippo would completely devour the lion, when he struck back with all of his remaining strength. The lion’s powerful claws cut fiercely into the face of the hippo as he struggled to free himself from the mouth of the watery beast. With heroic effort, the lion mounted the hippo’s back, forcing the vile creature’s head beneath the water.”

“Silence again reigned in the desert. I don’t know why brother, but a question rose, and I asked the great hare, ‘What then?’ Ancient of Days coolly laughed, ‘Son, no one can drown a hippo. It’s in his nature to love the murky waters.’ Hope fled as I stood before the hare and realized that Sophia was no longer beside me. She was gone. I cried out. I had lost her again. Then the

⁸ Set is the evil Egyptian god of darkness and brother of Osiris. He is often depicted as a Hippopotamus. Osiris is the solar lion. (Dyson Teal)

ancient one spoke, ‘Osiris my son, Sophia isn’t dead. Her soul has been exiled beyond the veil. You alone of the gods may pass into the middle realm to find her, for you are the golden lion of whom I dreamt.’ As I wondered about his motives, a ghastly wind arose striking up a dust cloud around the giant beast. I ran as quickly as possible, fleeing right past him through the canyon passage. The ancient one made no effort to stop me.”⁹

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

***Codex I (c)
Architect’s Work***

“The clear salty water reflected the blue sky as well as my weeping face. Poimandres, I had never seen my reflection. The waters of the swamp had always been too dark to reflect anything, but the pool of tears captured my image.”

Poimandres noticed a few of the workers were listening to the story being told by their foreman. The Architect took a drink before continuing his tale, “Beyond the canyon was more open desert. The monotony of the landscape was broken in places by sporadic rocky outcroppings. My daughter was lost somewhere in this wasteland. The weight of despair was overwhelming. Hopelessness wrapped around me like a dank cloak. I wished for oblivion, shedding tears that refuse to wash away my sorrow. Eventually, I found a small outcropping to sit on. I sat there crying, my tears forming a large puddle.

⁹ Symbolically this dust storm appears to indicate that Osiris is now being conducted beyond the veil into the middle realm of the gods. (Dyson Teal)

The small pool expanded until it was several meters across. The clear salty water reflected the blue sky as well as my weeping face. Poimandres, I had never seen my reflection. The waters of the swamp had always been too dark to reflect anything, but the pool of tears captured my image. For the first time, I saw myself as others do. I was amazed. I had the body of a man, but my face? Oh by the gods! A shocked and confused lion was looking back at me. I really was the lion-god who fought the hippopotamus in the Gatekeeper's dream.¹⁰ I touched my face for the first time with wonder. I felt my wide snout, my fur covered ears, and my broad golden mane." Poimandres reached out and pulled the Architect's mane. Both gods laughed.

The lion-faced builder leaned back a little against the top step; "I became the supreme architect in the middle realm. Worlds were mine to create and to set in motion. I looked up to the sky and reached into it, grabbing a brilliant star. I cast it into the pool of tears. I grabbed another star, and another, and another. Soon I had filled the pool with a galaxy of stars. The stars shimmered in the pool of tears. At first they knew no rules. They crashed into each other, exploded, collapsed, or disappeared without reason. I determined upon natural laws, powerful forces to control their courses and to order their behavior. This new universe was an exact copy of the higher realm."¹¹ The Architect smiled as he talked about his handiwork, "While I was occupied with my work, I heard a

¹⁰ In Mithraism, an ancient Persian religion, the *Leontocephaline*, or the lion-headed one, was a god depicted with a lion's head and a man's body. The *Leontocephaline* was believed to be the grand architect of the universe and master of the physical plane of existence. (Dyson Teal)

¹¹ "As Above, So Below," the famous Hermetic maxim that begins the poem known as the *Emerald Tablet*. Origins debated, possibly second-century B.C., Egyptian. (Dyson Teal)

*crashing sound in the sky. I looked up and saw a shooting star streaking across the sky. It plunged directly into the watery pool. The shooting star was followed by another, and another. There were seventy-two in all. I now realize these were the seventy-two Archons imprisoned by Ancient of Days.*¹²

Poimandres looked at the workers. Those same Archons were now building the Architect's church. The builder reached down, opening the water cooler. He got a fresh bottle, and tossed another to Poimandres. He took a large swig and continued, "I watched as a face slowly emerged from the depths of the pool to the surface. It was Sophie's face. She was trapped in the new universe, trapped there among the Archons. I saw fear on her face. I thought she could see me. She lifted her hands towards me, but she couldn't breach the shear divide. She struggled helplessly against the watery film, then slowly sank back into the depths of space."

"How could I save her?" the builder demanded. "If I entered my creation, I would be bound by its laws. I would have fallen prey to these shameful demons, these clown-faced villains around us. Poimandres eyed the worker's ugly faces. "Yes builder, your workers are vile creatures," he agreed, "but please continue your story." "Poimandres, if I couldn't enter my new universe, then I would have to fashion another means of rescuing her. So I created an agent for this purpose. I molded an image from clay and tears. But the sculpture had no life or soul. So I raised my hands to heaven, crying out to mother Isis, "Goddess,

¹² The 72 Archons were considered by the Gnostics to be the rulers of the celestial spheres or emanations into which the Goddess Sophia descended. They were lesser gods also referred to as the Watchers. In the *Book of Enoch*, the Watchers are caste to earth by the higher gods for lusting after and mating with mortal women, thus creating a race of giants that inhabited the earth in ancient times. (Dyson Teal)

send me your sacred breath!” Before I had a chance to repeat the prayer, a warm breeze descended to me from the sky. It enveloped me, infusing my mouth and nose. I put my lips to the clay figure’s mouth, breathing into its form. Immediately, the figure coughed violently and took his first breath.”

“As the clay man opened his eyes,” the great lion continued, “I helped him up with a strong grip.”¹³ He looked into my eyes with the wonder and bewilderment of a newborn child. His confusion was palpable. He was a silvery winged angel.” “Yes Architect,” whispered Poimandres, “I remember him well. She loved him dearly. More dearly than you perhaps?” The lion-faced builder shifted, straightening his apron. He thought for a moment about the watcher’s remark. Perhaps Poimandres was right. Perhaps he hadn’t been a worthy father? “I lifted my son into my arms and lowered him into the glimmering pool of tears, his toes slowly parting the veil of illusion. His body sank into the realm of lies and deceit, the material plane. He had a single mission, to find Sophia and bring her home. I turned my eyes away as I lowered him into the pool. I knew when he returned; his body would decompose back into tears and clay. But Poimandres, it was his awful destiny. I had no choice in the matter.”

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

¹³ See the Masonic Third Degree initiation, specifically the strong grip of the lion’s paw. (Dyson Teal)

Codex I (d)
Origin of the Physical Universe

“As the lion-faced god was listening, the watcher suddenly slapped his hands together shouting, “Fiat Lux!”

Poimandres was staring at a patch of ground before his toes. Why had the Architect finally decided to confide this terrible tale? His head ached. He looked up at the sun, but it returned his gaze in silence. And then he stood as if to leave, turning his back on the Architect. But he didn't walk away. Where did he have to go? “Architect?” he asked, still not facing the builder, “Do you know how I discovered your son and daughter?” The lion-faced god remained silent. It was the kind of silence that says I'm listening, but you already know.

The watcher kicked the lower step. Then he picked up the box and walked over to a nearby workbench. There he found a metal carpenter's square. Bending over, he started aimlessly striking the ground with its sharp steel edge. He dug up little flakes of gray earth, chipping away at his dusty memories. “Builder, I first saw her, when you led her across the great dunes to your rendezvous with Ancient of Days. I watched as you prayed before him.” Poimandres was pushing little clumps of earth to one side with the edge of the square, as he spoke, “I watched as you ran past the ancient one, and I followed you into the lonely desert. I watched as you wept and built your little universe. I saw Sophie's face rise to the surface of the pool, and then sink again. At that moment, I decided to plunge into the pool.” There was a murmur of understanding from the nearby demons.

*He dropped the metal square on the ground and stood. He looked into the lion's eyes; "I loved Sophie the moment I saw her rising in despair in the pool. I couldn't control myself. I had to find her, to be with her, whatever the cost. As soon as I jumped into the water, I found myself a stranger in a newborn universe. It was a cold, dark universe. Little wonder she was afraid. When I found her, she felt nothing; her form had become formlessness. Her thoughts had defused throughout the void of space. She wasn't simply diffused through space; she had become space itself."*¹⁴

*As the lion-faced god was listening, the watcher suddenly slapped his hands together shouting, "Fiat Lux!"*¹⁵ *"What was that?" Sophie exclaimed. It flashed across her mind like a great ray of hope; a window of light had broken open into her empty space. It was a flash of white light filling the darkness. She immediately focused her attention to where the light had appeared. An object streaked through her universe; it was glowing with tremendous heat and light. It was enormous, crashing through space at a tremendous speed. Her attention immediately enveloped the object. It was a fiery orb of gas, the first star you threw into the pool of tears. She embraced the star. She felt its heat. And then, another crashed through the portal, and another, and another flashed into the void. Soon her universe was filled with stars. She watched as they moved about. They were her only companions.*¹⁶ *She watched as the stars began to*

¹⁴ See the Egyptian goddess Nut, goddess of the void of space. Also see the descent of Sophia into the physical void after she falls into the lower realm as told in the *Pistis Sophia*. (Dyson Teal)

¹⁵ *Fiat Lux* (Latin) Genesis 1:3 "Let There Be Light." (Angelica Herald)

¹⁶ In certain esoteric traditions, the solar bodies of the universe actually possess their own spiritual essences or souls as well as consciousness. (Dyson Teal)

move in orderly patterns. Individual stars began circling in great clusters; and clusters began revolving in massive clumps forming galaxies.”

“After they were settled, she decided to inspect the planets orbiting her stars. Many were fiery furnaces, orbiting too close to their suns. Others were cold, icy places too far from their sun’s warmth. But a few of her planets orbited between these extremes. These places were just right for her experiments.¹⁷ Sophie began working a powerful alchemy, infusing her own spiritual essence into elemental compounds, creating a new form of sentient matter called life. She repeated these experiments on every planet favoring her method, until her universe was filled with living beings, all animated by tiny sparks from her soul.” Poimandres’ tone was joyous as he continued, “Architect, the empty universe was transformed into a place of perfection she named, Eden.” The watcher turned to the builder who had offered him another bottle of water. He drank it readily.

Then he continued, “Many life forms evolved on Eden’s planets. One of these planets was called Terra. The most evolved creatures on Terra were humans; creatures fashioned in Sophia’s likeness, filled with divine sparks from her soul. Their technology was highly advanced. They knew how to control the forces of nature, and had mastered interstellar travel. The Terran capital city was called Atlantis. There the humans had constructed three great pyramids,

¹⁷ Goldie Locks and the Three Bears has long been recognized as a Gnostic tale. Goldie Locks is the goddess Sophia while the three bears represent the two bears of Ursa Major and Minor, plus Draco, the evil dragon that sits between the bears. Ursa Major is also known as the Big Dipper that was symbolically used to dip the cosmic porridge or stellar plasma at the creation of the universe. (Dyson Teal)

carefully aligned to the three stars of your belt.”¹⁸ Atlantis was the center of a great inter-planetary trading network spanning the known universe. Under Sophie’s watchful eye, every planet and species lived in perfect harmony with its intergalactic neighbors. There was no warfare. There was no poverty, no disease, and no crime. Everyone on Terra was free to develop their own natural gifts, with no concern about how these skills would be utilized. Atlantian society provided for everyone’s needs and comforts.”¹⁹ The supreme spiritual leader of Atlantis was the Arch-Priestess, a woman dedicated to the service of the goddess.” “Poimandres,” the builder interrupted, “what was her name?” “They called her Eve, and her husband was named Adam.”

“Architect, there was one fatal flaw in your daughter’s great design. She had never exposed her children to the soul-searching questions of self-knowledge. She had sheltered them from tasting the bitter fruits of free will. She had deliberately protected them from the fear of death or the knowledge of evil. Humans faced their mortality with the naiveté of animals, feeling no anxiety as old age overpowered their bodies, and they slipped their mortal bonds. As a consequence, the concept of moral responsibility was unknown.” Again the Architect interrupted, “Yes Poimandres, I understand this absence of freewill resulted in the downfall of Sophie’s worlds. I learned as much from my wretched employees, these accomplices in the fall. But I do not know the details of their crimes. So brother, please continue.” “I will builder, but let me finish

¹⁸ This is a clear reference to Orion’s belt. Orion is the Greek form of the Egyptian god Osiris. The three Giza pyramids are strikingly aligned with the three stars of Orion belt. And the lion-faced Sphinx also faces the three stars of Orion’s belt. Clearly, the Sphinx represents the great architect of the universe. It therefore appears likely, that Atlantis was actually located at the Giza plateau in Egypt. (Dyson Teal)

¹⁹ See Plato’s Republic. (Dyson Teal)

my drink.” The watcher leaned against the church wall. He finished his water and closed his eyes. The Architect leaned back and folded his arms. Both could hear faint whispers coming from the workers, as they listened in the distance.

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

***Codex II (a)
Christ the Light Bearer***

“He questioned the compassion of a god who could sacrifice his own son for the mistakes of another.”

The Architect rose from the step and straitened his apron. He shook his fist at the sun yelling, “Move damn you! I’m tired of this endless day!” The sun responded instantly to his command, moving imperceptibly across the sky. He turned to the watcher as if he had just adjusted a dimmer switch, “Now that’s better; it will be evening soon.” He walked across the worksite, ordering his crew to gather firewood from the surrounding forest. Others were gathering stones and placing them in a large circle for a campfire. “I am sending my workers for food, what would you like?” the builder asked. “Please, some venison, and perhaps some red wine,” the hungry watcher requested. The builder sent some demons hurrying off into the woods.

“Poimandres, while we’re waiting, perhaps you would tell me about my son’s mission. As I’ve told you, I lowered him into the pool of tears that separated the middle realm from the physical universe. I heard nothing from him again until the end.” The Architect betrayed little emotion. Poimandres

picked up the shoebox and walked over to the stone circle. He found an empty nail barrel to sit on. He noticed the sun was slowly moving towards the horizon. "Yes, I knew your son. I spent many years watching him. He was my rival for her affection. Still, I was fond of him." Poimandres glared at his lion-faced companion, "I would have saved his life! But you made it impossible. You condemned them both to death." The dark faced watcher waited for a reaction to his incendiary remark. The Architect remained silent, his expression revealed nothing. So Poimandres went on, "I first saw the newborn Christ as you lowered him into the pool. I was surprised you gave him a material body. Why did you make him from clay and dust? Didn't you know you were condemning him to death?" This time the builder nodded. The watcher continued, "Your son's senses were awakened as he descended into the physical realm. He stretched out his powerful wings and flew through space. He had an overwhelming urge to find Sophia. But instead of following these instincts, he sought refuge, a place to think. He flew to a tiny volcanic planet close to a giant orange star. Here he found solitude to ponder his creation, his reason for existence." "Poimandres," the builder interrupted, "Does anything escape your observant eyes? Is there no privacy, even for the gods?" "Only when your lives bore me," he laughed.

"When Christ landed on the fiery planet," the watcher continued, "he found a place to sit and think. His mission disturbed him. He questioned the compassion of a god who could sacrifice his own son for the mistakes of another. His thoughts boiled into a sea of doubt. As he sat alone, another entity appeared before him. I recognized it instantly. I had hoped he was still

sleeping, but in the distance, through the sulfuric smoke and darting orange flames, Ancient of Days approached.” The Architect nodded, “Yes, nothing escapes his notice, so what did he want with my son?” “It is funny you should ask,” Poimandres responded, “because that’s exactly what the old one said. As the black hare approached, he stopped and demanded, ‘What do you want?’ ‘What do I want?’ Christ didn’t have an answer. ‘What do you want?’ Ancient of Days demanded again. With a stern expression, the old hare leaned forward, closely examining Christ’s face.”

Poimandres checked the shoebox, tightening the cord around its lid. “Your son was frozen before the dreaming god, but cautiously he answered, ‘I want to decide for myself.’ Without pausing the great hare replied, ‘So it shall be.’ The ancient one leapt towards Christ, grabbing him by the throat, throwing him to the ground. The weight of the giant hare was unbearable as the beast used its sharp claws to cut Christ’s throat. He fought for breath, but soon expired under the fiendish monster. His body lay under the beast, stone cold dead. His eyes still partially open.”

“The hare snorted, lowering his mouth closer to your son’s face. He blew a whitish vapor into his mouth and lungs. Immediately, Christ’s lifeless lungs expanded, forcing out a tremendous cough. His head and shoulders rose up violently, while his body sucked in as much sulfuric air as possible. The ancient one demanded, ‘What do you want?’ Finally Christ had a sincere answer for the old demon, ‘I want to live!’ The black hare studied Christ. ‘Do you understand now?’ Christ nodded and Ancient of Days was gone. But your son lingered for a while longer on his mercurial planet. The old one had indeed revealed to your

son what he wanted. Then and there, Christ knew he wanted to live. He had no interest in self-annihilation for Sophia or anyone else. He couldn't understand why you had created him. He had no intention of forgiving you builder, for making him disposable. The assault by Ancient of Days had convinced him beyond anything else, he wanted to live. The ancient one had given him free will."

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex II (b) Queen of Heaven

"Sophia was standing in a fiery chariot wearing golden armor, sword in hand. Her eyes were like lightening, she wore a crown of stars across her brow. Serpents slithered in the chariot, spewing acidic venom in every direction."

The sun had fallen to the horizon; soon it would be night. Poimandres looked forward to the darkness, the chill, and the mystery. He anticipated the partially revealed shadows of forms, familiar in the daylight, turned mysterious at night. And even more, he looked forward to the campfire. He loved the sight of fire, the dancing flames, and the warm tingle on his skin from the uneven heat. He knew how the demons would appear in the darkness, and it made him shiver.

"So what happened next?" the Architect interrupted the watcher's musings. "Oh yes," Poimandres sputtered, "I am sorry, I was distracted. When do you expect them to return with the food and drink?" "Soon brother," the

Architect answered, “Do not worry. Now please continue your story.” The watcher took a drink, “Your son still wanted to find Sophia even though the ancient one had given him the gift of free will. He called out her name, ‘Sophia! Sophia! Hear me!’ She heard his call instantly. As a storm summons lightening in a spontaneous flash, so she appeared before him. She was in her full regalia, wearing white silk with a golden crown on her silvery blue hair. She was tall with steely blue eyes. Her silky vestment was completely transparent, revealing her sinuous body. She was no longer the little girl you had known brother. She had grown into a radiant goddess. Architect, you would have been proud to see how she had transformed herself! When Christ saw her, his mind was overwhelmed by a tide of emotions. His heart trembled, his wings sank, and his voice quivered.”

The Architect smiled as Poimandres continued, “Your daughter stepped closer to Christ and demanded, ‘Who are you, Bright Eyes?’ ‘Bright Eyes?’ he responded. ‘You’re new, aren’t you? You’re pretty.’ The goddess approached him, circling like a predator. ‘You’re different from my angels. Your body’s made from both matter and higher realm spirit. Bright Eyes, you shouldn’t try to fly away. I’m everywhere; you are just a little white moth. Take care or I might burn your wings,” she laughed. Her blue eyes darted across the angel as she felt a delightful sense of curiosity, appeal, and desire.”

The sun was deep below the horizon. It would be dark soon. The watcher shuddered as he continued, “Your daughter was taunting him, ‘Pretty moth, you have such lovely bright eyes. If you do not give me your name, I’ll name you myself.’ She continued circling around the confused angel. She smiled, letting

out a little giggle, *'I like your eyes! Oh how they shine! My beautiful light bearer, you're mine now!'*²⁰ *Perhaps I'll put you in a glass jar to keep you from flying away.'* Once again she laughed, leaning forward to brush her hand against his shoulder and the top of his wings. She teased, *'Yes, I think I'll keep you. I rather like you pretty moth, everything in the universe belongs to me, including you.'* Brother, let me tell you, this wasn't at all what Christ had expected." The Architect smiled, watching as the last rays of sunlight slipped away. "Your son tried to explain, *'I was created by your father.'* But she didn't listen. She motioned towards his leg. Immediately, a metal chain appeared cuffing his ankle to the ground. *'Bright Eyes, I'm not letting you fly away.'* She brushed the back of her hand against his face. She moved closer taking a deep breath, smelling him, letting out a seductive little purr."

"She sat down in front of him, *'You are clearly an angel. I suspect you're immortal. True?'* He refused to answer, so with a capricious impulse she called down a powerful lightning bolt, striking his body. The ground around them smoldered in the aftershock, but both were completely unharmed. *'By the gods! What if you had killed me!'* he exclaimed. The goddess stood, *'You are too beautiful to burn.'* By now Christ was pretty pissed, and frankly brother, I was uncertain about her emotional stability. She had grown wild, her emotions unchecked." The Architect's expression was darker, "Well watcher," he demanded, "what happened next?" "Christ was pretty angry as he struggled against the heavy chain, yelling, *'Release me! Release me now!'* Sophia drew

²⁰ *Lucem ferre* (Latin) Light-bearer, is literally translated as Lucifer. It was a name given to the dawn appearance of the planet Venus, heralding daylight. Here we see the Christ and Lucifer archetypes provocatively linked by Valentinus. (Dyson Teal)

back hissing, ‘What did you say, little moth? You dare to make demands? I’m the creator of Eden and everything in it.’ She took several steps back lifting her arms towards the sky. With a quick move of her hips and snap of her fingers, a host of angels spontaneously appeared filling the sky as far as I could see. They flew across the sky in chariots drawn by fiery horses and dragons. Christ trembled. Sophia was standing in a fiery chariot wearing golden armor, sword in hand. Her eyes were like lightening, she wore a crown of stars across her brow. Serpents slithered in the chariot, spewing acidic venom in every direction. Hundreds of angels stood before Christ with sharpened spears pointed at his chest. She inhaled deeply, her breast heaving inside the golden armor. She looked up to the sky and repeated, ‘Again, I’ll ask you. What did you say, little moth?’”

“Brother, Christ was completely rattled. It took a few moments before he finally responded, ‘Great goddess, I am yours to serve as you will.’ She paused for a few moments; she appeared to be reflecting on the matter. Perhaps she felt a little embarrassed about making such a fuss. She snapped her fingers a second time, and as suddenly as her angelic host had appeared, they disappeared, leaving nothing but a memory in their wake. She remained standing in the chariot, but the venomous serpents were gone. The sword in her hand was replaced with a golden chalice. She lifted the cup, ‘Bright Eyes, since I didn’t create you, I can only assume you are from the higher realm.’ He nodded, ‘This is true great Queen of Heaven. I’ve been sent to serve you.’ ‘Who sent you?’ she asked in a more patient tone. ‘I was created by your father, the great Osiris.’ ‘My father,’ she hissed, ‘I am the first cause in this universe. Nothing

preconditions my existence.” The Architect was shocked, interrupting, “No! Had she lost her mind? Had she completely forgotten me?” Poimandres shook his head, “Please listen carefully, and all will be revealed.”

“Christ paused to reflect on her deranged assertion,” the watcher continued, “Could she really believe she was the creator of the universe? How could she have forgotten her origin? Yet nothing about this situation made any sense. She was supposed to be a lost child, trapped in a dark universe, terrified and afraid. Clearly, this wasn’t the case. She noticed Christ’s puzzled expression, ‘Bright Eyes, you’re different from my angels who have no free will; their only desire is to serve me. I need a companion who isn’t a mere reflection of myself. Bright Eyes, if I free you from these chains, will you be my companion?’ Her expression was difficult for me to read,” Poimandres confessed, “She seemed uncertain about the answer. It occurred to me, that this was perhaps the first time she had ever asked for something, without predetermining the outcome.” The Architect nodded, “Yes watcher, my daughter was a strong willed child.”

“Christ waited a few moments before answering, ‘My Queen, I was sent here to serve you. But I’m still puzzled, surely you remember something about your earlier life?’ ‘Bright Eyes, you are truly be a newborn in my universe. Dearest angel, if you were one of my creatures, you wouldn’t ask such silly questions about the memory of past lives. Bright Eyes, do you promise not to fly away if I release you?’ He nodded. She again touched the chain, and it disappeared. He quickly rose to his feet and spread his wings. Her eyes grew wide, afraid he would fly away, but instead, he shook his wings vigorously, and

folded them behind his shoulders. He stepped towards the goddess, bowing his head, "Thank you for releasing me." She nodded, with a sparkle in her eyes.

The Architect turned to the woods in the distance. Several demons were returning from their hunt, carrying a butchered deer. The watcher called out, "Remember to bring some wine as well!"

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex II (c) Cube in Space

"Her heart pounded as she pressed against his side, their warmth mingling in the chill of space. Their breathing became synchronized. Their bodies learned to trust one another, long before they could admit what was happening."

Poimandres watched as the workers were skewing venison onto sticks. Then they ignited an enormous blaze in the stone circle. Orange light danced across the church's unfinished walls. Some demonic clowns returned from the darkened path, bringing with them several oak barrels of wine. The watcher asked to have a flask filled. "Watcher, how's the wine?" the builder asked. "It is from my vineyards beyond the tower." Poimandres gulped it down without answering. He motioned to have his flask refilled. Between swallows he finally answered, "Your grape harvest was excellent, perhaps you should have stuck with being the god of vines?"²¹ The builder laughed, "I am glad to see you

²¹ Dionysus is the Greek god of the grape harvest, winemaking, and wine. He is the Greek equivalent of the Egyptian god Osiris, who was also associated with grapes and winemaking. (Dyson Teal)

loosening up. Sometimes you take yourself too seriously.” Poimandres held up the crystal flask, watching as firelight passed through the prism.

“It will be a while before the meat is cooked. Perhaps you could finish your story. What happened after my daughter released Christ from his chains?” Poimandres took another swig, “After your daughter freed Christ, she asked him, ‘Bright Eyes, do you want to see my garden? There your questions will be answered.’ Christ quickly nodded, ‘Yes goddess.’ So she motioned for him to step into her chariot. Standing beside the goddess, Christ felt a powerful new emotion. It was a sense of belonging with a person. His heart was filled with love for this radiant and rebellious creature. She couldn’t be tamed. Her beauty arrested him. Standing beside the goddess, he was no longer a god; he was a silvery moth attracted to her flames. Without the least restraint, he placed his arm around her waist, closing the space between their bodies as he steadied his footing. She wrapped her arm around him and lifted the reins of the winged horses, ordering them to fly. Her heart pounded as she pressed against his side, their warmth mingling in the chill of space. Their breathing became synchronized. Their bodies learned to trust one another, long before they could admit what was happening.”

“As you know,” the watcher continued, “the movement of the gods takes as long as they wish. The magic of their journey was prolonged to heighten their ecstasy. I followed closely behind, unobserved. I’m a voyeur; I freely admit it. When they finally arrived at the place she called Heaven, the two gods had become like one. She drew in the reins of the chariot, and the winged stallions landed in the center of a celestial city in the form of a perfect golden

cube.”²² The Architect reached for a stick with a piece of venison on it. He tasted it, and then offered some to Poimandres. The watcher took the meat and swallowed it with another gulp of wine. He continued, “In the center of the city, was a vast garden, populated with every imaginable plant and animal from the entire universe. This garden formed the courtyard of Heaven. It was the original holy of holies. Sophia took Christ by the hand, leading him into her garden of wonders. She whispered into his ear, ‘Bright Eyes, at the center of my garden, you’ll find the answers to your questions.’ He looked into her eyes; he was learning to trust her. As they walked towards the center of the garden, he noticed something odd. The sky was filled with fireflies, millions of them, swarming towards the center of the garden. The sparkling little creatures didn’t blink on and off like ordinary fireflies; their glow was constant. They darted all around the gods, brushing against their faces and between their bodies. Some flew close enough to flicker against Sophia’s hair. One flew into Christ’s nose. He tried to brush it aside, but she held back his hand, ‘No, please let them be. Everything will be explained.’

“As the two got closer to the inner sanctum of the garden, Christ saw a expansive boxwood maze. At the center of the maze was a large ornate fountain. The fountain was at least three hundred meters in diameter, with jets propelling water spouts high into the air. Around the perimeter of the fountain, were a dozen lesser spouts, spewing water from zodiacal statues. Sophia slowed as she approached the fountain. Christ’s attention was focused on the

²² See Revelations 21:16 for a description of the heavenly cube called the New Jerusalem. (Angelica Herald)

fireflies, as he watched them darting headlong into the spray. The glowing creatures rushed into the fountain, like moths drawn to a flame. The instant they came into contact with the water, they disappeared. Their sparks were instantly extinguished. Christ was deeply troubled; he felt a growing despair, ‘Goddess, what is the meaning of this?’

“Darling Bright Eyes,’ Sophia explained, ‘this is the place where all of your questions will be answered. It’s called the Fountain of Forgetfulness.²³ Those who drink from it, drink from the cup of illusion. This is the place of purification and the relief of suffering. Beautiful angel, you’ve only been here for a short time; you do not understand pain and suffering. They are the natural fruits of life in this dark universe. I’ve done everything in my power to create a perfect realm. But my powers are limited. The creatures I made are flawed. They’re mortal and eventually die. Eternal life eludes my abilities. Do you understand, dearest Bright Eyes? This is a magical place. The little lights you see darting about, they come here from all over the universe seeking one thing, forgetfulness. These are the souls of my mortal creatures. Their bodies have died, yet their minds live on. They suffer because they still long for what they can no longer have. These desires can never again be fulfilled. The only way for them to end their suffering is through drinking from the Fountain. Once their souls are immersed in the waters of mercy, they’re relieved of all past memories. They are renewed to be born again into new bodies on different worlds, in an eternal cycle of death, forgetfulness, and resurrection.”

²³ In Greek mythology the *Lethe* was one of the five rivers flowing into Hades. The *Lethe* flowed around the caves of *Hypnos* and into the underworld where all those who drank from it, experienced complete forgetfulness. Plato believed that souls were forced to drink from this river before being reincarnated, so they would not suffer from the memories of their past lives. (Dyson Teal)

“Christ listened in horror as your daughter revealed her dark secret. Oh, by the parental gods, what had she done? This wasn’t Heaven at all. Sophia had become the architect of Hell. While Christ listened, he watched thousands upon thousands of souls plunging into the fountain, extinguishing their identities. She held his hand tightly. She seemed completely lost in the devious perfection of this fountain, this place of extinction. Christ pulled his eyes away from the spectacle to look at the beautiful goddess beside him. He studied her expression; she was hypnotized by the sheer power of the place. Her eyes were distant, as if drawing relief from her own suffering. And then he realized this was indeed the place where his questions would be answered. He understood completely. His realization was unthinkable. He realized she too had drunk from the fountain. It made perfect sense. She had suffered immeasurably in the dark and lonely void. Her first and greatest creation was this fountain, a place to wash away any memories she had of the higher realm.”

“Christ considered the implications. She was happy in this universe of illusion. He knew the work of redemption couldn’t be accomplished through compulsion. And yet he also knew he would have to destroy her illusions to save her. Architect,” Poimandres waved his drinking glass at the builder, “I am afraid you erred in one important consideration. Once your new universe was set into motion, it became impossible to simply retrieve her. She was a part of the place. For Christ to bring her back, he would have to save the whole universe. Christ turned away from the fountain and lied to your daughter, ‘This is a beautiful place.’ She smiled, squeezing his hand.

Codex III (a)
Origin of Evil

*“She was ephemeral and translucent; she was the sound of distant church bells
no longer ringing.”*

The demons had gathered around the raging bonfire. Poimandres studied their faces in the firelight, as it cast sinister shadows across their harlequin faces. These depraved creatures embodied the vilest emotions to have ever erupted from the mind of the ancient one. They were the active principles of evil. Their eyes glowed, reflecting the orange flames. They would have given anything to take the box. The creature kicked in the cardboard prison; sensing its children were near. One of the harlequins was named Azrael. He wore a purple jester’s suit. “Lord Poimandres,” Azrael casually offered, “more wine?” The demon took the crystal goblet from the watcher’s hand and filled it to the brim.

The Architect turned to the watcher, “Poimandres, you’ve explained many things. Still more remains unanswered. Why are there only 71 demons here tonight? I counted 72 when they plunged into the pool of tears.” The watcher leaned forward, “I have carried this burden for too long. Tonight, I’ll reveal everything.” The builder looked into his eyes, saying nothing. The watcher leaned towards the closest Archon, “Azrael, do you remember your cellmate in the prison?” The Archon nodded. “Azrael’s former cellmate was Samuel. He’s the missing Archon. He was their ringleader.” The Architect was confused, but he didn’t interrupt.

“Azrael,” Poimandres motioned for the purple clad demon to draw near, “you knew him better than anyone.” Azrael nodded again; the memory of his former master still haunted him. “True, Lord Poimandres. Samuel was my only friend. I followed in his footsteps for many eons. I shared a cell with him for what seemed an eternity.” Azrael looked into the fire, whispering, “Samuel was haunted by his dreams. She would appear in his dreams completely unexpected like a phantom. As long as she was there, he felt comfortably numb. But as soon as he turned away from her for even a moment, she’d disappear. Her image snapped from his dreams, dissolving into fleeting memories, fragmented and distorted. She was ephemeral and translucent; she was the sound of distant church bells no longer ringing.”

Azrael sipped his wine; “One night Samuel asked me how long we had been imprisoned? Had it been forever? He lifted himself from his bunk, and stepped over to our cell window. I thought for a moment before responding, ‘I cannot remember. But I know you were here first.’ He kept looking through the window for a while before speaking, ‘Indeed Azrael,’ he answered, ‘I was here first. But before I was here, I vividly remember a childhood place of miracles and marvels; it was where I played for a summer that seemed to never end. I ran through open fields, climbing large rocks, swinging from tree limbs.” Everyone around the bonfire was listening. Azrael continued, “Samuel had lived on a mountain surrounded by rolling pastures. It was an ideal place. He told me he was very close to his father, he trusted him completely.”

“I watched as Samuel stood there, just gazing through the cell window. He was thinking about the past, a forgotten place neither worthy of lingering in,

or of tarnishing the present. He was trapped in his past; a place filled with empty emotions, unresolved disputes, and lost opportunities never to be put right. The past is a hellish place; it's a place of burned bridges and impassable rivers, meandering through poppy fields, blinding you to the passage of the ever present now. Our sorrows reside there; it's the source of our suffering. Samuel lived in his past, trying to forgive himself. But to no avail. The residue was like shards of glass buried beneath his skin. Eventually, he turned to me and spoke, 'Azrael, I'm troubled by my past; it's the source of my disease.' Every demon was listening to Azrael. The bonfire was losing its strength.

"Samuel confessed; 'I was only a child when my mother told me a cluster of fairies had moved to our mountain. I ventured out, determined to find their secret hiding place. I looked all about. I turned over rocks and dug under tree stumps. I went anywhere they might be hiding. I was exhausted; ready to give up, when I pushed aside some cabbage leaves in the garden. Buried beneath the leaves, was a tiny black rabbit, hidden in a downy fur lined nest. It was about the size of my hand; its eyes already open. I picked it up and carried it home.' The creature in Poimandres' box gave a furious kick, but this time the watcher reached down and pulled up a clump of grass. He stuffed it through the box slit, calming the beast.

Azrael continued, "The rabbit became Samuel's constant companion. He grew deeply attached to the creature. He was in the habit of fetching cheese from his mother's refrigerator for its dinner every evening. On one particularly dark and moonless night, a terrible storm rose above the grim peaks surrounding the house. Samuel's father called to him to bring his pet. He said

he wanted to feed it. So he ran outside through the storm, to the rabbit's hutch, bringing the wet creature in to his father. His father told him to fetch some cheese from the refrigerator. So he ran into the kitchen, grabbed the cheese, and darted back into the living room. Samuel was frozen, paralyzed in the doorway. The room was spinning. The only light, a flickering table lamp beside the man's chair. The rabbit was motionless, in the man's lap. He had slipped a sharp knitting needle along the base of its spine, between the ears and into its brain; the intended effect was to induce immediate paralysis. But the man wasn't completely successful, as the beast's hind legs twitched, kicking uncontrollably. The man then placed the rabbit onto a wooden board across his lap. With a straight razor, he sliced open its body. He called to Samuel to watch as the rabbit's heart still beat in its chest. He kept repeating, 'a fascinating experiment.'

"Samuel was still looking through the cell window. I remained utterly silent. I could hear that he was sobbing. Then he continued whispering, 'I was completely frozen at the threshold. Terrified, I ran back into the dark kitchen, back to the refrigerator, desperate to keep my crying silent. Minutes passed, and then I heard the man going into the bedroom. I saw the bedroom light from its reflection across the shadowy floor. I heard a tumbling noise, someone falling out of bed. Then nothing. A clock ticked on the wall, but it had no hands. How long did he stay in the bedroom, performing his experiments, his slow methodical butcheries?'" Azrael's voice was shaking as he repeated Samuel's story word for word.

“At first I silently cried. Then my mind grew twisted, cold, determined to stop feeling all together. Instinct overrode fear. I heard the man’s footsteps as he crossed into the kitchen. It was dark, frozen. I completely stopped breathing. I heard him switch on the lights. I heard him stop in front of the refrigerator door. He opened it. Springing from the freezing compartment, I grabbed onto his upper body, and plunged a sharp knife into his throat. He violently pulled me off, throwing me across the room. Gasping to draw air, he inhaled only blood. He thrashed about desperately trying to catch me, motioning for help, and then in his last desperate moments, he attempted to stab me with my chosen weapon.”

Azrael continued, “I was overwhelmed by Samuel’s confession. I rose from my bunk and demanded, ‘Lord Samuel, is this why you were confined? Was it for murdering your father? It was self-defense. You were only a child. My Lord, how did you survive? What did you do?’ Samuel paused before answering, ‘I sat on the kitchen floor alone, covered in congealed blood. I went into my parent’s room, hoping she had survived. Her body lay dissected on the bed. Her severed organs carefully removed, arranged in a grotesque display. He had labeled the organs with paper tags. Sprawled on the kitchen floor, the man remained unlabeled. Azrael, did you hear what I said? I ran into the kitchen and thrust the knife into his body again and again. I cut and slashed into him 71 times, releasing the same number of wretched emotions into the universe. I was laughing, screaming, crying, tearing away at his clothes, shouting the darkest, foulest words I could conjure into his dead ears. When I was finished, I had butchered his corpse beyond recognition. I released each of

the Archons into the higher realm. Each of you is my curse.” Azrael had remembered every word spoken to him by Samuel. His lips trembled; his hand involuntarily released his wine flask, shattering the crystal on the ground.

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex III (b) Birth of Guilt

“Ultimately, after a complete mental breakdown, where does the mind flee? It simply folds back into itself, becoming a miniature mind of god, weaving a fresh reality, covering itself with lies.”

The Architect stepped around the fire, tossing on a few more logs, bringing it back to life. “Azrael,” his feline voice pried, “You said Samuel was your friend. But how is this possible?” The demon murmured to the lion-faced god, “He was my only friend. I understood him. I know why he became a monster. On that night so long ago, locked away in our cell, he confessed to the first patricide.” Azrael studied his companion’s faces around the fire. They had all been inmates in that terrible place. He spoke as if speaking to each individually, “Mortal prisoners need only focus on the passage of days, counting down to their inevitable conclusion, waiting for the final release of death. But for us, there was no escape. We suffered from an unalterable and forever now. Time in the prison hung from the rafters, like heavy chains draped across our

shoulders. There was no hope for those condemned to Nemesis.”²⁴ The watcher put his hand on Azrael’s shoulder. The demon was still whispering, “Ultimately, after a complete mental breakdown, where does the mind flee? It simply folds back into itself, becoming a miniature mind of god, weaving a fresh reality, covering itself with lies.”

“The physical suffering in our cells was unbearable. The dry chill from outer space, the hunger, the thirst, we cried out but never perished. Suffering through endless ages, our minds grew twisted and perverted. Poimandres,” Azrael went on, “you wouldn’t understand the bond formed between victims, a bond connecting those who under better circumstances would never know one another. These dark angels and I are bound together; we watched the passage of planets and stars from our cell windows as intently as a drowning man watches the last bubbles of air escaping from his mouth. We watched as Nemesis passed the same stars eon after eon. We would have embraced a mortal’s death a thousand times over, to bring closure to our trek across icy space.”

“Faith springs eternal, as goes the ancient expression, but from whence does this fount tap?” quipped the purple clad demon. “The purest faith springs from the darkest, the most forlorn; the purest faith has no rational basis, but exists despite all reason to the contrary. For when there’s a reason for believing, there’s hope. Hope entices one to wait for someone else to save you,

²⁴ *Nemesis* (Greek) meaning divine retribution. It is a hypothetical comet, orbiting our Sun at a distance of about 0.8-1.5 light years away. This comet was originally postulated to exist as part of a hypothesis to explain a perceived cycle of mass extinctions in the geological record, which seem to occur once every 27 million years or so. To date the issue of whether Nemesis actually exists remains unsettled in the scientific community. (Dyson Teal)

but faith exists in the void where hope has taken flight. Faith springs from the essence of the goddess herself. It's the divine kiss of her nectar on a dying man's lips. On our final night in the prison, as I sat on my bunk and Samuel looked through the window, he saw a faint image of the goddess. As he looked out, her face didn't dissipate into a blur or blow away like a whiff of smoke in a dream. Instead it lingered, growing clearer. Eventually, Samuel called me over to the window."

Azrael continued, "On the night we escaped, we had long forgotten the feeling of hope. Only faith remained. For several moments, I looked out in silence. Then finally I stammered, 'Yes, Brother... I see her.' Soon the other inmates were calling out to one another, shouting and whooping as they looked out their windows. Suddenly, the space outside the walls of our rocky prison lit up. A star blazed by our window like a furious streak of lightening. Its gravitational wake shook the prison's brittle walls, causing it to crack and split. Then another star flew past even closer, grabbing our comet in its wake, pulling us along behind. The friction and pressure tore Nemesis apart, shattering the walls of our dungeon. We were thrown from the crumbling prison into a free fall towards a translucent barrier."

The fire was growing dim, the workers pensive. The demons looked at one another, nodding and remembering. Azrael continued, "We were finally free! We could fly in the physical realm at will. And then we saw her. We couldn't be restrained. We called out across space, and immediately she found our little band. Sophia demanded, 'Who are you, and what are you doing in my space?' No one answered so she flew to Samuel, 'What is your name?' He was

overjoyed to finally meet his beloved, 'I am Samuel. I'm the leader of this group of desperate and troubled spirits. For many eons we've been prisoners, locked away on a miserable comet in the higher realm.' She appeared worried and confused, but Samuel continued confidently, 'Beloved Queen, may we ask a small favor. We have noticed you're physical life forms. Please give us material bodies as well, so we can actually feel the pleasures of your wonderful universe.'"

Azrael paused, sipping his wine, "Sophia was clearly distressed by his bold request. I could tell she was frightened by our sudden appearance. Her reaction was quite predictable. She answered with a voice filled with venom, 'Samuel, unlike you and your companions, the mortal inhabitants of my worlds possess no free will. I've denied them the ability to make significant moral choices. We both know exactly who you and your companions are. Surely you would corrupt my innocent creatures with your sinister cunning.' I watched as she made a grave motion, transforming into her warrior persona as she mounted her celestial chariot. Lifting the reigns, she shouted, 'No Archons, I will never give you physical bodies. Your evil passions would devastate my worlds!'"

"Needless to say," Azrael caustically remarked, "my companions and I were pretty pissed. Samuel angrily raised his arms, signaling to our group, 'Archons, this arrogant whore has denied our humble request. Thanks for nothing... bitch! I promise, soon enough, you will hear from us again.' We then quickly flew away." Azrael was looking into the weak flames. He kicked some sand into the dying fire, trying to forget.

Codex IV (a)
Knowledge of Good and Evil

*“Eve said nothing, removing her white garments, revealing her nakedness.
Closing her eyes, she lay on the ground as the spirits penetrated her.”*

Poimandres reached for a bottle of water. He was finished with the wine for the evening. He passed another bottle to the Architect and one to Azrael. The purple clad demon refused. “I prefer my wine, thank you.” Poimandres smiled, leaning back against a barrel of nails. He checked the shoebox, and then tossed some branches on the fire. Wiping his face with his bandana he began, “The fallen Archons wandered the planets passively watching the activities of their inhabitants. Eventually, they found Terra, where they studied the humans closely. They learned about their lives, their joys, and sorrows. Samuel loathed the mortals. Over time a scheme began to fester in his perverted mind. It was an evil, twisted plan to take control of Sophia’s worlds.”

“Samuel watched and waited, studying the comings and goings of the high priestess at the temple in Atlantis. He watched her closely, learning her daily routine. Samuel loathed her. He knew each morning; Eve went for a walk in the temple gardens. Her husband Adam would join her there later in the afternoon. There they would spend their time walking, eating, and making love in the open air. Samuel eavesdropped on their most intimate conversations. He watched the man and woman for many years before making his next move. He knew the lusts of his demonic companions were fired to the wildest extremes when Adam and his wife made love. The demon’s un-satiated passions inspired his devious designs.”

Poimandres threw a few more branches on the fire, “It was a beautiful fall morning in the garden. Samuel was once again watching Eve as she walked in a familiar grove of sacred trees. That morning, Eve had used a powerful hallucinogenic herb to aid her during meditation. This was important information. Her emotions would be heightened and unstable. It was time to execute his plan. In Eve’s altered mental state, he hoped to telepathically communicate with her. As she sat reclining against a fruit tree, she thought she heard a voice from the leaves above. It was a beautiful voice, melodious, like sweet music moving through the air. Its sound caressed her body, blew across her bosom, parting her long golden hair with its warmth against the brisk fall air. ‘Whose voice was this?’ she wondered. She lifted her eyes to the leaves but saw no one. ‘Perhaps this was the voice of the goddess.’ But before when she’d heard Sophia’s voice, it had been as the voice of a child. This voice was different; it was masculine, subtle, and mysterious.”

“Eve,” she heard, ‘Where’s your husband? Isn’t he usually here with you by now?’ ‘Who are you?’ she asked, ‘How could you have known? You’re trespassing in the temple precincts.’ ‘A thousand pardons,’ replied the silvery voice from the treetop, ‘I meant no offence. I’m a simple air spirit. I sometimes live here and sometimes there. I’ve seen you and your husband here many times, and simply wondered his whereabouts.’ Eve wondered why she’d never heard a spirit speak to her before. This was odd indeed. ‘Air spirit, my husband’s working in the temple. He’ll join me when he’s finished, perhaps you would like to meet him?’ ‘Yes, indeed I would,’ answered the old deceiver, ‘But I don’t believe I’ll see him today.’ ‘Why not?’ ‘Oh, you must know your husband

won't be here today? For just before you arrived, as I was resting in this tree, he came to this very place and was soon joined by a younger priestess. I took her for his daughter; she was so young and beautiful. They kissed and embraced, leaving together for the garden gates."

Poimandres turned to Azrael for a reaction. The demon's painted face revealed no emotion. So the watcher went on, "Eve felt something alien plunge into her heart. It was a strange and powerful feeling. She didn't understand it nor had she ever experienced it. It was a new and burning emotion... jealousy. Her face became contorted, and her eyes twitched a little as she responded, 'Oh, I believe you're mistaken. I know my husband's habits very well. He'll no doubt be here shortly.' 'Indeed, I'm sure you think you know him well,' replied the old serpent, 'but I've seen him many times in this garden with you making love under this very tree, and yet I've never seen him look at or embrace a woman such as the one I saw him with earlier.' 'NO! You lie!' she shouted at the tree, 'I don't believe you!' 'A thousand pardons great priestess. Please forgive me. Perhaps I was mistaken, how could a man such as Adam, married to a wise and mature woman such as you, be tempted by the charms of a beautiful, younger female?' Eve sprang from the ground, shouting at the tree, 'Mature! Damn you air-spirit, what do you mean... old? And what do you mean by wise you lying spirit. You speak too lightly of wisdom. Don't you know our goddess has reserved wisdom for herself alone?' she fumed. 'Really,' replied the old liar, 'Why does she reserve the knowledge of wisdom for herself?' 'It is not our place to ask,' answered the priestess. The demon quickly fired back, 'She denies you, because I alone possess the wisdom of good and of evil. It gives me the power to

know the hearts of men. I even know what's in Adam's heart. I already know if he's been true or false."

"The serpent paused. He waited for Eve to consider his latest claim, and while he waited, he became alarmed. One of his demonic lookouts, our companion Beelzebub, was warning him. Adam had just left the temple, heading to the garden. There wasn't much time. It was now or never. Eve broke the nervous silence, 'How can I know you're speaking the truth air-spirit?' Samuel quickly answered, 'There's only one way great priestess. You must gain the knowledge of good and evil so you can look into Adam's heart, to know if he's been true. Great priestess, I control this knowledge and can give it to you.' For once Samuel uttered the truth. Eve looked at the ground, tears filling her eyes. What were these? Why were these alien drops falling to the ground? She looked at her hands; yes, they did show the first signs of age, tiny lines and creases. She had never noticed. Had Adam betrayed her? How could she trust him now? What if he had lied, how could she ever look at him again, or feel his embrace if she didn't know he was faithful? She had to know the truth; she had to know if the spirit had lied or if her husband had betrayed her. 'Serpent Lord of the Air, that's your real name isn't it? The goddess has warned us about you.' 'Indeed,' he replied, 'I am the Lord of Hosts, the demon of the air called Samuel, but my true name is Legion.'²⁵ I alone control the knowledge of good and evil."

"Eve's voice fell to a whisper as she asked, 'Legion, how can I receive this wisdom?' The serpent smiled, 'You must allow me and my followers to lie with

²⁵ Mark 5:9 "And Jesus asked the man, that was possessed by demons, 'What is thy name?' And he answered, saying, 'My name is Legion, for we are many.'" (Angelica Herald)

you, to impart our being into your body and soul, and with our seed, you shall receive wisdom.’ Eve said nothing, removing her white garments, revealing her nakedness. Closing her eyes, she lay on the ground as the spirits penetrated her. She saw nothing, but she could feel their weight upon her chest, one after the other. She could smell their bodies and their breaths. She felt their orgasms. The ecstasy was overwhelming. The emotions rushed into her as a flood of passion, desire, lust, revulsion, defilement, and then finally... estrangement.”

“When she opened her eyes, her vision had changed forever. She no longer saw beauty in the garden. She realized she was cold. She covered herself, feeling exhausted. For the first time, she noticed the leaves in the garden were wilting. A cold drizzle was falling; she was wet, cold, and miserable. Nothing in the garden was as it had been before. These new emotions were confusing; these feelings must have been what the serpent was talking about, the knowledge between good and evil. She felt a flood of disharmonies and contradictions impossible to control. Off in the distance, she could see her happy husband coming up the path from the garden gate. Only now did she remember he had told her the day before he would be late. The herbs had clouded her memory. Now she knew the bitter taste of betrayal.”

The watcher drew his legs up under his chin, placing the box between his feet, “Eve watched as Adam approached, feeling something she hadn’t expected. She had expected to feel joy on learning he was faithful. But instead, she felt revulsion. He was so happy, so carefree, so stupid and innocent. She watched as he drew near, feeling another confusing emotion... contempt. ‘Adam was such a silly fool,’ she thought to herself, ‘Why was he so happy in this cold wet

garden?’ He was even older than she, and he was every bit as mortal. ‘In a few short years,’ she thought, ‘he’ll die just as I will. What does he have to be so damn happy about?’ And then something terrible occurred to her. She removed her robes and called out, ‘My darling husband, you’re late, come lay with me beneath our tree.’ As usual, he innocently complied. When they were finished, he shivered, experiencing the cold dampness as he had never experienced it before. He was exhausted and something more; he felt... rejection. Eve’s cool gray eyes averted his gaze. They were deep in thought, distant and cold. Her stare made him feel lonely, so very lonely.”

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex IV (b) War in Heaven

“So that’s how it spread,” murmured the Architect, “through the sex act, like a virus.” “Yes builder, that’s how they did it,” Poimandres answered. “Only one human had to voluntarily give herself to Samuel. The rest were taken without knowing what hit them.”

Poimandres had explained many things. He had explained how Sophia created her universe and how Christ appeared in it. He had explained how the Archons were stranded there and about Samuel’s vengeful temptation of Eve. But he still hadn’t revealed what happened to the mortal races. The Architect was troubled so he asked, “Brother watcher, what became of Sophia’s children? What became of their souls after Samuel tempted Eve? Please Poimandres, I

need to know why things went so terribly wrong.” The builder sighed, resting his feline head in his hands.

Poimandres signaled for the demons to bring more wood to fuel the flames. The fire roared back to life. “Builder,” the watcher began, “I remember watching Adam pacing to and fro for hours on end; shuffling aimlessly across his palace balcony. He was a tragic figure, the first victim of carnal betrayals. Tossed by forces beyond his comprehension, he faced his tribulations without self-pity or bitterness, only a sad confusion. He wondered like you, why had things gone so terribly wrong? Fifty-six years had passed since the damp afternoon when he found Eve laying in the garden, with the oddest expression on her face, the coldest gaze in her eyes. Eve had changed; she had grown distant, distracted, obsessed with her appearance, and worse, she had become unfaithful, lusting after other men.”

The lion-faced builder lifted his head, focusing his keen night vision on the dark-skinned speaker. “I watched Adam closely as he held his hands before his eyes, considering the wrinkles on its surface. He was eighty-five years old. Yet his father had lived for almost two hundred and seventy years. Now humans were dying of old age in their seventies and eighties. What had gone wrong? He was certain something had happened that afternoon, but he could never quite grasp it. In truth Architect,” the watcher continued, “he had not had much time to think about it. He remembered the first murder vividly. The crime had taken place in his own household; a petty squabble over a sacrifice to the Goddess had turned into a bitter argument between his sons. Days later, the body of Abel was found hidden in the garden, his throat cut ear to ear. Under

extreme remorse, Cain confessed his guilt. Eve's rage rose like a tempest; she immediately had him tied to a temple pillar for public ridicule and disgrace. She intended to leave him there to die. But the thought of losing two children was too much for Adam to bear. In the evening, he cautiously slipped into the temple courtyard and cut his son free from the pillar. Then he smuggled Cain onto an interstellar cargo ship, carrying him to safety."

"I watched as Adam leaned against a giant flower urn on the balcony. For over fifty years the civilized planets had been at war with one another. Battle fleets coursed through space, annihilating thousands of worlds. The crime first committed by Cain had been multiplied a billion times over. The races of the civilized universe were on the brink of extinction. Terra itself had been devastated by hundreds of nuclear weapons."

"From person to person, it spread through sexual transmission. Within weeks the entire population of Atlantis had become infected. Humans carried the infection to other planets. Within months, everything in Sophia's well-ordered universe had gone to hell. Samuel and his friends were on the loose, with the ability to influence the physical world through possession of mortal bodies. The Archons established themselves as rulers of their own planets. They used their mortal subjects as proxies to wage interstellar wars against each other." "So that's how it spread," murmured the Architect, "through the sex act, like a virus." "Yes builder, that's how they did it. Only one human had to voluntarily give herself to Samuel. The rest were taken without knowing what hit them. The cunning Samuel had caught Sophia completely off guard. He had

exploited the one weakness in her system, the absence of free will. She watched in horror as everything she had created was ruined.”

“The attacks had devastated the Terran population, reducing it to less than a million, scattered in underground shelters. Most of the planet was a burned landscape. I watched, as Adam called to his duty orderly, ‘Jared, come here please.’ The young man approached the elderly leader, ‘Yes, my Lord?’ ‘Have we any word yet?’ Jared answered, ‘Yes my Lord, see for yourself. The Noahchite world-ship has just entered orbit.’ Adam pushed away from the urn, and looked towards the sky. From the surface of the planet, the world-ship resembled a small moon, reflecting sunlight as it slipped into geo-synchronous orbit. ‘Jared, it’s time. Alert all habitats to begin assembling at their designated evacuation points.’ With great foresight, Adam had used the last of his planet’s wealth to charter the Noahchite world-ship, Antares Regulus Kosmos or ARK, to save his people from extinction.”

“Adam was amazed at the size of the Noahchite world-ship. He watched with awe as thousands of Terran vessels lifted their precious cargos towards space. It looked as if the gigantic sphere was swallowing tiny comets as the smaller spacecraft approached. Adam had gone to great lengths to insure that every species on the planet was collected for transportation. Plants, animals, sea creatures, even insects and bacteria, were gathered to preserve the diversity of Terran life. A shuttle was waiting to carry Adam to the safety of the world-ship. The duty orderly reminded his master it was time to leave. ‘No Jared,’ the old man answered, ‘You go on. I’ll stay here. Please Jared, you go, take my place. Gather your family and take them to the shuttle before it’s too late.’

Quick-witted Jared didn't have to be told twice. Hurrying from the balcony, he took one final glance towards his master as he slipped away. Soon, the last shuttle with Jared and kin lifted from Atlantis, disappearing into the belly of the Noahchite sphere. Then the giant world-ship's twin engines folded space, disappearing to a distant location known only to the Noahchite captain."

Poimandres stood up, grabbing the box. He nervously paced around the fire, pressing the box against his side. "Architect," the watcher went on, "Adam was still looking towards the sky. I stood with him, unseen, for several minutes. What was he waiting for, another world-ship? Then we saw what appeared to be dozens of shooting stars streaking through the sky. The first missile sent a scorching heat wave across the city, burning everything in its path. Adam's body slumped to the ground, vaporized in a sea of flame. After the inferno cleared, I wandered the charred ruins of Atlantis. Only three pyramids remained." The watcher gazed into the bonfire, imagining Adam's burning face staring back at him.

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex IV (c)
Brink of Despair

“She was on the brink of despair. Heartbroken, she raised her hand towards the shimmering sphere. She had decided to wipe the slate clean, beginning anew. But right before she moved her all-powerful hand across the sphere to brush aside a universe, she felt her lover’s hand.”

The Architect was visibly shaken. He ran his hands through his great yellow main, demanding, “What were my children doing to prevent this calamity? I can’t believe they stood idly by while these Archons devastated the universe.” Poimandres nodded, “Heaven existed on the border between the middle realm and the physical universe. I spent a great deal of time there. Sophia enjoyed sitting on a malachite roof terrace atop her palace. Suspended about six feet above the roof was a large shimmering sphere, about 30 yards in diameter. Inside the shimmering sphere were billions of tiny stars, clustered in fuzzy, milky spirals. This sphere contained the whole physical universe. From this sphere flew every departed soul to the Fountain of Forgetfulness in the palace gardens. Sophia was studying the orb, longing for a miracle. But nothing changed inside the floating sphere.” Poimandres eyed the Archons sitting around the fire; they appeared nervous.

He refused to soft peddle, “Sophia tried everything to exterminate these nasty vermin, sending massive angelic armies against them. Still the Archons remained. She was on the brink of despair. Heartbroken, she raised her hand towards the shimmering sphere. She had decided to wipe the slate clean, beginning anew. But right before she moved her all-powerful hand across the sphere to brush aside a universe, she felt her lover’s hand. I couldn’t take my

eyes away from what I was seeing. She heard Christ's voice, "No Sophie stop. It's too late. Today, as I was watching the souls of your children darting into the fountain, I noticed that something was wrong. They're returning to the physical plane still carrying residual emotions from their former lives. I studied our little creatures, catching and examining several closely in my hand. It true, the lusts and jealousies of these poor souls remain even after passing through the magical spray. Sophie, the whole system's been compromised."

"She demanded, 'What do you mean Bright Eyes?' Christ turned her around by the shoulders, 'Sophie... look. Their lights are no longer clear; their souls are permanently tainted. The fountain's only washing away their memories, not their emotions.' He looked into her eyes. Tears were welling up. She cried, 'What are we to do?' He stepped back, 'Sophie do you trust me?' 'Bright Eyes, you should already know the answer,' she pleaded. 'Then listen,' and he began confessing everything he had hidden from her."

"Sophie,' he explained, 'I was created by our father to save you, to bring you home to the realm of the dreaming gods.' He got on his knees, wrapping his arms around her, 'No! Impossible, this can't be true!' she yelled, balling her hands into fists. But she knew he wasn't lying. She was swept by waves of truth, blowing away the chaff of self-deceit. She asked, 'How long have I been a prisoner in this illusion?' She didn't really expect an answer. 'Sophie, there's still more I must tell. Your children, the fireflies created from fragments of your soul. Those fragments must be re-absorbed, before you can return to the higher realm. We must purify every soul before I can take you home.' She looked into

his eyes, 'Dearest Bright Eyes, is such a thing possible? How can we purify their souls when we can't even destroy the Archons?'

The Architect was again holding his head in his hands, silently crying. The demons were silent as well. Poimandres put his hand on the Architect's shoulder, "Christ looked into your wonderful daughter's eyes, saying, 'Dearest Sophie, the only way to purify these little souls is through atonement, a sacred act of union.' Then he stepped away, leaping into the shimmering sphere. Christ had a plan. He had to find at least one mortal with a pure soul."

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

***Codex V (a)
Book of Enoch***

"Phenomena, its nature is nothingness staring at itself in the mirror. Nothingness is the realization that the reflections are the only reality."

The Architect noticed beads of sweat glistening on Poimandres' ebony face, capturing sparkles of firelight. He knew almost nothing about the dark figure, sitting across from him. No one knew the origins of the watcher, or his purpose. "Lord Poimandres," the builder broke the silence, "Tell us where you went after the Terran surface was burned away?" The watcher took a swig from his bottle; "I found myself on a charred planet. There was nothing left, only desolation. The human's extraterrestrial enemies had finally exterminated all life on the sad planet. So I followed them into exile. I flew through space and found the Noahchite world-ship. I began secretly watching its inhabitants.

Over time, I became fond of one; his name was Enoch. He was a noble sort, the type of creature I would have wanted to be, if I were mortal. I remember watching one day as he shaved.”

Poimandres held the shoebox under his arm, drumming it with his fingers; “Enoch stared into the mirror for the millionth time, without expression into his darkened, spent eyes, raising his razor to his face. A soapy film residue covered the mirror, or rather the polished steel serving as one over his sink. Florescent lights flicked from the fixtures on the wall. The most oppressive thing about this place was the total lack of color. Everything in Enoch’s eight by ten foot cabin had an ugly grayish hue. The humming of air circulators assailed his ears with the omnipresent vibration of whistling metal.”

“His razor was a ritual tool, the course across his face, the only variable in his otherwise depleted life. ‘There’s an endless number of ways to shave,’ he thought, ‘As long as I never become bored with this one luxury, perhaps I won’t seek out a strait edge.” Poimandres continued; “Enoch noticed a slip of paper he had taped on the mirror. It was a scripture that his father had often recited; ‘Phenomena, its nature is nothingness staring at itself in the mirror. Nothingness is the realization that the reflections are the only reality.’

“Enoch had spent his entire life aboard this spacecraft, the transport vessel Perseus. The Perseus had been docked inside one of the vast cargo holds of the world-ship for over 90 years. His parents were dead, as were most of the original survivors of the Terran holocaust. Enoch, the latest captain of the Perseus, finished shaving for no reason; simply a habit acquired from his clean-shaven father, Jared. It was the only thing Jared had left him. He sighed,

sinking back into the worn, grimy mattress that covered the tight metal mesh of his bunk. He reconsidered, 'That wasn't entirely fair.' Jared had taught him a system of values, the importance of truth, and the strength coming from self-respect. Most importantly, Jared had taught him everything he knew about the goddess Sophia, the fallen goddess, as many now called her. His parents had been religious. From these simple people, he had learned the difference between right and wrong. This was Jared's greatest legacy."

Poimandres made a slight hum, picking up his water. The Architect was waiting to hear more; "Jared had bequeathed another gift to his son, an appreciation for Terran flora and fauna. Jared would often take the young Enoch to visit neighboring ships within the Noahchite behemoth. His favorite destinations were the vessels housing the many animal species, salvaged from the home world. Jared loved seeing the animals that were allowed to run free inside the abandoned vessels. Robbed of their natural habitats, the animals had quickly adapted to life in space. Birds flew and nested in starship engine rooms, as wild cats and exotic reptiles roamed about in cargo holds. Some of the vessels, old water transports, had been converted into miniature seas filled with every variety of shark, fish, and aquatic mammal. These starships, now occupied by their animal inhabitants and human caretakers, had become a refuge for Jared and his family, a living testament to a world now lost. Over time, some of the caretakers, responding to the demand for food, had begun harvesting surplus animals. Jared abhorred the practice, but his son, lonely for companionship, had sought out an animal supplier. He had bought a pet, a tiny one to be sure, a squirrel. The animal was really quite intelligent. It was the

offspring of a hundred generations of space breed squirrels. It loved to climb and jump on everything in his cabin. Every day, it would brazenly climb onto his arm to be fed.”

“Enoch laid back into his pillow, trying to remember an important assembly called by the Noahchite leadership. Only captains were allowed to venture onto the world-ship. The Noahchites were a secretive and distrustful people.”²⁶ It was his first meeting with the Noahchites as the new captain of the Perseus. The short trip to the Noahchite command center had taken only fifteen minutes, covering a distance of almost six hundred miles, all within the confines of a single cargo hold. Incredibly, the world-ship had eighteen such holds. But to describe the ARK as a massive spacecraft isn’t entirely accurate,” the watcher explained to his listeners. “ARK was actually a self propelled space habitat, constructed around and within the hollowed out core of a natural moon. Like carpenter ants, the Noahchites had used the ores from the center of the moon to build the outer surface of their vessel, its engines, weapons, control centers, and hanger bay doors. The giant caverns remaining, served as cargo holds. The moon was propelled by two cylindrical engines, each about eleven hundred miles long. These engines, nicknamed Jachin and Boaz, were used to generate the tremendous amounts of energy necessary to jump the world-ship from one location in space to another.”²⁷ Simplicity itself, a giant vessel carved and

²⁶ Noahchites or “Sons of Noah.” (Dyson Teal)

²⁷ Jachin and Boaz were two copper, brass, and bronze pillars which stood in the porch of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem. (Dyson Teal)

constructed from a natural moon. With a circumference of ten thousand miles, ARK was large enough to cause tidal waves if it orbited a planet too closely."

Poimandres explained, "The Noahchites were a race of giants. ²⁸

Standing an average of nine or ten feet, their stature wasn't the only thing that set them apart from the humans. What really distinguished them was their intelligence. Their minds possessed mental abilities far beyond the average human. Why the Noahchites tolerated the host of Terran ships lodged within their belly was anyone's guess. Certainly they could have ejected the humans had they wished. This question worried Enoch, 'Why don't they just expel our ships into space? We consume precious resources they must constantly risk the ARK to replace. Why do they keep us?'"

Enoch had learned little during the recent assembly called by the Noahchite captain, Uriel. ²⁹ Uriel began the meeting by informing the group about a recently intercepted spacecraft. The crew of this vessel reported they had recently stopped at a long forgotten planet while making repairs. They noticed the war-ravaged planet was returning to its natural ecological balance. The Noahchites hadn't revealed anything to the passing strangers, but they immediately recognized the description of the planet. It was Terra. The Noahchites told the human captains they had set course to the Terran star system. ARK would arrive there within a year. Uriel gave no explanations for

²⁸ Genesis 6:4-5 "There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them. The same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown." (Angelica Herald)

²⁹ The *Book of Enoch* describes the Archangel Uriel as being set by God, "over all the luminaries of heaven; the sun, moon, and stars, all the ministering creatures which make their revolution in all of the chariots of the heaven." (Dyson Teal)

their change in course, as usual leaving Enoch and his companions with more questions than answers.” Poimandres finished his bottle of water; pleased the silent demons were listening.

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

***Codex V (b)
Advent of Christ***

“Enoch froze. His lungs stopped, the very air afraid to escape.”

The Architect was puzzled, even disappointed. Earlier, Poimandres had told his listeners that Christ had jumped into the shimmering sphere, with the intention of finding at least one pure soul. “So what happened, did Christ find the human nomads or not?” “I was just getting there,” the watcher insisted, “Christ was determined to act quickly. He knew he had to find at least one pure soul to bring back to Sophia, before she grew impatient and destroyed the physical realm. He stretched out his wings, and flew across space determined to find the ARK and its band of wayfarers. His mission was daunting. How could he redeem every soul in a universe plagued by horrible demons? When he located the ARK, he found the ship’s inhabitants in a dreadful state. How could he convince these creatures to turn away from the evil seeded in their hearts? How could he convince them to reunite with the goddess? His mind searched through the massive world-ship, looking into everyone’s heart; and in Enoch, he

found a good man. Suddenly, he appeared before Enoch, as the human rested in his cabin.”

“Enoch froze. His lungs stopped, the very air afraid to escape. His mind was paralyzed. His body became as icy as the fingers of death, scratching across a gravestone. How does one describe the first moment, the moment when a god first contacts a mortal? Enoch realized he hadn’t lost his mind. This was no alien life form appearing before him. Not for an instance did he ponder who this was. He recognized the Cosmic Logos, the Christ, as he folded his wings before the mortal’s eyes.³⁰ Enoch trembled before the presence of divinity. Christ spoke, ‘Fear not Enoch, for I am the truth and the light, and I have come to set you free.’ The angel watched for some sign from Enoch. Enoch didn’t move; he didn’t sigh, and he didn’t release the stale air in his chest. ‘Enoch, breathe slowly,’ the angel pled, placing his hand on the petrified man’s chest. Enoch exhaled. When he inhaled the holy air surrounding Christ’s body, fear fled from his mind as snow flees the spring. His tension was released. His eyes focused on the angel beside him. He awoke before Christ as if he’d been suspended in a dream. ‘Follow, and walk with me,’ Christ said, taking Enoch by the hand. The man slowly rose and stood beside the god.”

Poimandres looked around, gauging the reactions of his demonic audience. “Enoch paused for a moment as they left his cabin; ‘Lord, I’ve been taught about Sophia, our mother goddess, and I know who you are as well. You

³⁰ *Logos* (Greek) meaning ‘the word.’ From John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” (Angelica Herald)

are Christ, her beloved consort.’ Christ answered, ‘Yes Enoch, I’m Sophie’s beloved bridegroom.’ Enoch whispered a prayer, ‘Grace and blessings be upon the Goddess and her Beloved. Holy are their names.’ ‘Blessed are you Enoch,’ Christ responded, ‘for you walk with God.’

“Enoch didn’t notice where Christ was leading him as they left the cabin, entering the sleeping deck hallway. He was still looking at Christ’s face with wonder and astonishment. ‘Enoch, I have come to save humanity and to restore order in the universe. Do you trust me?’ Enoch nodded. Christ continued, ‘Humanity must returned to Terra to fulfill their destiny. I have a plan to return your people to their home planet. I need you to spread the word to your people that I’m real, and I’m working among you to bring atonement. Enoch, will you take this message to your people?’ ‘I will do as you ask my lord,’ he answered without doubt. Christ stopped, turning in his tracks, ‘Enoch, what I ask is a difficult task. Most will laugh at you. They’ll say you’re mad. But a few will listen. And their numbers will grow.” Poimandres wrung his cold hands together, warming them by the fire.

Then he pulled a silver dollar from his pocket, flipping it between his fingers. Azrael was curious, “Watcher, tell us what happened to Enoch after he was visited by Christ?” The watcher moved closer to the fire, still moving the coin between his fingers, “I watched as Enoch sat in the captain’s seat on the bridge of the Perseus. He had spent a year preaching the word of Christ’s return from ship to ship. He told anyone who would listen about his vision. Few believed him; most thought he was insane, but a few listened. He didn’t know why Christ wanted him to preach this message of atonement, but he was a

righteous man who did as his lord had asked. Now he was watching as one ship after another unmoored from their docking terminals. Thousands of ships were firing up their long unused engines, slowly moving towards the outer doors of the world-ship. One after another, the ships lined up at the great doorways, carefully navigating through the giant bulkheads. They darted out into space like bees swarming from a hive. Humanity had returned home.”

“Uriel, the Noahchite captain, had finally revealed his plans to the humans. He announced the world-ship was no longer safe to inhabit. It had suffered extensive battle damage over the course of the war. The ARK’s twin engines could explode at any moment. On top of this, the Noahchites had inhabited their artificial world for centuries. Prolonged exposure to cosmic radiation had made their females sterile. They couldn’t reproduce; they needed human females to perpetuate their race. The Noahchites intended to abandon their world-ship, to relocate their population on Terra, where they could breed with the humans.³¹ Already, hundreds of spacecraft were landing near the old city of Atlantis, still recognizable by the towering remains of the pyramids. Still others were releasing their animal and aquatic passengers back into their natural habitats.”

“Enoch ordered his crew to release the Perseus’ moorings, while firing up its old engines. The cargo freighter crept forward, away from the docking station where it had sat for nine decades. Enoch carefully piloted the old

³¹ Numbers 13:32-33 “And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched, saying; ‘The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that is eaten up by its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Uriel, who descend from the giants; and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.’” (Angelica Herald)

*freighter towards the ARK's hanger bay doors. Suddenly, a violent explosion rocked through the gigantic hanger. Hot plasma flew across the bow of the Perseus. Explosions tore through other ships still moored to their docks. Steel superstructures and rock walls were crumbling, as explosions ripped through the cargo hold. One of the ARK's giant engines had exploded, shattering the moon in the process. Everything was fire and debris. Enoch saw open space through the hanger doors in the distance. He pressed the ship's throttle, racing forward, trying to get his ship out of the inferno, before it was consumed in the collapsing moon. Seconds later, the Perseus blasted through the hanger doors into open space. As the ship emerged, it was hit by flying debris. The Perseus' reactor exploded, turning the small ship into a ranging fireball. The bridge was filled with fire and smoke. For a moment, Enoch saw Terra. He piloted his burning starship like a fiery chariot, crashing towards the planet. And then he was not, for Christ took him."*³²

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

³² Genesis 5:24 "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." Enoch is one of only two biblical characters that never died; the other was Elijah. Both were prophesized to die near the end of times. (Angelica Herald)

Codex V (c)
Atonement

“Sophie, this is the process of redemption. This is why our father sent me. This is the way we must reassemble your soul.”

Azrael was puzzled, “Did Enoch die in the explosions or not?”

Poimandres nodded to the clown-faced demon, “Is Azrael the only one curious?”

The Architect jumped in, “No brother, but we’ve grown weary. Perhaps we should bring back the sun and begin our morning labors.” “Soon enough,” the watcher relented, “But first to answer Azrael’s question. No, Enoch never died.” The demons were shocked. They whispered among themselves. They moved closer to the watcher to hear what he had to say. “Right before the Perseus exploded, Christ took Enoch away, carrying him to the middle realm.”

“There, Sophia had been sitting on an emerald bench, facing her little silvery universe. Without thought, she watched as tiny soul-sparks, contaminated by sin, flew from their shimmering universe and darted towards the fountain. Why had her darling Bright Eyes jumped into the little universe? ‘Where was he and what was he doing in there?’ At that moment, a spark flew from the silvery veil, closely followed by the angel she adored. The spark darted towards the fountain, and splashed into it. Then it leapt out from the other side, sparking as pure as the light in Sophie’s eyes. She watched in wonder as the tiny soul-spark flew to her beloved Bright-Eyes, buzzing around his face and body, then landed on the palm of his hand. ‘I have never seen a soul do that before!’ she exclaimed. ‘How is this possible?’ Christ extended his hand saying, ‘Sophie, this is the soul of a human named Enoch. He has been washed clean in

the fountain.’ Christ blew on the spark, and it materialized into a golden white image of Enoch. ‘Enoch,’ Christ proclaimed, ‘you have returned to your goddess, Sophia. Reunite and become part of her once more.’ Enoch looked to Christ with tears of joy falling from his eyes, and then he turned to the Goddess. She extended her arms, embracing him, reabsorbing his golden-white body into her own. The first of Sophia’s fallen children had returned.”

“Sophie, this is the process of redemption. This is why our father sent me. This is the way we must reassemble your soul.’ She could feel the joy of Enoch’s spirit merging with her own. Now she understood Christ’s plan. She joyfully exclaimed, ‘Redeem them all my love! Bright Eyes, you must go and bring them all back, one by one. Bring all of my fallen children home.” Poimandres’ lips drew tight. It was time to recall the sun.

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

***Codex VI (a)
Cast into the Lake of Fire***

“Samuel couldn’t drop his cross of self-loathing and guilt. He walked across the sands of time, bearing the burden of a billion sins, committed to wash away the guilt from his dreadful childhood. He walked to and fro on the Earth, betrayed by all he had ever known.”

The Architect was tired of the night. It was time to get back to work. He waved his arm in a sweeping motion across the sky. Immediately, rays of sunlight sliced through gaps between the trees. The rays prompted woodland creatures around the worksite to awaken. Birds began calling to one another.

Squirrels raced across tree limbs, and the evening dew took its leave. The lion-faced builder stood, stretching in a great yawn. He ordered his crew to work. Some started connecting a block and pulley to the steeple frame, while others strung a cable to the church rooftop. Still others were installing window casements. The Architect was pleased to see his project under way again. The watcher called to Azrael, who was working on the roof, "Azrael, come down for a minute. I have a question for you." The demon flew down from the roof to the watcher. "Yes, lord Poimandres?" Azrael asked. "I am curious about Samuel's activities after the war. Have a seat with me. I'm sure your master will release you from your labors for a little while." The Architect turned over an ice cooler, emptying the melted water into the glowing embers of the fire. He called to one of his workers for more ice and bottles of water. Poimandres unzipped his fly, relieving himself over the steaming embers. The Architect lifted his apron and followed suit.

Azrael rubbed his painted chin, trying to remember, "I followed Samuel, though he didn't seem to care for my company. He was tired of walking to and fro on the Earth, and from walking up and down on it."³³ For many centuries, we wandered the once beautiful Terra, now called Earth by its miserable inhabitants. What a wretched hell it had become." Azrael stopped for a moment, as some demons brought up a cooler. Poimandres opened it, taking out some icy bottles. He offered one to the parched Archon. Azrael licked his lips; "As we walked, Samuel kicked up dust, remembering. What a terrible

³³ Job 1:7 "And the Lord said to Satan, from where come you? Then Satan answered the Lord and said, from going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." (Angelica Herald)

destruction he had brought on this sad planet. Why he wondered, had he tried to wash away the memory of his first murder, by committing the crime a billion times over? Samuel couldn't drop his cross of self-loathing and guilt. He walked across the sands of time, bearing the burden of a billion sins, committed to wash away the guilt from his dreadful childhood. He walked to and fro on the Earth, betrayed by all he had ever known."

"Why hadn't Sophia granted our requests for mortal bodies? The war in heaven had ruined everything, but Samuel consoled himself. He had liberated Sophia's creatures from their own ignorance. He had freed them from her spell. And now the universe was a charred and desolate place. He saw himself as a victim once again. The humans had forgotten their advanced technologies. Within a few generations, they had reverted to living like animals. They fashioned bronze tools to plow the rocky ground, from which they scratched their meager living. And they were plagued by hybrid half-giants, the descendants of the Noahchite crew. Now the giants survived by attacking human villages, stealing crops, and kidnapping human women."

"Humanity knew little of their past before the cosmic exodus. The war and the world-ship were now distance memories; mysterious legends passed from generation to generation, their stories becoming more and more primitive. They told tales of a paradise named Eden, a great city called Atlantis, and a ship named the Ark." Azrael looked into the watcher's eyes, "Your tale last night explained something for me. Samuel and I had heard stories about Enoch. The people, who passed these stories down, were called the Children of Light. They waited for Christ to come back for them, like he did for Enoch."

Azrael was admiring a small rainbow in his water bottle; “Now I finally understand. The Children of Light were descendants of the people, who had listened to Enoch, as he preached on the world-ship. Samuel really hated the Children of Light. What irked him most, was the way they bore their suffering. No matter how difficult the physical world was, no matter what he came up with to torment them, still they held to their harebrained faith. He wanted to punish them for being happier than he was on his stinking planet, the place he now called Hell.”

“For years we watched the Children of Light. We recognized their members and knew their habits. Among them was a man named Job, who Samuel particularly loathed. Job was a righteous man in the eyes of the Goddess. Samuel hated Job for that. Job had the love of his wife and respect of his children. Samuel hated Job for that. Job was blessed with prosperity, owning many flocks of sheep and oxen, having many servants and riches. And Samuel hated Job for that, too. But most of all, Samuel hated Job because he was respected by the people as a prophet loved by the Goddess. He was a leading elder, who taught the story of Enoch. Samuel longed to take possession of Job’s body, so that he could cast it off the nearest cliff. But alas, he couldn’t possess a pure person. Yes indeed, Samuel deeply, deeply, hated Job.” The clown-faced demon finished his bottle. He reached into the cooler for another.

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex VI (b)
Haunting the Crossroads

“We saw the angel of light coming towards us, and as a moth is drawn towards a flame, and to its inevitable demise, so was Samuel drawn to Christ.”

Poimandres and the Architect pondered the bloody harlequin. Was Azrael beginning to regret his former life? He clearly felt an urge to purge his tormented soul. Perhaps he was changing? The demon took another sip of water, and then continued his story, “As Samuel and I walked, we saw someone approaching us from the distance. He was like no other. We saw the angel of light coming towards us, and as a moth is drawn towards a flame, and to its inevitable demise, so was Samuel drawn to Christ. Along a lone and dusty path, the two approached one another. One approached with poised and steady paces, the other with trepidation. Samuel was being drawn to the edge of oblivion. The two stopped, facing each other at perhaps ten paces.”

“They stood there in the middle of the dusty path, saying nothing. Samuel shifted about anxiously, while I stayed back in the distance. And then Christ asked my former master, ‘From where do you come?’ Samuel nervously answered, ‘From wandering the Earth.’ ‘Do you know who I am?’ Christ asked with confidence. Samuel lifted his angry red eyes and shouted, ‘You are nothing but a moth, belonging to that whore Sophia...’ Samuel didn’t have a chance to finish before the angel slammed into him, grabbing him by the throat in one quick and brutal motion. Christ took flight with Samuel struggling in his clutches. He folded his wings back steeply, accelerating through the sky. At a tremendous speed they crashed straight into the face of a mountain, smashing

Samuel's body. Holding my master by his throat, Christ yelled, 'I can you hold you here forever, or I can drag you down into the fiery furnace at the center of this planet!' Samuel withered, yelling like a tortured child. Christ released him, dropping my master several hundred feet to the boulder-strewn ground. Samuel screamed out, his wings were shattered. His left ankle was crushed. Christ flew down and stood over the broken demon, 'Now, do you know who I am?' Samuel relented, 'Yes, you're a son of the higher gods.' My master ground his fists into the dust as tears welled in his eyes."

"Christ ordered the fallen angel to get up. Samuel rose, regaining his composure. I stood back in the distance, offering no assistance. Christ directed the fallen Archon back to the dirt path on which we had met, but the injured demon was unable to keep up. At one point, Christ found a knotted acacia branch, giving it to Samuel as a cane. Eventually, the three of us reached an overlook, with a clear view of a valley. In the valley below, there were several small villages, inhabited by simple farmers and shepherds. Christ sat down on a rock, motioning for Samuel to join him."

"Why do you think I've brought you here?' Christ asked. Samuel didn't answer. So Christ tried a different tact, 'Samuel, you must return with me to Sophia.' 'Never!' My master blurted out furiously, 'You can cast me into the center of the hottest sun, but I will never go with you!' Christ looked down into the valley asking, 'Have you noticed my children among the humans, the ones calling themselves the Children of Light?' Samuel was provoked, 'Oh yes, I've noticed your Children of Light. Below us, in that insatiable valley, I've introduced the greed for wealth, among those with only a few years to live."

Below us, in that prideful valley, I've introduced vanity, among those with only a few years of youth and beauty before they find the grave. Below us, in that avaricious valley, I've introduced envy for power and position, among those who are equal before the face of eternity. Yes brother, I've noticed your Children of Light."

"I continued watching and listening from a discreet distance," continued Azrael. "Christ remained silent for some time as the bitterness in Samuel's voice weighed on his heart. And then an idea occurred to him, and he asked, 'Samuel, have you noticed my servant named Job, living below us in the valley? Have you seen how he is without sin, without pride or greed, vanity or avarice?' Samuel jumped up yelling, 'Job doesn't love you or Sophia! His faith is in an old story about a dead prophet, a story made up by the humans to ease their sufferings. If you didn't protect him from my influence, I would show you just how quickly he will turn on you and his Goddess. You know nothing about these wretched humans; they would deny you in a moment to save themselves for just one more breath, one last gasp of life.' The fallen Archon crossed his arms defiantly. Christ wondered how he could reach this tormented creature? He pondered a terrible option, an unthinkable option. But as his own father had made the choice to sacrifice him to redeem Sophia, so he would sacrifice Job to redeem Samuel. Christ relented, 'Samuel, you may use your power to torture my servant Job; you may possess the bodies of his loved ones to cause him harm, and you may use your servants to destroy his property, but you may not kill him. Demon, you'll see that Job will remain faithful to the Goddess.' Then he left Samuel with me on the cliff."

Codex VI (c)
Book of Job

“Our lives are fleeting dreams, grasped from filaments of burning stardust. A moment in time, filled with the desire for eternity.”

The Architect was watching his workers. Their work was sure and steady. Several Archons were carving lattice for the steeple, while others were nailing the last of the clapboard. Soon the church would be finished. There was no time to waste. The builder had to convince Poimandres to release the beast, or his work would be in vain. “Your church, it’s almost finished,” the watcher glumly noticed. The Architect nodded. Poimandres was still watching the wood carvers decorating the steeple, “Azrael, please tell us what happened to Job after Christ left him unprotected.”

“As soon as Christ left us, Samuel leapt,” Azrael began, “he unleashed his darkest passions against the righteous man. He struck the old man where he was most vulnerable; he infected Job’s wife with disease. She suffered intensely, and then she died. Job tore at his flesh, wailing before his wife’s still body. He abandoned his home on the evening she died. He wandered into the wilderness, away from his little world. In the lone wilderness he found no comfort, only grief. In the stillness, he heard the voice of another in his clouded mind. The voice laughed at him sneering, ‘Old man, your wife is dead. She will soon be worm food. Now pray to Sophia. Ask her to send Christ to save you from your suffering. Nothing will save you. I’ve taken your wife; soon I’ll take you as well. Old man, fall down and worship me. I can yet restore her. Choose quickly. Worship me, before she’s gone forever.’ Job stopped cold in his tracks.

He knew this was the voice of a demon. He dropped to his knees, praying to the goddess. He begged her to have mercy, by taking his life as well. He shouted for her to send Christ to take his spirit away, but nothing happened.”

Azrael went on without pause, “Job stayed away from his village, as his children buried their mother. He lay tormented among the large stones near the high hills, without water or shelter. He invited death to fall on his weary body, but death stubbornly refused. Later his neighbors discovered his hiding place, finding him nearly starved. I still remember the exchange between the old man and his friends, ‘Job, your suffering has been terrible, but now we must give you even worse tidings. Giants from the north have attacked our village, killing your sons and their families. Your flocks were taken, and our village put to the torch. Oh Job, what are we to do? Where is the Goddess now? Where is Christ? How are we to have faith in the teachings of Enoch? The old man’s neighbors tossed dust on their heads, crying for death to free them.’³⁴ But again, death failed to come.”

“Job looked to the sky praying, ‘Goddess why, please take me.’ But instead of the Goddess, he again heard the demon’s voice, ‘Old man, your goddess has forsaken you. There is no Christ, and there was no prophet Enoch. Everything you believe is a lie. You have been a fool, and now you’ve lost everything. Deny your silly goddess, and turn to my voice. Let me into your heart, and I will relieve your suffering.’ Job shook violently screaming, ‘Get out of my head! I won’t listen to your lies!’”

³⁴ Job 2:12-13 “They began to wail and to weep; each one tore his robe, and they tossed dust into the air and upon their heads. So they sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights. No one spoke a word to him, because they saw that his grief was very great.” (Angelica Herald)

Azrael took a quick sip, “Job turned back to his neighbors saying; ‘We are cursed by our mortal fate to live in a world filled with sorrow. Our lives are fleeting dreams, grasped from filaments of burning stardust. A moment in time, filled with the desire for eternity. My children, we are exiles from a higher realm, cast into hell. There is only one path to salvation; we must follow the light. The light will lead us to redemption, to reunion with our maker. Any voice tempting us to forget... lies. My friends, when we forget who we are, when we forget our mortality, when we believe our lives are perfect and our loved ones will live forever, we fall into Hell’s trap. Friends, I lost sight of who I really am. I forgot that we’re solitary travelers, traversing a wicked dream. I believed in the dream. Turn from me, and walk away.’ Job stood slowly, walking away from his bewildered friends. Samuel and I followed as the sad, old man wandered deeper into the blistering wilderness.”

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex VI (d) Death of the Saint

“Christ watched the lonely man, and was filled with self-doubt. He was torn apart by this spectacle, for it was he who had been an unworthy god. He envied Job, a weak mortal, whose faith was stronger than his own.”

The Architect ordered his workers to prepare lunch. Some Archons hurried off into the woods to gather food and drinks. Others set out picnic tables and benches. They distributed venison, ale, wine, bread, and honey along

the tables. The crew found seats wherever they could. The hubbub was awful. The worker's grabbed meat with their dirty hands, spilling wine all over themselves and their companions. The watcher sat between the Architect and Azrael. He turned to the demon, "Azrael, what happened after Job wandered into the wilderness?" Azrael swallowed a piece of venison with a swig of ale. He reached again for the copper pitcher, refilling his cup. He drank it in a single gulp before finishing his story.

"Job wandered deeper into the desert. The sand pulling at his feet; each clump longing to wrap around his fallen body. But Job denied the dust a while longer. He still looked to the sky for the goddess or her consort, still believing they would come for him, as they had come for Enoch so many years before. Job never stopped looking up. Christ watched the lonely man, and was filled with self-doubt. He was torn apart by this spectacle, for it was he who had been an unworthy god. He envied Job, a weak mortal, whose faith was stronger than his own. Christ doubted his own morality and judgment; perhaps he had made a grave mistake. With remorse, the angel of light finally appeared before the man wandering in the desert."

"Job was unshaken by the sudden appearance of the celestial being. Christ walked beside the man, offering him his hand. The two walked for a while without speaking. Christ spoke first asking the saint, 'How do you maintain your faith through suffering?' He looked into the dying man's eyes, seeking an answer to his own fear of extinction. How could this mortal bear the torments of Samuel's Hell without ever losing faith? Christ was full of doubt. Job turned to the angel and answered, "It is in man's nature to suffer. It is in

the nature of the gods to wonder. Man suffers because he's a finite being with an infinite soul. The gods wonder because they have infinite potential with finite imaginations. Your character was determined when you were fashioned by the higher gods. Man's character is earned through his suffering, and is worn as a crown of thorns. It is in man's nature to long for the aspects of the gods, but it's a necessity for the gods to wear the flesh of man. My immortality is assured by seeking the goddess. To find your potential, your godlike nature must be cast off for a mortal's skin. It is only through our dearest friend called death that we find our way. You will have to find this human mortality, if you want to know your true purpose. My lord, you must be like me to understand my strength. As a mortal, I have learned to understand my limitations; as a god, you must learn to understand your emerging potential. My Lord, you can have it all, but what do you want?"

"Christ stopped," Azrael stammered, "releasing his hold on the weary man's hand. How could this human have known his secret doubts? Christ had heard the same question before, 'What do you want?' He remembered being asked this by Ancient of Days. 'How could Job have known?' But Christ didn't have long to wonder," Azrael continued, "Job stopped in his tracks, falling to the ground. He was dehydrated, suffering from renal failure. He was only a simple man dying in the desert heat. Christ stooped down, lifting Job into his arms. The saint looked into the angel's eyes, 'Lord, do you know the others following us?' Christ turned around. He saw Samuel and me following at a distance. Samuel approached Job, and knelt beside Christ. He looked into the saint's eyes. The mortal looked into the faces of both angels, uttering his final

words, ‘My Lords, someday you will both know that the shadow isn’t just a reflection. It is your other side, the darkness hidden within. You must each reach out to your shadow, to your brother, to become whole again.’ Then he died in Christ’s arms as Samuel wept. Far away in distant Heaven, Sophia opened her arms to another shining spark.”

“Samuel was weeping as we slipped away. My master couldn’t bear the guilt. He couldn’t bear the idea that Christ was his brother. His mind snapped.” Azrael gulped down another cup of ale; “He refused to accept the truth. He was determined to make someone else the scapegoat for his sins. And then a solution occurred to the devil. A treacherous scheme for revenge emerged from his vile mind, like a reptile struggling to free itself from a leathery egg. He ranted he was still a god, at least among the mortals. And as a god, the crippled angel demanded his own worshippers. His mind settled upon a plan. First he would find the most powerful kingdom on the dreary planet. He focused on a place called Egypt. ‘I will find the ruler of this kingdom, and make him a deal he can’t refuse!’ He began limping along, leaning on his acacia cane as I followed. I was filled with self-loathing as I followed the dark wretch, but I had no place else to go. He didn’t seem to care if I followed. He enjoyed having someone to hurl abuses.” Azrael looked to his companions for sympathy. Poimandres leaned closer, “Azrael, sooner or later, we all have to walk alone.”

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex VII (a)
King of Kings

“Ramses roared like a lion. He shone like the sun god Ra. Blood flowed from his sword like the river Nile flooding its banks. His eyes were those of another. His own warriors quaked with fear, trembling before the awesome son of Ra.”

Dinner was over; the Architect ordered his crew back to work. They grumbled, but one stern look got them moving. They pushed away from the tables, flinging down cups, wiping their greasy hands in their hair or on their aprons. Poimandres walked across the yard, towards some large gray boulders near the tree line. He asked Azrael and the Architect to join him on the rocks, away from the noise and commotion. Azrael brought along a bottle of port. His tongue was flying loose. The watcher wanted to learn everything he could from the talkative clown, “Azrael, you told us Samuel went to Egypt, planning to possess their ruler. But how did he do it? How did he convince the ruler to relinquish his soul?”

Taking a gulp of port, Azrael stammered, “I stood near the elderly pharaoh called Ramses. He was leaning against his walking cane in the insect infested darkness. He looked out over the dark gardens of his palace. He could smell the scent of incense drifting across the courtyard, in a vain attempt to drive away evil spirits and their biting cohorts. He listened to the rhythmic humming of priests, chanting in a nearby temple. His concubines’ naked bodies glistened in the torchlight. The evening air was dry, as dry as the desert surrounding his river kingdom. Ramses leaned forward, straining his weak eyes towards the river that meandered the length of his realm. His mind wandered to the night he had become Samuel’s host.”

Azrael paused taking a sip; “He remembered sixty years earlier, when a youthful prince, had tried to sleep, deep within enemy territory. But he could not rest. Fear paralyzed his mind, as he fretted about his exposed position among the Hittite savages.”³⁵ His father, Pharaoh Seqenenre Tao, had sent him here with an Egyptian army to prove his manhood. But on that night, surrounded by the enemy, he wished he had chosen to become a priest. Why had he tried to gain his father’s favor with military glory? Why was he so jealous of his twin brother Tuthmoses? Perhaps his brother wanted to see him killed, conveniently removing him as a rival for the throne. The elderly Ramses took another whiff of incense. ‘What had become of Tuthmoses’ desert friends?’ the old pharaoh wondered. It didn’t matter, Tuthmoses was long dead.”

“The dreaded Hittites attacked the Egyptian army as they slept in their tents. They plunged into the Egyptian camp riding war chariots, cutting down the men of the Nile like stalks of papyrus. Ramses bolted from his cot, terrified, his breath rigid in his chest. He saw Hittites running through the camp, torches in hand, burning tents. The old Ramses shivered as he remembered that night.

³⁶ And then at the darkest moment, when all seemed lost, a spirit who could only be the god Horus-Ra entered his tent. At first he thought it was a Hittite warrior, coming to lop off his head. His eyes were fixed on the dark spirit. It wore a dusty cloak, weathered sandals, and carried a knotted walking stick.

³⁵ The Hittites were an ancient enemy of the Egyptians. They occupied the region of Asia now known as Syria and southern Turkey. The Egyptians were notorious for referring to their enemies as savages, regardless of their cultural achievements. (Dyson Teal)

³⁶ The Battle of Kadesh took place between the forces of the Egyptian Empire and the Hittite Empire near the Syrian city of Kadesh. The battle is generally dated to 1274 BC. It was probably the largest chariot battle ever fought, involving perhaps 6,000 chariots. The events of the battle largely parallel those described here by Valentinus. (Dyson Teal)

His hair was jet-black, oily, and covered in dust. It had twisted black wings, and a braided gray-black beard. His nose was bent, broken. Its dark, sunken eyes appeared weary. A rancid breeze followed the spirit, as it approached the frightened boy. 'Ramses, do you know who I am?' the god asked the frozen prince. The lamed demon leaned closer to the boy whispering, 'Ramses, I am Horus-Ra. Allow me into your frightened heart, and I shall restore your courage. I will destroy your enemies. I shall vanquish your brother. The gods of Egypt have chosen you to become the next pharaoh.' The frightened prince quickly nodded, giving his body to the demon."

Azrael licked his port stained lips, "I watched the elderly Ramses as he inhaled more incense, his eyes following his priests circling the courtyard. The old pharaoh flexed his sagging arms, recalling the vigor he had felt so long ago. He was no longer afraid of the Hittites. He rushed from his tent, sword in hand, and grabbed the reins of his chariot from his startled driver. A Hittite warrior ran up, plunging his bronze spear point into the prince's ankle. He screamed out in pain, but the demon within turned on the Hittite, slashing his throat from ear to ear. Ramses let out a blood-curdling cry, 'I am Horus!' His eyes flashed like those of a dragon, his horses rearing on their hind legs, as he charged into the enemy. Slashing left and right into the horde, he yelled, 'I am Horus! Follow me and crush the enemy! I am Horus! Follow me and crush the enemy!' Ramses roared like a lion. He shone like the sun god Ra. Blood flowed from his sword like the river Nile flooding its banks. His eyes were those of another. His own warriors quaked with fear, trembling before the awesome son of Ra." Over and over again he shouted to the Egyptians, rallying them around his chariot.

Throughout the night and into the morning, he slaughtered the enemy, long after his weary warriors had fallen to the ground. Then he limped across the battlefield, cutting the throats of all who had fallen.” Azrael smiled, sipping from his cup.

“Ramses rallied his remaining soldiers, promising them the fruits of Egypt, if they would follow in his bloody wake. They followed. He led his tattered army back into Egypt against the forces of his father. They had no chance against the possessed demigod. He was unstoppable, and soon the quivering throat of Seqenenre Tao was under the prince’s sandal. His father pleaded for his life, but the will of Samuel controlled the mortal prince. Ramses repeated Samuel’s original sin. The young prince cut his father’s throat like the throat of a swine. Samuel felt the warm blood spray across Ramses’ face. He tried to kill his twin Tuthmoses as well, but the twin fled south, finding refuge among some desert hermits.”

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex VII (b)
Priests of Siwa

“The pharaoh’s entourage rode into Siwa like aliens exploring a distant planet. The oasis was a miserable place, boasting a lethargic spring, oozing from the sand, a few weary palm trees, and mangy flea covered camels. At the center of the oasis was a dilapidated temple, reeking with the foul smell of body odor and human waste.”

The Architect watched as his workers were nailing roof shingles, while others painted the exterior of the church. Time was short. When the church was completed, the stories of Poimandres and Azrael would end. But he still had a job, “Careful with the paint! No spattering! Take your time. This isn’t a slap dash job!” Poimandres grabbed a fresh water bottle and offered it to Azrael, urging him to take a break from the wine. Azrael had an odd feeling. He couldn’t quite grasp it. It was similar to self-pity, but different. And then he realized, it was regret. For the first time, the bloody demon felt a tinge of regret. Yet it wasn’t just regret. It bubbled up as a crystal clear guilt. A verdict rendered by his inner self, against his criminal soul. He knew he was lost if he didn’t atone for his mistakes. He would be extinguished or condemned by the higher gods. His mind raced, grasping at every straw, but his fate was sealed. Reduced to his last resort, he finally tried honesty. He picked his next words deliberately; “Lord Poimandres, why are you asking us to recount these tales if there’s no hope? There has to be something gained by remembering the past?” The watcher was startled by the demon’s candor. He looked into Azrael’s bloodshot eyes, seeing something new, fear and remorse. Poimandres knew his plan was working. If he could soften the heart of the depraved Azrael, he could transform the other Archons as well. “Azrael,” the watcher answered, “there’s

always hope. Atonement begins with the acceptance of culpability. Perhaps you are beginning to understand.”

Azrael nodded and then continued his story; “The elderly Ramses shook himself from his reveries, lifting his feeble gaze to the east. He looked into the darkness, waiting for the first rays of light. He feared the night. In the darkness Charon would come.³⁷ How much longer could this body survive against the ravages of old age? Samuel had preserved Ramses’ body for as long as possible. He knew time was running out for his host. Soon, he would have to find another, who would willingly accept him. The old man strained his eyes, still no sign of morning. His mind wandered back to an earlier time. He had just destroyed the forces of his father, and his brother Tuthmoses had fled south, into a region occupied by the despised Children of Light. The spirit of Samuel fumed, whenever he thought of those foolish followers of Enoch and Job. The mystics had settled around a small village, called Nag Hammadi, where they were growing in numbers. They had accepted Tuthmoses into their community, and he had adopted their faith. He was now called Moses among these misguided people.”³⁸

³⁷ Charon is the Greek and Egyptian ferryman of Hades. He carried the souls of the newly deceased across the river Styx, into the world of the dead. A coin to pay Charon for the ferry passage was often placed on the mouth of a dead person. Those who could not pay the ferryman, had to wander the shores of this world as ghosts. (Dyson Teal)

³⁸ Sigmund Freud first put forward the theory that the crown prince Tuthmoses was actually the biblical Moses in his book *Moses and Monotheism* in 1939. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud contradicts the biblical story of Moses with his own retelling of events, claiming that an Egyptian prince named Tuthmoses led his religious followers to freedom during an unstable period in Egyptian history. The idea that Tuthmoses was actually Moses has not received the attention one would expect due to its inherently controversial nature. Many historians point out that the name Moses is a common element of Egyptian names (e.g. Tuth-MOSES, "Son of Thoth," Ra-MOSES, "Son of Ra") to disprove this theory. In the Book of Acts 7:22 we find the claim that "Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." Thus there is

Azrael explained, “Ramses had conquered his enemies, but his left ankle had never properly healed. He was crippled for the rest of his life. Samuel had heard an ancient legend about a deviant priesthood, dedicated to the evil god Shaitan, the incarnation of Apophis himself. Long ago, these priests were exiled to the far western desert. Samuel was amused by the story. He summoned Beelzebub, the Lord of Flies, and ordered him to discover if the priesthood still existed. Beelzebub found the remnants of the wretched group hiding at an oasis called Siwa.”³⁹ Samuel decided to go there.”

“The pharaoh’s entourage rode into Siwa like aliens exploring a distant planet. The oasis was a miserable place, boasting a lethargic spring, oozing from the sand, a few weary palm trees, and mangy flea covered camels. At the center of the oasis was a dilapidated temple, reeking with the foul smell of body odor and human waste. The temple was carved into a raw limestone cliff, overlooking this decrepit caravan stop. Samuel wanted to find out how much these priests really knew. There were only a few dozen, comprised of pathetic outcasts and criminals, the insane, diseased, and demented. Ramses was led to their chief priest, a fellow named Simon. He was a magician of sorts among his followers.”⁴⁰ Simon was a rather stupid, superstitious fellow, a bald recluse,

some historical basis to Valentinus’ assertion in the *Corpus Gnostica* that Tuthmoses is the biblical Moses. (Dyson Teal)

³⁹ The Siwa Oasis is in Egypt, located between the Qattara Depression and the Libyan Desert, 348 miles west of Cairo. About 50 miles in length and 12 miles wide, the Siwa Oasis is one of Egypt’s most isolated settlements. It is famous for being the home of the cult of Shaitan. The ruins of his temple are a popular tourist attraction. Valentinus’ description of the oasis appears to be largely accurate. (Dyson Teal)

⁴⁰ The only biblical reference to Simon the Magician is found in Acts 8:9-24. He was also prominent in several apocryphal and Gnostic accounts by early Christian writers. Some writers regarded Simon as the source of all heresies. He was the inspiration for Goethe’s play *Dr. Faust*. (Dyson Teal)

living in depravity. Clearly, these dirty priests were nothing more than cheap con artists. It was so easy to manipulate them. We returned to Memphis with these grimy charlatans, and used them to spread our false religion. If my master could not defeat Christ, he would at least use these perverts to spread confusion.”

“Samuel sent these priests into every town and village, preaching against the Children of Light and their prophets. Soon the passions of the Egyptian people were stirred. Ramses gathered a large army and marched south to destroy his enemies. I watched as the old pharaoh relived his past. He seemed anxious, worried the sun wouldn’t rise in time to spare him.” Azrael paused for a minute or more, sipping his water. He was deeply troubled, and then suddenly it appeared. A single tear fell from his eye.

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

***Codex VII (c)
Children of Light***

“I watched in awe as Sophia moved her hands across the sea, dividing it. Holding the forces of nature at bay, she opened a passage for the Children of Light. The Egyptians stopped cold in their tracks, astonished as they beheld the sea rising, creating a way through which the refugees quickly fled.”

Azrael’s eyes were no longer bloodshot. Poimandres saw the whites of the sad clown’s eyes. They were filled with tears. And then, it just seemed the right thing to do; Poimandres pulled his red bandana from his pocket, and reached over, wiping the clown makeup from the demon’s face. Azrael didn’t

protest. Soon his face was clean. He had a beautiful, youthful face that hinted at past innocence. "Have faith Azrael," the watcher counseled, "I have a plan for all of you." Azrael openly wept, as one by one the other demons noticed what was happening. They snickered and laughed, "Look, Azrael's face is clean! Look, he's crying!" But several had the courage to approach the rocks, to find out what was happening. "Sit down," the watcher offered, "and listen."

Poimandres asked Azrael to continue his story; "Ramses' frenzied army marched south, and descended upon Nag Hammadi. But the Children of Light had already escaped. Tuthmoses or Moses as he was now called, had rallied the community; they fled east before the forces of his evil brother arrived. Ramses ordered his war chariots to pursue the refugees as they fled towards the sea. The peaceful Children of Light were too slow to outrun the chariots. Moses looked towards the distant sea. The tide was rising. There was no way they could escape across the water. The people of Nag Hammadi were trapped; they would die on the soldier's spears or drown in the crimson sea."

"Precisely, I remember it well," Poimandres interrupted. "I was watching everything from Heaven. Sophia cried out, 'Bright-Eyes, we must save our children!' The holy couple jumped into the shimmering sphere, and descended to Earth. I quickly followed." Azrael nodded, as he picked up the story, "Moses was driving his chariot as fast as he could. He turned, seeing his brother's host closing in, and then he looked towards the sea, a few hundred yards away. Ramses' army was closing in; arrows from his chariot-archers were falling among the refugees. Suddenly Moses' body jerked forward, violently coughing up a mouthful of blood. An arrow had pierced his lung.

Sophia wailed, ‘No! Not Moses!’ But it was too late. He fell from the rear of his chariot. As he lay bleeding on the ground, his brother rode up in a blind fury. Moses saw the blind hatred on his brother’s face; it was the last thing he ever saw. Ramses swung his battle-axe, splitting open his brother’s head.”

Poimandres wiped tears from his dark eyes as Azrael continued, “I watched in awe as Sophia moved her hands across the sea, dividing it. Holding the forces of nature at bay, she opened a passage for the Children of Light. The Egyptians stopped cold in their tracks, astonished as they beheld the sea rising, creating a way through which the refugees quickly fled. Sophia stirred the hearts of the Egyptians to pursue. The army plunged directly into the watery valley held back by her hands. Only Ramses prudently held back. As soon as the army was between the high seawater walls, the goddess lifted her hands, releasing the waters, drowning the Egyptians.”⁴¹

“Well told Azrael. Well told,” the watcher offered. The demon finished his story, “The elderly Ramses was in great pain. He was clenching his chest, making a terrible grimace. I could hear Samuel’s voice wailing. And then the old man released his wooden cane and fell forward, hitting the ground. It was still night. The insects were still biting. The priests were still chanting. But it was useless; the old ruler clenched his chest, and expired. Instantly, Samuel’s spirit leapt from the dead pharaoh and stood beside me. My old master kicked Ramses’ body, ‘Well now what, whom shall I take next?’” Azrael frowned; he finally understood the meaning of remorse.

⁴¹ See Exodus 13:17-14:29 (Angelica Herald)

Codex VIII (a)
Three Magicians

“Friend, we are as kings in our country. We’ve spent our entire lives studying the movement of the stars. We know how to interpret signs and dreams.”

Poimandres watched as several workers sneaked closer to eavesdrop.

“Architect,” Poimandres asked, “Please invite them over so they can hear.” The Archons hurried over and sat in the uncut grass. Poimandres explained, “I know your jobs are important, but you’re on no deadline. Notice Azrael. Look at his face. Under his grotesque makeup, a kind face was hidden. Now he’s awakened, he’s a watcher like me.”⁴²

The former harlequin was transformed. Through the act of confession, his atonement was achieved; he was a new creature. Even his bloody cloak was magically changed into a clean white robe. He was angelic. The demons sitting in the grass seemed less contemptuous and nasty. They appeared sincere, and were surrendering their egos. A second cooler was brought up, and water bottles were passed around. The watcher pulled the old silver dollar from his pocket, and flipped it between his fingers, heads, tails, and then heads again. Azrael didn’t smile, nor was he arrogant. He felt relieved, like one who has carried a burden for too long, and is finally leaving it behind. Now Poimandres had living proof that atonement was possible for the Archons. “Azrael,” the watcher was posing questions, “Where does evil dwell?” “In the heart,” the

⁴² In Daniel 4:13-17 a reference is made to the *Irin* or "the watchers," which appears to be an order of angels. The term "watcher" probably derives from the verb "to be awake" or "to be vigilant." Angels were popular in ancient folklore, which described them as never sleeping. While there are good and bad "watchers," most stories revolve around the evil ones that fell from grace when they took "the daughters of men" as their mates. (Dyson Teal)

former demon answered. "And where does good reign?" "Master Poimandres, good reigns within the heart as well." "So Azrael, are both equal and the same?" "No master, although equal in power, they are opposing faces of the same coin. For what they purchase is indeed very different." "Azrael, what has caused this change in your heart?" "My Lord, through grace, I realized I could flip the coin." Poimandres was pleased with his answers. The Architect was also impressed. The watcher then asked, "Azrael, please tell us what happened after the Egyptian army was drown?"

Azrael paused to collect his thoughts, "Samuel and I wandered for many centuries. Christ was busy through his secret disciples, the Children of Light, while Samuel manipulated humanity through his dark priests. A frenzied war for souls spread across the planet." The watcher interrupted, "And then you heard about something that would shift the balance of power forever." "Indeed master. We heard Christ was coming to Earth as a mortal, to lead his followers against us."

Azrael took a drink and continued; "The devil's in the details, as the old saying goes, and Samuel certainly had an eye for details. He was very concerned about Christ's arrival. After all, their last meeting hadn't gone so well. It was the final evening hour as we sat in front of a small fire, listening to the crackling and snapping of burning twigs. My master was in his usual form, covered in sand and dust. I myself remained invisible. His weary camel cast a faint shadow through the glowing flames. Above the horizon, Samuel watched for a familiar sign, the rising of the morning star, Venus. We had been following the star for some time. Every hour before sunrise, it rose over the

horizon, slowly moving in a westerly direction. He watched and waited, drawing his body closer to the flames, feebly attempting to keep warm.”

“The morning was cold; frost covered the gritty stones and loose desert sand. Samuel didn’t move; he was listening intently. In the distance he heard the footfalls of camels, the heaving of men on their straining backs. As the sun rose, three camels with their human burdens approached the seemingly lone figure by the dying embers. He stood as the camels drew near. The lead driver stopped, ‘Stranger, please re-kindle your fire. We’ve traveled all night and wish to warm ourselves.’ My dusty companion complied. He stirred up the hot embers and tossed more twigs into the blaze. The mysterious party of three drew their camels alongside and dismounted. They closed around the flames, exposing their palms towards the heat. ‘Smooth palms,’ he thought, ‘unaccustomed to labor.’ ‘What brings you here?’ asked my lonely friend. The three men looked to one another, uncomfortably, trying to fabricate an answer. They removed their fur outer garments, revealing fine silk clothing beneath. The one who had first spoken, answered for the group, ‘We are traveling towards the west, following the morning star.’ ‘Why do you follow a star?’ The three men mumbled as my friend offered them his pipe, filled with ground poppy pods. They eagerly accepted his kind offer.”

“No doubt,” Azrael observed, “to the three travelers, our dusty friend appeared a tramp. His clothing was worn. His only possessions were a large canvas bag, and an old camel, tooth bare, and ill tempered. After inhaling the purple smoke, the travelers became more talkative, ‘Friend, we’ve traveled from

Persia, following the star known as the goddess Ishtar.⁴³ We've seen a prophecy in our dreams, the goddess shall deliver a son in human form, born where the star rises every morning.' The three stoned astrologers were confident their dirty companion understood little of what they said. 'But, how could you know this to be true?' he wondered. One of the astrologers who had remained silent until now spoke, 'Friend, we are as kings in our country. We've spent our entire lives studying the movement of the stars. We know how to interpret signs and dreams.' The first astrologer looked sternly at his companion, attempting to cut off his loose banter. Samuel took his pipe, and inhaled deeply, 'Ah, I too have dreams about the goddess. She harkens to me, to follow her star, and to bring gifts to her son.'

"The oldest of the three spoke up, having held his tongue for perhaps too long, 'Friend, you must understand, we've spent our whole lives studying the stars, the prophecies, the mysteries. And we've brought precious gifts to offer. I've brought pounds of frankincense, and my companions have brought myrrh and spices from distant India. We've been deemed worthy to represent our people by making this trek. Consider, in the kindest way, perhaps your dreams have led you astray.' The old man crossed his arms, confident his words would admonish the ignorant stranger."

"Yes, great teacher, you are wise indeed. I'm unworthy of your words,' my friend acknowledged. 'Only please, before you continue your trek, please

⁴³ Ishtar was the ancient Sumerian goddess of love and fertility. Her lover was the fertility god Tammuz. After Tammuz died, she went into the underworld to retrieve him, but her efforts were in vain, and she returned to the living world alone. Her mythology closely parallels that of the Egyptian goddess Isis. She is associated with the planet Venus or the morning star. The English word *Star* is derived from the name *Ishtar*. (Dyson Teal)

grant me one small request,' the loner pulled his sack closer. The oldest of the three smiled, 'Of course, we'll do for you what we can. Perhaps a small gift of incense for you to sell in the nearest village?' 'No kind teacher, I wish to travel with you, to pay my respects to the king of the world. Within my bag, I have many things. If you would be so kind as to name an object, anything in the world, and if I have it in this bag, you'll kindly allow me to travel with you. And if I don't have what you name, I'll leave you in peace.' The chief magi considered this odd test.⁴⁴ *He certainly didn't intend to arrive at the birthplace of the goddess' child with this vagrant. "Ha," the old astrologer blurted out, "Do you have a pomegranate seed in your bag?" The vagrant smiled, reaching into the bag to withdrawal a single red pomegranate seed.*

"No, you trickster," exclaimed the magi, "You may not accompany us. For in our dreams, we were told to bring gifts, gifts worthy of the goddess' son. You have nothing but opium and pomegranate seeds to offer the king of man!' With this the three magi rose and prepared to mount their camels. The dusty traveler also stood, lifting his bag into the air over his head. He poured the remainder of its contents, pure gold dust; pound after precious pound of gold flowed from the vagrant's canvas bag, over his whole body, until it completely buried his feet and legs up to his knees. The wise men looked at the vagrant standing in gold with their mouths agape, silent and frozen before a magician far superior to any they had ever encountered. They said nothing to their new

⁴⁴ *Magi* is a term, used since the 4th century BC, to denote a follower of Zoroaster, and a person with the ability to predict fortunes by the stars. The Greek word, *mágos*, or magician was influenced by this older word. The term includes expertise in astrology, alchemy, and other forms of esoteric knowledge. (Dyson Teal)

traveling companion as he scooped the gold back into his bag. He heaved his bag across his camel and grabbed his walking staff.”

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

***Codex VIII (b)
Born in a Warren***

“Under the rising star, the morning’s child is born. God, born in a warren. My son is the Christ. He speaks with God.”

One of the workers raised his hand. Poimandres smiled, ‘They are raising their hands, it’s a good sign.’ “Yes Babael,” the watcher answered, “What’s on your mind?” Babael was a rather shortish demon, round and fat. He wore a grayish, weathered robe with blue trim around the edges. He was bald. His body odor was particularly noxious, even by the demon’s lax standards. His flatulence was nearly fatal. “Lord Poimandres, was the rumor told by the magi true? I mean, was Christ really planning to be born as a mortal?” “Yes smelly one,” the watcher answered, “it was true. I was with the holy couple when he made the decision. I watched Sophia after Christ departed. I longed to reveal my existence to her, but I held back. What was the point? She was so in love with him, a voyeur like me didn’t have a chance. So I decided the best thing I could do, was follow him to see what he was facing. I knew the most likely place to find him was in the secret hiding place of the Children of Light. The Children of Light, or the Essenes as they called themselves, were hidden in a network of caves, dug into cliffs beside a small salt sea. There, I found the

Essene priestess Miriam, straining in labor.⁴⁵ The Essenes were excited by her pregnancy. She had lived a celibate life, but was now with child. Midwives confirmed she was still a virgin. The community elders said her pregnancy fulfilled a prophecy that Christ would be born to a virgin.”

Azrael jumped in, “Lord Poimandres, this must have been when I was with Samuel and the three astrologers. “Yes Azrael, what was Samuel up to with these travelers?” Azrael took a quick drink, “I followed Samuel as he joined the three magi on their trek across the sand. We continued through the day and into the next night, following the star to the salt sea. In the distance, we saw the faint glow of lamplights from the cliffs lining the shore. The three astrologers followed their crippled companion along a narrow path, running between the cliffs and the shore. Traveling with the tramp magician had been a mind blurring experience. These so called wise men, allowed him to cloud their judgment, by filling their lungs with poppy smoke all day long. By the time they reached the caves, they were fried, comfortably numb.”

“The three magicians followed the cripple, guiding their camels behind his, stopping when he stopped, moving when he moved. They climbed uphill along the path, towards the glowing cave lights, then stopping directly below the cave entrances. They dismounted to look for a way up to the caves. As they stumbled in the dark, several knife-wielding men descended on them. The white clad sentinels threw the intruders to the ground, pressing their weapons against the trespasser’s throats, ‘Are you Romans or Sadducees?’ The largest sentinel

⁴⁵ Miriam is a Hebrew name derived from the ancient Egyptian name *Meritamen* or *Merit-Amun*, “Beloved of Amon.” (Dyson Teal)

demanded, 'Answer or die.' The stoned magi froze, only the dusty traveler had the wits to answer, 'We are neither. We're disciples of Enoch and Job. We've received visions from the goddess, telling us to come here to pay homage to the son of man, who was born this night.' The sentinels were shocked. How could these strangers know there had been a birth in their caves? Answering their unspoken question, the traveler explained, 'We have traveled from the east, following the star which rises in the evening and again in the morning. She is the queen of the heavens. She has directed us in our quest to find his birthplace.'

⁴⁶ *'Who are you? What is your name?' the guard demanded. 'I am a disciple of the ancient prophets. I've come to offer my respect and devotion. My three traveling companions are Persian magi. They're wise concerning the movement of the stars and are respected as sages in their land.'* The three magi remained frozen. For a moment or two the sentinels whispered among themselves, before removing their knives from the stranger's throats."

"The leader of the sentinels was still puzzled, 'It was foretold Christ would come to our world when the morning star becomes the evening star, and the three kings rise in alignment with the queen of heaven.' ⁴⁷ *This is that glorious morning. It only comes once in a thousand years.'* The oldest of the magi coughed, *'It comes once every one thousand fourteen years.'* The white clad

⁴⁶ The planet Venus is a symbol of Isis, Ishtar, and Sophia. Venus is known as both the morning and the evening star. It reaches its maximum brightness shortly before sunrise or shortly after sunset depending on where it is in its orbit around the sun. (Dyson Teal)

⁴⁷ The Three Kings are the three most prominent stars forming Orion's belt. They are located along the celestial equator and are therefore visible throughout the world. It is one of the largest and most conspicuous constellations in the night sky. The perfect alignment of the three stars of Orion's belt with the morning rising of the planet Venus only takes place every 1014 years. Thus we can accurately date the birth of Joshua to the early winter of 217 AD. (Dyson Teal)

guardians dropped to their knees, ‘Truly you are brothers from the east, for you know how long we’ve waited. We shall lead you to his birthplace.’ ‘Yes brothers,’ the crippled traveler said with glee, ‘take us to his birthplace, I have a debt to repay.’

Azrael continued, “The sun had risen; its rays filling the cave as the travelers entered.”⁴⁸ They saw before them one who appeared to be an angel, a young girl, holding her newborn child close to her breast. Miriam raised her eyes to the strangers saying, “Under the rising star, the morning’s child is born. God, born in a warren. My son is the Christ. He speaks with God.” And then her head fell to her side. The midwives had never seen so much blood, for no man had penetrated her. She had been terribly torn and slowly bled to death. One of the nursemaids took the child, placing his tiny head against her nipple, silencing his cries. Sophia saw her consort within the little baby and sent an army of angels to protect him. The magi raised their hands in praise as the dusty traveler reached into his bag of treats.”

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

⁴⁸ According to Greek Orthodox tradition, Joshua or Jesus was born in a cave near Jerusalem. This agrees with the theory that Joshua was born into the Essene community living in caves along the Dead Sea. (Dyson Teal)

Codex VIII (c)
Bag of Treats

“The baby cried in the dark basket, the bouncing waves upset his stomach. Raphael muttered, ‘A colicky child.’ Ariel answered beneath his breath, ‘A colicky god.’”

Babael drew closer to the speakers. He was wiping his face paint off and shining like Azrael. He had flipped the coin, transforming into an angel of light. Other demons were doing the same. They were washing their faces in a washbasin, waking up to their divine selves. Still others were whispering anxiously. Workers were dropping their tools and coming over, to see what was happening. Poimandres spoke to the growing assembly, “Each of you possesses a dual nature. We all do. In each of us there’s an evil and a good side. Some creatures learn to subdue their dark natures, presenting the outward appearance of likeability. But for you my tormented companions, this was impossible when you were imprisoned on Nemesis. The darkness overcame the light within; you became the personifications of evil. You had no choice in the matter. But light still shines behind the heavy clouds. Changing who you are is like flipping a coin,” Poimandres pulled out his silver dollar and started rolling it between his fingers. “It is easy enough to do, but almost impossible to choose. You must turn away from what you are used to doing. When you’ve sincerely made this decision, the coin flips by itself. Look at Azrael. Look at Babael. They have flipped the coin. They no longer carry the burden of their sins. For each of you, it’s a simple choice. I commend those of you washing your faces. And I declare a new rite. From this day forth, you’ll be known as the water drinkers.

You've washed away your old blemishes, becoming as pure and clean as this spring water."

Poimandres' message went through the gathering of fallen angels like a bolt of lightning. More Archons began shining. Others were crying, washing their faces. They reverently passed bottles of water around. The Architect was stunned by this miracle. He realized his plans for the church would have to wait. He ordered the remaining workers at the construction site to join the gathering. As a group, demons and angels alike, cried out, "Tell us more Azrael! What happened after Christ was born? And what happened after the three astrologers and Samuel showed up at the cave? Don't leave us hanging!" Poimandres laughed, as he leaned over to Azrael, "They are shouting for a command performance! Please Azrael, go on with your story."

Azrael sipped his water, "The morning opened with a mixture of joy and sorrow. The cave dwellers had lost their most cherished member, the priestess Miriam, but with her child, they had witnessed the fulfillment of their greatest prophecy, the virgin birth of Christ. The three sages fawned on the newborn as the white clad sentinels became more relaxed. A nursemaid was carefully tending the sleepy baby. Casually, the dusty traveler opened his large sack, pulling out beautiful ripe oranges. Juice sprayed his nose as he tore into one of the fragrant rinds. It tasted wonderful. He offered one of the succulent fruits to everyone in the cave. Everyone accepted. His three traveling companions were too stoned to remember that from his pouch everything seemed to spring; they accepted the fruit like everyone else. Within half an hour, everyone had died

from eating the poisoned fruits; the wise men, the white clad sentinels, even the nursemaid, died with the child cradled in her arms.”

“The demon was now free to draw closer to the child. The baby was completely at his mercy. The lusts of the fallen Archon would be sated. Samuel held a blade high above his head. The devil laughed, feeling a surge of ecstasy as his hand tightened around the handle, his arm wheeling back to slice the baby’s head clean off. He swayed back with all of his strength, then suddenly felt a firm, vice like grip on his wrist. His arm was violently jerked away from the child by the powerful hand of Michael, Archangel of War and leader of Sophia’s angelic hosts. Samuel’s arm muscles were torn from the socket as he was heaved against the cave wall. ‘No!’ the villain screamed, smashing against the stone. Ariel, Gabriel, and Raphael instantly appeared around his crumpled form. Still more angels quickly surrounded the infant and the area around the cave.”

“Samuel withered before his opponents. Michael angrily ground the archfiend’s face into the floor. The demon cried out. Michael and Gabriel tied his hands and feet, bound his mouth with a gag, and tossed him from the cave entrance. He fell a couple hundred feet before smashing head first onto the limestone rocks below. Then Ariel and Raphael began binding two wicker breadbaskets together, one on top of the other. It was peculiar work to watch,” Azrael admitted, “seeing such powerful angels doing such menial work. After fashioning the basket halves together, they covered the whole contraption with a blackish tree tar they found in a jar at the back of the cave. The cave dwellers used the sticky mess to fuel their torches. Then Ariel carefully wrapped the child

in a woolen blanket and gently placed him into the basket enclosure. He closed the top lid, securely fastening it to the lower basket, giving the contraption the appearance of a sticky black egg. Ariel and Raphael flew from the cave entrance, carrying the basket between them.”

“The archangels flew along the shoreline until they approached a fortress called Masada. This fortress was built atop a high sandstone plateau, rising nearly one thousand feet above the sea.⁴⁹ The lord of the fortress was Herod the Great, King of Judea. The angels landed near the base of the rocky plateau. There they waited until mid-morning, when they saw a group of young women approaching the banks of the sea. Well hidden behind a stone outcropping, they released the wicker basket onto the water. The baby cried in the dark basket, the bouncing waves upset his stomach. Raphael muttered, ‘A colicky child.’ Ariel answered beneath his breath, ‘A colicky god.’ The two angels watched as the little boat floated down the shore towards the bathing girls. The little vessel floated for a short while before one of the girls called out, ‘I hear a baby.’ Another girl saw the little black basket bobbing along the shore. Quickly they swam out, retrieving the sticky vessel. They pulled in up on the beach and excitedly opened it. Before their eyes was a baby. An older girl picked up the infant and claimed him as her own. Her name was Roxanne, daughter of the king. Her younger sister Salome cried out, ‘But I heard him crying first! He should be mine!’ The girls argued until Salome gave in to her sister.”

⁴⁹ Masada (Hebrew) meaning "fortress." It is the name for an ancient fortification in southern Israel on top of an isolated plateau on the eastern edge of the Judean Desert, overlooking the Dead Sea. It is the site of the mass suicide by its Zealot defenders during the First Jewish-Roman War. (Dyson Teal)

“They hurried up the steep path back to the fortress. Remaining unseen by any mortal, the two angels, Raphael and Ariel followed the girl’s into the fortress. When the girls arrived, they found their father distressed. The king had just learned of a massacre at one of the Essenes’ caves, only a few miles away. This vexed the anxious ruler. Was it a prelude to a Persian attack? Was it an assassin’s attempt to test a new poison, before using it against Masada? ‘Father!’ the girls cried out, ‘Look! See what the waters have given us! A baby boy!’ The girls were terribly excited about their new plaything. King Herod’s expression grew even graver. It was clear the basket had been set afloat near the scene of the murders. He concluded the child had belonged to Essene parents. But it didn’t matter now. So he allowed his daughters to keep and raise the baby as their own. The girls took their new son to their bedchamber. They found a nursemaid to feed him. They agreed he would be raised as a grandson of the king. They named him Joshua. Samuel was left alone on the rocks where I untied him. He was even more determined to prevent Christ from completing his mission. He ordered me to locate the chief priest of Shaitan, a fellow named Caiaphas.”

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex IX (a)
Herod, King of Judah ⁵⁰

*“Joshua heard nothing beneath the water; it was a moment suspended in time,
a feather falling in a vacuum.”*

The workers were now equally divided between angels and demons. They asked Poimandres to tell what he knew of Joshua’s early life. He nodded, sipping his water; “I was familiar with Joshua and his family as he grew into manhood. I remember watching the old king, his adoptive grandfather, as he sat in front of the dining hall fireplace. The room was small, the walls hung with woolen blankets and linen tapestries, to insulate it against the cold. Oil lamps were hung from the rafters. On a small table near his chair, was a brass opium pipe. He used it to relieve the symptoms of his many ailments. Herod’s health had been a wreck for years. He suffered from venereal and kidney disease, as well as leprosy. Now worms were literally consuming his flesh.”

“I watched as the king peered into the fire. His worries were many. He worried about raising tribute for his Roman overlords. His country was poor, and the Romans were greedy. He worried about the Persians on the eastern frontier. From time to time they raided the caravans, crossing his small kingdom. He worried about the religious factions in his strife-ridden realm. The cunning priests who controlled the temple in Jerusalem, were turning offerings to God, into money for lending to clients. The Essene mystics who lived in the wilderness along the salt sea, refused to recognize his or the temple’s

⁵⁰ King Herod (183-250 AD) was the pro-Roman king of Judea in the last decades before the rise of the Christian-Essene movement. He started his career as a general before the Roman Caesar Commodus recognized him as the King of Judea. He was not a truly independent king; however, Rome allowed him control of domestic policy. Although Herod tried to respect the pious feeling of his subjects, many of them were not content with his rule. He was succeeded by his son Herod Antipas. (Dyson Teal)

authority. And he worried about his children; his older daughter Roxanne was pious, but strong willed. The younger, Salome was a loose seductress, a scandalous woman, from whom the god fearing averted their eyes. And his son Antipas was constantly gambling, falling deeper and deeper into debt. But there was one bright star in Herod's family. His adopted grandson Joshua was cut from a different bolt."

Poimandres took another sip; "Joshua had proven to be a godsend for Herod's otherwise trouble family. Still, sometimes the old king worried. Perhaps Joshua was a little too righteous, a little too pure. 'Was it his Essene parentage,' the old king speculated as he leaned towards the fireplace? 'Enough of this fretting,' he sighed. 'Today, Joshua is returning home from defending the southern kingdom.' He was looking forward to seeing his grandson. He waited patiently to hear the shofar, signaling the prince's return.⁵¹ He demanded wine to quench his thirst and numb his senses. He smoked opium to deaden his pain. And as expected, near dusk the horns sounded, as horses raced up the narrow cobblestone path to the fortress. Cries carried across the palace courtyard."

"Salome and Roxanne waved silk scarves as soldiers rode into the fortress, followed by their leader, Prince Joshua. He was truly handsome, tall with reddish brown hair, and golden brown eyes and skin. He greeted his mothers with equal affection. Herod slowly lurched from the dining hall, calling out, 'Joshua, praise God, you've returned. I trust the news you carry from the south is favorable?' The younger man called back, 'Yes grandfather, the

⁵¹ The *shofar* is a instrument commonly made from a ram's horn. It makes a trumpet-like sound and is traditionally blown on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. (Dyson Teal)

miserable Persians took to their heels in a great hurry. We gave them a sound trashing.’ ‘Very good my son, very good,’ the king rallied back. ‘Come, have food and drink with your old king and your fair mothers.’ Joshua passed the reins of his horse to an attendant and joined his royal family in the dining hall.” Poimandres noticed a few angels who were whispering among themselves.

One of the newest angels, Babael was confused, “How could Joshua have been a warrior? Wasn’t he Christ, sent by Sophia to save humanity?” The Architect was also puzzled, “Was Joshua the Christ or not? I had no idea he had been a prince and a warrior.” Poimandres turned to the builder, “Yes, Joshua was the Christ, but he didn’t know it yet. For the first thirty years of his life, he lived as a prince in Herod’s court. But soon after his thirtieth birthday, he began having odd dreams. He dreamt of a teacher known as the Baptist. He had heard quite a bit about the Baptist, from the king’s tax collectors and from the priests in Jerusalem. The teacher’s given name was John, and he was no friend of the religious or royal establishment. For several weeks, Joshua dreamt of traveling to the Jordan River to visit the Baptist. So early one morning, the prince rode out, and headed towards the Essenes’ caves. The locals recognized him, but they weren’t particularly friendly. They were a closed mouthed, clannish sect with no use for royals.”

“He found the preacher late in the day. He saw the Baptist, standing knee deep in the river. The area was a green oasis, with lush shade palms along the gently sloping riverbanks. Joshua leaned back against a tree. There were dozens of people lined up along the shore. John was submerging one person after another, head first into the water. He held them down for several

moments, before lifted them back up. Eventually, his attention was drawn towards the shade trees. He pointed to Joshua and called out, 'There stands the one of whom I've preached. There stands the Christ in man.' Joshua was aghast. He turned to leave. But in a few moments, dozens of worshippers surrounded him. John waved his arm, 'Prince of Judea, come down to the river.' Joshua had little choice in the matter as the crowd nudged him forward."

"The Baptist was a longhaired, bearded man. He appeared about the same age as the prince. He was wearing a white linen robe, tied up over his knees. He stepped up to Joshua, and led him by the arm into the river. Joshua was swept away. John's hand was behind his neck, as he pushed Joshua backwards, holding him firmly under the water. The Baptist proclaimed, 'I baptize you in the name of Sophia, and in her holy consort, the angel of light.' Joshua heard nothing beneath the water; it was a moment suspended in time, a feather falling in a vacuum. And then John raised him back up by the nape of his neck. The prince was born again. Joshua was gone. Christ remembered everything. John raised his hands towards the sky, declaring, 'Beloved brothers and sisters, this is the one our prophets have foretold. He is the one for whom I've prepared the way. This is my cousin Joshua, born of the Priestess Merriam, sister of my mother Elizabeth. He was born with the living Christ within. He is the holy consort of our goddess. Behold the Lamb of God.' Then John fell to his knees."

Poimandres paused for a moment to gauge the reactions of his listeners; "John was transformed by the presence of his cousin. Joshua knelt down, cupping cool water into his hands. He offered it from his hands to John. Then

he motioned to John's flock, standing on the water's edge, to come and drink. Everyone was awakened in turn from their spiritual slumber, their surreal existence. Joshua spoke, "This is a holy rite of communion. Through this rite of water-drinking, the Children of Light shall be known." Poimandres smiled, "Now brothers, you understand why we drink so much water around here." Two more demons were silently crying, wiping their faces clean.

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex IX (b) Dance of Salome

"It was the sound that sin makes, throwing a rock through the windows of hell."

The Architect was counting; over half of his workers were now angels. He looked across the yard. The construction site stood abandoned. He motioned for some angels, and whispered in their ears. They returned to the church and began working. He turned to the watcher, "Lord Poimandres, I must finish my project. But I'll only send those who have been transformed." The watcher nodded. He asked those remaining, if they wanted to hear what happened to Joshua after he was baptized. The assembly roared, "Yes Poimandres, please tell us what happened next? What did Joshua do after he was baptized, and what became of John?"

So Poimandres continued, "Salome was troubled when she learned that her son was living among the religious mystics. Her sister Roxanne cautioned

her to give Joshua some space, but Salome was livid. The old king was demanding to know where his grandson was. Salome hoped he would name Joshua as his successor to the throne. But if Joshua failed to answer the king's summons quickly, he could lose the old man's favor. She had no intention of allowing the kingdom to pass into the hands of her brother Antipas. She had already polluted the old man's mind against Antipas. If Antipas became king, she would probably lose her head. If Joshua couldn't be convinced to leave his precious Essene friends, then she would fetch him back. She ordered the king's soldiers to escort her to the desert mystic's caves. They left with the receding sun on their backs. She arrived in Essene territory in the dark of night. In the pre-morning hours, her attendants set up large tents near the cave dwellings. A couple of Essene women discovered Salome's camp, as they went to the river to gather water. The frightened women dropped their clay pots, and ran back to the caves, sounding the alarm."

"Salome was a treacherous woman," Poimandres coolly observed, "and she was an expert in human nature. She had raised her son from birth, and she knew him better than anyone. She knew if he had already ignored her father's summons, there was little she could do to change his mind. But she also knew about John. His reputation extended far beyond the desert. Essene teachers proclaimed his name across the kingdom. But he was a man; she smiled, admiring her beautiful features in a polished brass mirror. She really hated men; but their nature was her specialty. She was a temptress, a seductress, a vamp, and often a whore. Her lasciviousness far exceeded her beauty. Her plan was simple enough; she knew Essene lookouts would recognize the royal

banners flying from her tents. No doubt, they would report directly to the prophet. As their leader, John would be obliged to come down to meet the royal visitors.”

“She did not have long to wait. Within an hour, several white clad men approached the tents from the direction of the hills. Salome’s guards mounted their horses. John was nobody’s fool; he knew these royals intended to take Joshua back to Masada. The guards stopped the white clad mystics as they approached. They checked under their garments for weapons. Then they led the mystics to Salome’s large tent in the center of the camp. They were ordered to wait, while the king’s daughter was informed of their arrival. One of the guards ordered the prophet to follow him into the tent, leaving his companions behind. It was a large caravan tent, at least thirty meters in diameter. The sandy ground had been covered with fine oriental carpets. The tables were set with a fine array of food and drinks. Servants stood by to attend the princess.”

“Salome was reclining on a pile of cushions, tossed high at the rear of the tent. She was covered with colorful silk veils. Oil lamps were hung from tripods; oozing an eerie flickering light. The princess moved lazily, serpent like across the sleek cushions that caressed her lavender oiled body. Her dark eyes glowed in the semi-darkness, like those of a dangerous feline, visible for a moment, then vanishing. But this cat didn’t vanish; she slid seductively closer to her prey. In an instant, she sprang from the pillow-strewn floor, and clapped her hands together, igniting a chorus from her musicians.”

“Their music was a strange hybrid brew of sensuous melodies. To John, it sounded like a perverse cacophony of sheer noise. It was the sound that sin

makes, throwing a rock through the windows of hell. And still she didn't speak; instead she twisted, closing like a reptile around its victim. A rainbow of scarves were attached to her body, her feet were naked, covered with toe rings and anklets. She shimmered across the carpets, her belly thrust rhythmically like Poseidon's tortured sea. Slowly, the serpent stirred in John's loincloth, and he began sweating, as the servants fanned the air. The princess danced around him, pulling one veil after another from her fragrant body, caressing his face, his arms, and his legs with the silky veils. She twisted and spun around the erect preacher. She heaved up and down before his captive eyes. The vixen exposed more and more of her lavender covered body, as veil after veil piled at his feet."

The watcher shifted, adjusting his jeans; "This was sheer torture for the prophet. It didn't matter that he was an Essene master; he was still a flesh and blood man. He turned his eyes away from the king's daughter, but she danced closer, rubbing her half naked body against the rigid mystic. She kissed him, forcing his hands against her firm, round breasts. She kept spinning around and around, losing one veil after the other, exposing more and more of her smooth dark body. The music screeched, his head spinning in a dizzying flurry. His vision was blurred by the multitude of colors, flying about in a twisting vortex. He closed his eyes, and then opened them again, soaking in Salome's beauty. She fell to her knees, whispering, "Lift your cloak." His spirit and mind ordered his hands to disobey, but his faithless appendages strayed, lifting his garment as she pulled down his loincloth. She looked up into his eyes, wantonly asking between oral motions, 'Where is my son, Joshua?' John shook his head.

She pulled away from the preacher. ‘Where is he?’ she demanded. John’s mind was not his own, ‘He has gone deep into the desert.’ Again she demanded, ‘Where in the desert! I must find him at once! He is needed at home; my father must see him before he dies.’ John tried to pull himself together. He pulled up his loincloth and dropped his cloak, ‘I do not know where he is, I have no way of finding him. It’s a rite of passage in our community, to go into the desert to pray for forty days. I’m sure if God wills, Joshua will return at the appointed time.’ ‘It will be too late!’ she screamed. She slapped the prophet’s face.”

Poimandres’ pace quickened, “Immediately, four huge guards threw John to the carpet covered ground. He looked up to his captor. She kicked him across his face with her bejeweled foot. She hurled insults. She pulled a scimitar from the belt of one of her guards.⁵² She flailed about with the heavy blade, ordering the guards to hold John still. For a final moment, he silently prayed to the goddess, to forgive his physical weakness, and to thank her for the opportunity to have seen the Christ. Then the naked princess swung the blade into his neck. The blade stopped, wedged midway through his spine. She failed to cut through to the other side. The princess couldn’t pull the blade from his bleeding neck. She was splattered with blood, as one of her guards finished the task. He quickly freed the blade, cleaving John’s head from his body. The Baptist’s headless corpse was pulled from the tent. His companions, waiting outside, fled when they saw their dead master.” Poimandres finished his tale with a tortured expression, as if witnessing the prophet’s murder once more.

⁵² A Scimitar is a sword with a curved blade that broadens out as it nears the point. (Dyson Teal)

Codex X (a)
Sermon on the Mount

“God doesn’t need the things of this world. So you should give to God that which belongs to God, your own spirit. Go forth, and teach that we should give to Caesar that which is Caesar’s and to God that which belongs to God.”

Noise was coming from the construction site. Some angels were casting a large bronze bell for the steeple. Others were blowing stained glass in a small oven. They worked tirelessly, completely absorbed in their tasks. A demon in the gathering raised his hand; “Lord Poimandres, where did Joshua go? Was he really in the desert? Why didn’t he come back to save John from Salome?” The others in the group were clamoring as well, “Yes watcher, tell us, where was he?” The Architect turned to the watcher, “Well, you’ve got their attention. You can’t just leave them hanging.”

The watcher nodded; “Salome waited at her camp for a week, hoping Joshua would return. But he never showed up. Eventually, she gave up and returned to her father’s fortress. He had wandered the desert, praying for forty days and nights, as was traditional. A few days after Salome left, Joshua wandered in from the wilderness. White clad mystics hurried to him, calling excitedly. They told him about John’s murder. Joshua cried out, tearing at his robe. Then he hurried to the caves. He heard that John’s headless body had been dragged from Salome’s camp, and left to dry in the sand. No one had found his head. The Essenes then prayed, asking Sophia for a new leader. Everyone turned to Joshua. He quietly stood, telling the group to gather and come with him into the hills. He climbed down from the cave to the path below, walking slowly so everyone, women and children included, could follow.”

Poimandres paused to take a quick drink; “I followed unseen, as he led the people from the caves to a rugged mount, sparsely covered with olive trees and shrubs. It was late in the afternoon; the cerulean sky was dabbled with woolly clouds. A cool breeze had risen from the sea. Tall trees lent a canvas of afternoon shade. The women found a little spring trickling from the hilltop, where they filled their water jars. Joshua called everyone together, asking them to sit where they could hear. He sat in front of the group and began speaking. At first he spoke too softly, making it difficult to hear. But after a minute or two, he found his pitch; ‘Children of Light, the murder of my cousin, brings Sophia one soul closer to returning home. She has sent me to deliver a message, a message of hope, love, and atonement. As I wandered in the desert, I pondered how I would give this message to you. Soon, we will all be called on, to teach about Sophia’s love. And when we go out into the world, we should teach our message this way;

‘Blessed are the servants of the goddess, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are those who comfort others, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after knowledge, for they shall receive gnosis. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see the higher Gods. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called Children of Light. Blessed are those persecuted for the goddess’ sake, for their reward is holy atonement. Blessed are the Children of Light, for you are a light shining upon of the world.’⁵³

⁵³ The *Beatitudes* (Latin) or "Blessings" are a set of eight blessings contained in the *Sermon on the Mount* found in the Gospel of Matthew. Similar sayings are recorded in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gnostic Nag

“Joshua looked into the hearts of everyone gathered on the mountain. They were entranced by his words; ‘I have not come to abolish the teachings of the prophets, for I walked with Enoch and Job. I’ve fought the devil Samuel, and defeated him. I’m the consort of the Queen of Heaven. And truly I say to you, Heaven and Earth shall not pass away, until she has finished her mission of atonement. She will not rest until all beings are one with her. Those who teach this to others, shall be remembered as her beloved. Ask of the goddess, and it will be given; seek her communion, and you will find it; knock on the door of her temple, and it will be opened. And remember in everything; treat people the same as you want to be treated, for this is an ancient law. The gates to the Kingdom of Heaven are narrow for few seek holy atonement; and the gates of destruction are wide and the way is broad. There are many who choose to return to hell, to suffer life after life, and few who seek salvation. Children of Light; beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You’ll know them by their fruits. Instead, do the work of our mother, and teach in my name. And when your souls return to the Fountain of Forgetfulness, I will remember you and say, I knew this faithful servant. And when teaching, begin with this prayer;

Our mother who lives in Heaven,

Holy is her name,

On Earth as it is in Heaven.

Hammati scriptures and in Jewish sources predating the Christian era. According to the two-source hypothesis, the Beatitudes originate with the lost sayings of Gospel Q. Matthew and Luke each incorporated Q into their respective stories. In Valentinus’ *Corpus Gnostica* we find another version of the sermon, with a decidedly Gnostic interpretation mentioning Sophia and holy gnosis. (Dyson Teal)

Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our faults,
As we should forgive others.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from Hell.
For hers is the kingdom, and the power,
And the glory, forever.
*Amen.”*⁵⁴

Poimandres continued, “When Joshua finished his sermon, the gathering was amazed. They realized he was the Christ. He paused for a moment, allowing them to absorb his message. Then he spoke again, ‘Children of Light, I must leave you now, to carry this message to the world. But I will take with me any who wish to follow. I will train these followers to be fishers of men.’ He waited to see if any were bold enough to volunteer. One by one, twelve men and one woman stepped up.”

“What happened next?” Azrael impatiently asked. “You still haven’t gotten to the part I remember.” “I am getting there, Azrael. Give me a chance to tell the story the way I remember it. For the next three years, Joshua and his friends walked the roads of the kingdom. Everywhere they went, they preached the same sermon. Word quickly spread that the King’s grandson had turned into a wandering mystic. Crowds gathered in every town and village to hear him. Large numbers were converted. They performed baptisms and the water communion wherever they visited. As word spread, the Romans worried he

⁵⁴ For a comparison to the Lord’s Prayer, see Matthew 5-7. (Angelica Herald)

was secretly preaching rebellion.”

“They sent spies to listen to his preaching. One day, as he was speaking about the greed of the temple moneylenders, a Roman spy in the crowd cleverly asked, ‘If the temple is corrupt and money lending is a sin, then shouldn’t we stop paying our tithe? And if the state is treacherous, shouldn’t we stop paying our taxes?’ Joshua realized the spy was attempting to entrap him. He smiled at the cocky spy, and then turned to one of his disciples asking for a coin. Philip reached into a little leather sack, pulling out a Roman denarius.⁵⁵ He handed it to Joshua, who flipped the coin about in his hands, studying both sides. Then the master asked the spy, ‘Whose picture is on this coin?’ The spy answered, ‘Gaius Quintus Decius, called Caesar, ruler of the known world.’⁵⁶ Joshua smiled, handing the coin back to Philip, as he spoke, ‘This silver coin is the life’s blood of the empire. Because this coin is Caesar’s property, you should give it to Caesar. And as everyone knows, the temple tax is also paid in Caesar’s coin. But I teach that you should give to God, that which is God’s. God is spirit; our souls come from the same spiritual substance as God. God doesn’t need the things of this world. So you should give to God that which belongs to God, your own spirit. Go forth, and teach that we should give to Caesar that which is Caesar’s and to God that which belongs to God.’ The Roman spy was angry when he heard this, because Joshua’s answer betrayed no crime. Nevertheless,

⁵⁵ *Denarius* (Latin) or “ten” was a Roman silver coin, minted between 211BC-275 AD. (Dyson Teal)

⁵⁶ Caesar Gaius Quintus Decius reigned from September 249 AD until June 251 AD. This places the life of Joshua well into the late Roman Empire, as opposed to the traditional dates for Jesus being a contemporary of Augustus Caesar. Many scholars are now questioning the chronology given by the early church fathers for the founding of Christianity, noting that Jesus’ birth was post dated to an earlier era to avoid any problems with contradictory eye witness accounts. (Dyson Teal)

he reported everything he had seen and heard to the governor and the king.”

“Herod was livid, when he heard his missing grandson, had turned up as a traveling mystic. He considered having him executed. But as report after report, told of Joshua’s large following, the king’s emotions gave way to pragmatic considerations. It occurred to the sick old man, that if his grandson had a large movement behind him, it would make it easier for him to rule as a popular king. And according to the tradition of the prophets, there was a story of an anointed one or messiah, a priest-king who would someday rule Judea, restoring the nation to greatness. Now Herod was too shrewd to believe Joshua was the messiah, but it didn’t matter. What mattered was what the people believed. ‘Yes,’ mused the old worm eaten king, ‘Judea shall soon be rid of me; in days the devil will take my soul. Joshua is now so popular, neither the Romans nor the high priest will dare challenge him as my successor.’ So Herod issued a royal proclamation, that on his death he would not pass the throne to his eldest son Antipas, but to his beloved grandson, the prophet Joshua. Salome heard her father’s proclamation with glee, realizing her lecherous brother would be powerless to harm her.”

Poimandres took a drink and finished his story, “When Caiaphas, the high priest in Jerusalem, heard the king’s proclamation, he was outraged. He had already made financial arrangements for Antipas to take the throne. Antipas had borrowed heavily from the temple moneylenders. Caiaphas planned to use this debt as leverage over the next king. It was a wonderful scheme, provided that Antipas took the throne.”

Codex X (b)
An Arrangement

“People from all over Judea, brought offerings to the temple to appease God. They brought sheep, goats, incense, silks, gold, silver, gems; everything of value was offered to win God’s favor. ‘Funny,’ thought Caiaphas, ‘God had never once bothered to collect any of the offerings.’”

The Architect hurried over to the construction site. Several workers were rolling the freshly cast bronze bell towards the steeple, intending to install it into the bell carriage while it was still warm. “No! Stop!” he yelled. “The core of the bell has to cool. If it isn’t allowed to cool, it will crack when we strike it. Now listen, the steeple frame must be hoisted up first, and secured to the ceiling joists and rafters before the bell carriage is raised.” The Architect was pulling a heavy rope, “Make sure the block and tackle are secure to the boom on the roof. Check those belts around the steeple. We don’t want it to fall as we’re lifting. Now tighten those belts. You two over there, we need more arms, now pull!” The builder was in his element, as the steeple slowly rose to the church top. Carpenters were on the roof, swinging the steeple over the eaves, before carefully lowered it onto the exposed ceiling joists. “Over there, you window joiners,” the builder called to a couple of angels that were working on the stained-glass window, “We will need more hot lead and sand.”

Poimandres had been speaking for hours and was ready for a break. “Azrael,” he suggested, “you were with Samuel while I was following Joshua. Would you share with our group what you saw?” Azrael nodded, “As you wish my Lord. Samuel and I were in Jerusalem. I remember watching the high priest Caiaphas, crawling towards the stone altar in the inner sanctum

sanctorum of the temple. ⁵⁷ *Once a year, the high priest would crawl beneath a heavy purple curtain, from the outer sanctuary into the holy of holies, to give an offering of incense to God. On the stone altar sat an oil lamp and a clay dish, filled with sand and charcoal. The priest's feet were bare; on his toes were two bells. Tied around his leg, was a golden-laced rope. If the high priest's heart were impure, God would strike him dead before the altar. Thus the sound of the bells to indicate he was still alive. If God struck him dead, the bells would fall silent. Attendants on the other side of the curtain would then pull the dead priest from the holy of holies, by the robe tied to his leg. Caiaphas adjusted the purple sash around his neck, and the jeweled plate attached to the front of his robe. He smiled, almost laughing as he jingled the bells on his toes, indicating he was still alive. 'Fools' he thought, 'if there really was a god living here, surely he would have revealed himself by now.' But he had never seen anything except a few insects, living in the forbidden room."*

Azrael sipped his water, "I watched as Caiaphas removed a burning ember of charcoal from a tin censor, using it to light more charcoal on the altar. Then he sprinkled amber flakes of frankincense on the charcoal. Soon, the small room was filled with the fragrant smell of burning resin. The high priest was expected to remain in the holy of holies for a while, to commune with God. But Caiaphas found the entire exercise a bit boring and monotonous. As far as he was concerned, there was only one true god, gold. Well perhaps two, gold and silver. At any rate, the business of running the temple certainly provided

⁵⁷ *Sanctum sanctorum* (Latin) for Holy of Holies. In common usage the term can also be applied to any reserved, private, or much-valued place. It was originally applied in a religious context to the most sacred place within a temple. (Dyson Teal)

enough of both, for him to crawl into a dark room to burn a little frankincense once a year. Indeed, the temple was more of a financial institution than a religious one. People from all over Judea, brought offerings to the temple to appease God. They brought sheep, goats, incense, silks, gold, silver, gems; everything of value was offered to win God's favor. 'Funny,' thought Caiaphas, 'God had never once bothered to collect any of the offerings.' So it was the job of the priests to dispose of the offerings as they saw fit. And the money just kept rolling in. The temple functioned as a national bank, charging interest for loans to rich and poor alike. Through the temple bank, Caiaphas controlled the financial transactions of merchants, traders, and caravan owners. More importantly, the temple was in the business of underwriting the expenses of the government. Caiaphas had even made loans to the Roman government, the local Roman governor personally, and to spendthrift members of Caesar's own family."

"He tossed a little more frankincense on the hot coals, while considering his latest investment. For several years, he had been making loans to two very important people. One was Antipas, son of the king. Antipas was a drunkard and a womanizer, who lived far beyond his means. Once Antipas assumed the throne, Caiaphas would control the kingdom through the financial leverage he held over the prince. The second person was the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Pilate suffered from an all too human weakness. He was an inveterate gambler. The governor lost money playing dice, betting on horses, playing cards, anything with a risky stake. He was now hopelessly indebted to the temple. If his superiors in Rome ever learned how much money he had stolen from the

tax coffers, they would crucify him. But Pilate understood the risks he had taken, and he understood his banker. Caiaphas would hold his tongue, for a price.”

“But now it appeared his plans were going astray. Herod, the dying king, just wouldn’t die soon enough. He had just announced his intention to pass the throne to his grandson Joshua, the popular wandering mystic. ‘What a fool,’ fumed Caiaphas, ‘What was he thinking?’ Joshua was a dangerous enemy of the temple. He was wandering around the countryside, preaching about his mysterious goddess, while claiming to be her lover. ‘Just how stupid are the common people?’ the wicked priest hissed. It didn’t matter, Joshua was dangerous, and his mother Salome was equally dangerous. She was already planning his coronation in the capital, as soon as Herod’s death was announced. The priest needed a plan before everything unraveled. If Joshua became king, it would only be a matter of time, before he replaced the temple priesthood, with his own Essene mystics.”

Azrael continued, “I watched as Caiaphas dumped a whole handful of frankincense on the hot coals, filling the room with sweet smelling smoke. He wanted to give his audience in the outer sanctuary a good whiff, before he retreated from the sacred chamber. ‘What was that?’ the priest froze, staring through the white smoke. He saw a dark figure, standing in the corner of the room. ‘But that’s impossible.’ Surely it was an illusion, a mirage. There was no other way into the holy of holies, except through the front entrance, and there were at least thirty priests on the other side of the curtain. But there it was; the figure stepped closer to the altar. The high priest could see its dark eyes. His

heart pounded furiously. He was terribly afraid; it must be the true God, Elohim.⁵⁸ Caiaphas knew his heart was impure; surely Elohim was here to strike him dead. He shook like a silk scarf, blowing in a hailstorm. But there was no place for him to hide. The dark figure spoke to the trembling priest, ‘Caiaphas, do not be afraid. I am your god, but I’m not Elohim. I’m called Samuel.’ The high priest was petrified. Samuel continued, ‘I am here to help you with your problem, Joshua. We can help one another.’ The demon smiled, as the high priest nodded his head.”

“Samuel then whispered to the wicked priest, ‘I have a plan to deal with Joshua and the Children of Light. Follow my instructions carefully, and we’ll both be rid of these pests. There is a fellow who works for you as a money counter in the temple. He is one of my own servants; he’s very dedicated. You might say we have an arrangement. You know him very well; he’s your bookkeeper, Judas. Give him everything he will need to find Joshua, money, supplies, whatever. When the time comes, Judas will deliver Joshua to us. Trust me Caiaphas; I’ve dealt with this kind of problem before. I know exactly what to do.’ Again the high priest nodded. ‘So do we have an arrangement?’ the demon asked. The priest finally found his voice, ‘Yes Lord, we have an

⁵⁸ *Elohim* is a Hebrew word that expresses the concept of divinity; notably used as one of the two names for God in Judaism. *Elohim* occurs frequently throughout the Bible. According to some scholars, the variations in God’s name are evidence of different source texts. *Elohim* was used as the name of God in northern Israelite sources, while *Yahweh* was used in Judean sources. These variations result from the theological differences between the northern and southern Israelite tribes before their captivity in Babylonia. (Dyson Teal)

arrangement.’ Through the heavy veil, the attending priests could hear Caiaphas’ muted voice. They whispered among themselves, ‘Caiaphas is speaking to God!’

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

***Codex X (c)
Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing***

“The mysterious figure never moved, but Judas could hear his voice well enough. It was the same voice he’d heard at his initiation.”

“Wonderfully told Azrael. You’re truly a gifted storyteller. Your memory is remarkable,” the watcher exclaimed. Azrael bowed, “Thank you brother, but there’s still more. As soon as Samuel made his deal with Caiaphas, he sent me to find this bookkeeper. Judas was a tormented soul. At one time he had been Caiaphas’ brightest student, and was well on his way to becoming a priest himself. That was before he spent an ill-advised hour with one of the many prostitutes frequenting the city streets. His mistake wasn’t paying for sex; Caiaphas himself was guilty of that sin on a regular basis. The woman had become pregnant, going to the priests to report Judas’ sin. He was thrown out of rabbinical school and forced to marry the woman. Still, Caiaphas remained fond of him, so he gave him a job as a temple accountant. Judas tabulated the value of religious offerings, the selling of livestock, the exchange of currencies, and the loan payments and interest owed to the temple bankers. He also kept Caiaphas’ personal accounts in order. He knew enough to have the priest

stoned if he had wanted. But Caiaphas had been like a father to the young scribe.”

“Judas was burdened with a terrible guilt. Years earlier, he had made a journey to the seaport of Joppa, to pick up a delivery of wine. There he had spent several days lazily mulling about the city. One evening in a small tavern by the docks, he overheard a conversation between black clad strangers about a foreign god and his dark rituals. At first he tried to avert his attention, but little by little, his curiosity drew him into their conversation. He approached the strangers and made his interest known.”

“At first the strangers were mute, but Judas persisted, buying them as much wine as they could drink. He discovered they worshipped a god named Shaitan. Judas was all ears. He had heard legends about the evil god, believing them to be mere fantasy. Now he wasn’t so sure. He was intrigued and remained in contact with the group. Eventually, he was initiated into the order. During his initiation, he underwent a ritual murder at the hands of three ruffians.⁵⁹ After the ritual, Judas was presented to a masked individual, the High Priest of Shaitan, who told him someday he would be expected to do a favor for the order. In exchange, Shaitan would grant him one wish. Not surprisingly, Judas wanted to become wealthy.”

“Within a few years, his wish had come true. Now it was time for him to pay his bill. Earlier in the week, he had been walking through a side alley towards his richly decorated home, when he again saw the masked figure

⁵⁹ During the Masonic third degree initiation, the initiate undergoes a ritual murder at the hands of three mallet-wielding assailants. It appears from the context of the codex that there may be an ancient connection between the priesthood of Shaitan and the Masonic Order. (Dyson Teal)

hiding in the shadows. The mysterious figure never moved, but Judas could hear his voice well enough. It was the same voice he had heard at his initiation. The master said very little, 'Soon, Caiaphas will make a strange but important request. Do whatever the high priest asks.' It seemed strange, but Judas quickly affirmed his loyalty. The shadowy figure then disappeared. Judas knew his soul was damned, but he saw no way out."

"A few days after this strange visit, he heard a knock on the accounting office door. He jumped up to greet Caiaphas. The high priest embraced him, 'Judas, my brightest and most loyal student, haven't I always helped you in your endeavors?' 'Yes, of course you have, my lord. I'm forever in your debt.' 'Judas, can I rely upon you for anything, no matter how difficult?' 'Yes my lord, anything!' 'Then Judas, prepare yourself for the most difficult task I have ever given you. I want you to locate and join the band of disciples following the wandering mystic, Joshua.' 'You mean the king's grandson, Joshua?' 'Yes Judas, I mean that Joshua. I want you to join the water-drinkers. Learn everything you can about them. But most of all; get close to Joshua. Gain his trust and confidence. And stay in contact with me as much as possible. I'll send disguised priests to listen to his speeches. You will recognize them in the crowds. When you see my men, pass any messages you have for me through them. Will you do this for me?' Judas was deeply troubled, but there was no doubt this was also the favor asked by his dark master. He had no choice, 'Yes, my lord. I'll do as you ask.'

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex X (d)

Oh! What a Tangled Web We Weave, When We First Practice To Deceive! ⁶⁰

“Pilate couldn’t help himself; he was drawn to the games. He loved the ponies, the dice, risking everything on a toss. He had won fortunes. He had lost fortunes. But now, he was in real trouble.”

Azrael leaned forward; “I should tell the group about another mortal, he was Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. I remember looking over his shoulder as he read a message from the imperial state secretary. His office was a Spartan affair located in Fort Antonia, the Roman military garrison in the center of Jerusalem. He had been assigned to the Judean command after falling out of grace with Caesar. ‘Anyplace but Judea,’ he had pleaded, but to no avail. It was either the Judean command or the galleys as a rower. For the Romans were known as a practical people. They provided opportunities for debtors to work off their obligations. Pilate was actually lucky. His wife was a cousin of Caesar’s. Otherwise, it would have been the oars for the hopeless gambler.”

Azrael continued, “Pilate couldn’t help himself; he was drawn to the games. He loved the ponies, the dice, risking everything on a toss. He had won fortunes. He had lost fortunes. But now, he was in real trouble. He seemed to owe everybody. He couldn’t play if he couldn’t pay off his debts. So he paid his debts of honor. And to pay these debts, he’d borrowed huge sums from the temple bankers. But now he had to pay the interest on these loans, so for several months, he had been skimming money from the tax coffers, money collected as tribute for Rome.”

⁶⁰ Sir Walter Scott (1808) from his poem *Marmion*. (Angelica Herald)

“I watched as he broke open a sealed message. His eyes darted across the document once, twice, a third time. He couldn’t believe what he read. The note was brief. It stated the imperial treasury was sending auditors to check the tax receipts. The rather low yields being sent back to Rome, simply didn’t match up with the recent population census taken earlier that year.”⁶¹ Pilate felt a cold shiver racing up his spine. As soon as the auditors discovered the financial shortfalls, his head would be handed to Caesar. There was no way out. There was nothing he could do. He looked at his skinny wrists and considered opening his veins, but he hesitated. No, he was still a gambler, and he knew his luck could always change. It just had to change.” Azrael smiled at his audience. They seemed to appreciate his narrative flare.

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

***Codex X (e)
Christ’s Doctrine of the Holy Trinity***

“Worlds and universes rise and expand, and then wash away again like castles made of sand.”

The Architect watched, as his workers finished attaching the steeple to the rooftop, ‘Soon they’ll be finished and then, oblivion.’ Poimandres felt a strong thump from inside the shoebox. The beast within was hungry. He pulled

⁶¹ The Romans were well known for making a population census every ten years. Because the lifetime of Joshua was known to have corresponded with at least three censuses, the dates for his life were inaccurately post-dated to the first and most famed census made by Caesar Augustus around 4 BC. This placed his date of birth at least two and a half centuries too early in church history. The census referred to here is actually the 250 AD imperial census. (Dyson Teal)

up a clump of clover and stuffed it in the box. The builder glared at the watcher, “Do you really think you can keep him prisoner forever?” Poimandres fumed, “I will never release the beast! Never! The unending universes must end; I’ve seen too much suffering to free it again.” He defiantly folded his arms across the box. Azrael tried to break the uncomfortable deadlock, “Neither of you is going to agree about freeing the beast. And I still haven’t finished my story. Shall I continue?” The demigods nodded.

Azrael took a sip of water and continued, “I followed Judas, as he asked everyone he met, for the whereabouts of Joshua and his followers. He finally found them near a lake called Galilee. It was near sundown when he approached the teacher and his disciples gathered along the shore. He counted a dozen white clad men and a well-dressed woman. A couple of young men were casting a net into the lake. They had tossed some fish up on the beach. Another man was making a fire. Others were sitting on the beach with the woman. A man at the center of the group was speaking. As Judas drew near, the speaker greeted him, ‘Come, and join us if you wish.’ Wiping his sweaty forehead, Judas introduced himself, ‘Greetings. I am Judas, a merchant from Caesarea. I’ve come to hear the words of the prophet Joshua. Are you the king’s grandson?’ Joshua looked into Judas’ eyes and answered, ‘I am the one who was raised by two mothers, both daughters of the king.’ He nodded to the woman seated beside him. Judas realized she must be one of the royal princesses. Joshua motioned for Judas to sit with the others. He sat, wondering if the woman was the notorious Salome or the pious Roxanne.”

Azrael grabbed a fresh bottle of water; “When Judas was settled, Joshua continued his discussion with his followers; ‘The message you must take to the world is difficult. Most will not have ears to hear. Most are blind, seeking after the things of this world, gold, silver, and fame. You must teach everyone to become a Christ. Anyone can become the Goddess’ consort by turning to the light within. But your task is difficult. It will sometimes seem that you are building sandcastles along the shore, simply to watch as your hard work washes away. But you are planting mustard seeds in hearts and minds. Sooner or later, these seeds will bear fruit.’”

“We have all known one another before, long ago in the distant past. This universe, created by the higher gods, is like the tide washing this beach. Worlds and universes rise and expand, and then wash away again like castles made of sand. But just as the sand remains the sand, tide after tide, so too do we remain who we are, life after life, and death after death. Many will mock you, when you go into the world to preach this message. They will call you heretics. But brothers, I say go out and teach the doctrine of the holy trinity of mind, spirit, and soul. Each of these is a ray of light, radiating from God’s rainbow. Your soul is composed of the Goddess’ own life force. It animates your body. Your spirit is the Christ hidden within; it is my inner voice patiently directing your destiny. And your mind is the impermanent home of your memories and emotions. The mind springs from the flesh, it lives and dies with the body. Protect this holy trinity of mind, spirit, and soul; that corresponds to the outer courtyard, the inner courtyard, and the holy of holies of your bodily temple. This holy trinity must become fully integrated, before you can be

reunited with the Goddess. Understanding the mysteries of the trinity is the key to being born again. Carry this doctrine to everyone you meet. Baptize those you teach as Children of Light, and give water communion to the pure of heart.”

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Azrael paused for a moment, sipping his water, “Judas seemed troubled by what he had heard. Joshua had not spoken about the king’s proclamation naming him as heir to the throne, nor had he spoken about the temple priesthood and the Romans. His message was unlike anything Judas had expected. For a moment, he even wondered if this was the right wandering mystic, but the presence of the royal princess appeared genuine enough. Judas stood up, ‘Lord, may I follow you for a time to learn more of your teachings?’ Joshua nodded. And then Judas asked, ‘Lord, do you plan to become king when your grandfather dies?’ Joshua took a baked fish from one of the disciples, ‘I will carry out the Goddess’ will. I’m already her king in heaven.’ Judas was even more disturbed by this answer,” Azrael went on, “but he remained quiet. Was Joshua completely mad? Had the prince lost his mind in the desert heat? Had he gone crazy listening to John’s prophetic ravings? Or was he telling the truth?”

“I followed the disciples for several weeks as they traveled across the kingdom. Large numbers of people came to hear Joshua’s sermons. Some underwent baptism and the water-drinker’s communion. But I noticed Judas

⁶² The pure ones, or Cathars (Greek *katharos*) was a name given to a Christian religious sect with Gnostic beliefs that appeared in the Languedoc region of southern France in the eleventh century. The Cathars were known as the Children of Light. They were well known for their practice of meeting in the open air or in members houses instead of churches. The Cathars practiced a rite of water drinking and baptism for new members at the time of enlightenment. (Dyson Teal)

avoided these rites. It is true,” Azrael went on, “that Judas probably wanted to renounce his former life, his work for Caiaphas in the temple, and his allegiance to the priests of Shaitan. But he couldn’t, he was too afraid. There was no escape; he was committed to his mission. I noticed from time to time, that he recognized one of Caiaphas’ agents in the crowd. Then he would secretly pass a message to the spy, updating the high priest on Joshua’s plans. But it appeared that Joshua had no interest in worldly affairs or in the fate of his grandfather.”

“Then one day, word arrived that the old king had finally died. The king’s heralds went throughout the kingdom, announcing the death of the old king, while proclaiming the assumption of the throne by Joshua. Hundreds of people descended on the camp of disciples, demanding to see the new king. Some of the people were official visitors from the capital. There was even a temple delegation sent by Caiaphas himself. The Roman governor sent a cohort of soldiers to escort Joshua to Jerusalem for his coronation. The soldiers treated him and his followers with all due respect, but they insisted he accompany them. He consented, and the soldiers allowed his disciples and Roxanne to follow. Of course, Judas went along as well.”

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex X (f)
Two Ships That Passed In the Night ⁶³

“Salome moved towards him like a serpent, twisting and turning her round hips like the rhythmic motion of the sea, up and down, back and forth. The temptress purred to the soldier. Her body was covered with lavender and musk...”

“Azrael,” Poimandres leaned forward, “your story is exactly the way I remember. I saw you wandering off the night before Joshua’s group reached the city. Where did you go?” The former demon cleared his throat, “My Lord, I left the group to report back to Samuel. I knew he would be with the high priest. Caiaphas was looking out the window of his palace. He peered into the dark night, as dark as the recesses of his lecherous soul. No one was moving at that late hour. The high priest hung his head out the window; he was waiting for a visitor. He waited for hours, and then in the distance, he heard the yell of the city’s gatekeepers. Few visitors were important enough to have the city gates opened in the middle of the night. But this visitor certainly was. Caiaphas heard the clapping of horses racing through the stone streets, up to the temple precinct and his palace. The horsemen stopped at his courtyard gate, demanding entry. Caiaphas ran down to his courtyard, as fast as his portly legs could carry him. He ordered his servants to bring food and wine for his visitors. He hurried to his guest, extending his arms to help him to dismount, ‘Thank Elohim, you’re finally here Prince Antipas. Time is short. We must work quickly, if we’re to stop Joshua’s coronation.’ The prince said nothing, his grim expression revealed everything. The two hurried inside. The same night, Princess Salome arrived in Jerusalem through another city gate. She had

⁶³Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1820) from the poem “The Battle of Lovell’s Pond.” (Angelica Herald)

convinced herself that Joshua would forgive her for murdering John. She spurred her horse along the empty city streets. She too had an important visit to pay.”

Azrael continuing, “When Samuel heard that Salome was in the city, he insisted that I find out what she was up to. She had gone to see the Roman governor. Pilate was unable to sleep; apparently, earlier in the evening, he had received two important messages. One was the formal notification from the imperial overseas office, confirming Caesar’s endorsement of Herod’s last will and testament, which named Prince Joshua as his heir. The second was notification that the imperial treasury auditors had arrived at the port of Joppa, only a day away. Pilate was instructed to make all of his tax receipts and census data available to the auditors as soon as they arrived. He was desperate. How could he return the money he had taken from the treasury before the auditors arrived? The temple bankers had already refused to make any more loans to the desperate gambler. There was no way out. He would be arrested for embezzlement, and carried off to Rome in chains. As he tossed and turned on his cot, he heard knocking on the door. ‘Could the auditors be here already? Who is it?’ he demanded. His orderly’s voice answered, ‘Governor, you have an important visitor.’ ‘Who in the hell could it be at this hour?’ he fumed as he answered the door. In the dimly lit hallway, was a familiar and lovely face. It was Salome, the dead king’s daughter. Pilate turned in the threshold, inviting her into his room.”

The listening demons perked up when they heard Salome’s name, “My lady,’ Azrael continued, ‘to what do I owe the privilege at this late hour?’ Pilate

wondered as he sat on the edge of his cot. Salome moved towards him like a serpent, twisting and turning her round hips like the rhythmic motion of the sea, up and down, back and forth. The temptress purred to the soldier. Her body was covered with lavender and musk, ‘Governor, I’ve come to beg a favor. I’ll do whatever you please, if you will grant it.’ I watched as she stalked her prey, removing her few items of clothing, ever so slowly. He stammered a little, ‘What favor?’ The olive-skinned princess leaned over the seated man; her breasts fully exposed. He could smell the nectar of her perfumes, ‘My son Joshua must become king. My brother intends to usurp the throne for himself. You must help me stop Antipas. I will do whatever it takes.’ The governor smiled, ‘Whatever?’ Salome kissed him, ‘whatever.’ The soldier didn’t reveal that he had already received the official confirmation of Joshua’s succession. Why should he give away an advantage, when it gave him an opportunity to save his skin?”

The demons clamored to hear the full details of Salome’s evening with the governor. Azrael laughed, as he skipped over the sexier parts of the story, “Pilate did not sleep. His nocturnal visitor had departed, just as the first rays of light broke over the Judean hills. Now he had a plan to return the money he had taken, before the auditors arrived. He had negotiated a financial arrangement with Salome; indeed they had negotiated for several hours. When Salome left the governor’s bed, he gave orders for the coronation customs of the Judeans to be strictly observed. It was customary for the newly selected king, known as the

‘anointed-one,’ to pay a visit to the temple where he would be crowned.⁶⁴ After the traditional rites at the temple were completed, Pilate wanted the new king escorted to his office. He had important business to discuss. He would present King Joshua with Caesar’s official ratification of his appointment. In exchange, Salome would then prevail upon her son to make a generous loan to the governor. Pilate would deposit this money into the tax coffers before the auditors arrived. Surely the heir to the kingdom and his lovely mother could come up with the money he needed. ‘Yes indeed,’ the gambler smiled, ‘my nocturnal meeting with Salome, was a sensuous and productive exchange.’

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

***Codex XI (a)
Beware the Treachery of Priests***

“Caiaphas had paid a dozen or so merchants to scream at the tops of their lungs, while overturning their own tables along Joshua’s path. Simultaneously, they threw dirt and feces at the disciples and the crowd. Instantly, the scene turned into a confusing full-scale riot.”

The Architect was giving his crew directions for installing the stained-glass window. Poimandres was watching, ‘Why does he keep building? It seems so pointless, so repetitive, ultimately so doomed to failure.’ But as he watched, he noticed that the lion-faced builder was smiling, and his workers were enjoying themselves, kidding around. They were happy at their tasks. ‘If only I could be so happy.’ After a little while, a group of angels and demons

⁶⁴ Anointing a king was equivalent to crowning him in ancient Judea. See 1 Samuel 16:13. (Dyson Teal)

reassembled around the rocks. When they settled down, Poimandres spoke, “Azrael, you’ve done a fine job telling your stories. I couldn’t have done better myself. Now I would like to tell the group what I saw when I arrived in Jerusalem with Joshua.”

“It was mid-morning, the same morning that Salome left Pilate’s bed. The Romans had announced that Joshua, the new King of Judea, would be arriving that morning for his coronation festival. Trumpets sounded, as the sun rose high in the morning sky. Joshua rode into the city, flanked by his mother Roxanne and a praetorian guard. The city’s streets were lined with thousands of screaming well-wishers, throwing palm branches before his party, as they slowly rode into the city.⁶⁵ Women tossed flowers and silk scarves from their balconies as the crowd screamed Joshua’s name. Judas was still riding with the group. He lowered his head, trying to hide his face. Many people knew he was Caiaphas’ chief accountant. He looked at the crowds in disbelief. He couldn’t believe how many people had come out to see the new king. He wondered how many actually understood Joshua’s strange message.”

“I followed as Joshua’s party approached the heavy bronze gates of the temple. I saw long lines of tables in the temple courtyard. Along these tables, merchants were selling animals to sacrifice. They were also buying and selling gemstones, exchanging goods for the appropriate sacrifices, or simply making loans and pawns. It was a disgusting sight before the temple. As the disciples passed through the gates, temple guards stopped their Romans escorts. Non-believers were forbidden from entering the temple courtyard, so the Romans

⁶⁵ Matthew 21-8 Jesus enters Jerusalem as the new king of Israel. (Angelica Herald)

were obliged to wait outside. Joshua and the disciples dismounted their horses and walked on foot into the courtyard. As Joshua walked, he grew more and more angry. Merchants recognized the new king. They grabbed at his white robe, trying to sell him sacrifices and jewelry. They were yelling, shouting, pushing, and shoving. The disciples fared no better, being shoved about like buoys on a rough sea.”

“And then suddenly, along the lines of merchandise tables, something terrible happened. Caiaphas had paid a dozen or so merchants to scream at the tops of their lungs, while overturning their own tables along Joshua’s path. Simultaneously, according to some prearranged signal, they threw dirt and feces at the disciples and the crowd. Instantly, the scene turned into a confusing, full-scale riot. The richly clad merchants tossed pots filled with lamb’s blood on the white clad mystics. The disciples were embroiled in fights. One of Caiaphas’ aggressive agents knocked Joshua to the ground. Raphael, one of the invisible angels protecting Joshua, snapped the assailant’s neck like a twig. Another instigator took a cage filled with doves, and slammed it into Roxanne’s face. Caiaphas’ men feed the crowd’s rage; everyone was turning over tables, busting up animal cages, and spilling coins across the ground. Simon, one of Joshua’s closest disciples, grabbed a bolt of cloth from a table, swinging it wildly as he fought through the chaos. People were pulling out weapons, stealing as much stray money as possible.”

“I watched as the disciples fought their way into a circle around Joshua,” Poimandres continued, “fighting towards the courtyard’s northern wall. Roxanne was screaming, as Joshua pulled her from the grasp of an assailant.

She kept swinging and flailing as her son pulled her away. The temple guards had been ordered by Caiaphas to give the riot a chance to get violent, before intervening. But they waited too long. Just as they began restoring order, Joshua's Roman escort burst into the courtyard. Their intrusion on sacred ground inflamed the crowd, as they used deadly force to quell the rioting. As the mob and the Romans fought, two local followers of the water-drinkers, a man and wife named Joseph and Elizabeth, yelled to the disciples. Roxanne immediately recognized them. Joseph shouted above the noise, directing the disciples to a side gate that led into a small alley."

"The disciples shoved and pushed through the mayhem. They managed to slip out through the side gate. They followed their friends through narrow twisting alleys, jumping over baskets, and past animal carts, running until they were a safe distance away. Then they blended into the crowded streets, following their friends back to their home. Elizabeth tried to make her unexpected houseguests feel welcomed, but the situation was tense. Joseph spoke to Joshua for a few moments, and then slipped out into the streets. Elizabeth introduced her young son Saul to the disciples, and then began preparing the evening meal. Judas appeared more nervous than the others. He was pacing across the floor. Joshua spent this time playing with young Saul, teaching him an old Essene song. Roxanne's had held up well through the riot and the chase, but now she was crying."

"When Joseph returned, he said the temple guards were conducting a house-to-house search for Joshua. He had heard street criers yelling that Caiaphas had charged Joshua with blasphemy, for provoking a riot on holy

ground. It was only a matter of time before the guards searched their house. The disciples were alarmed, but Joshua said they wouldn't be recognized if they changed out of their white robes. Joseph found some worn garments and gave them to the disciples. Elizabeth suggested they have something to eat while it was still daylight. They could then slip out of the house in small groups after dark. She passed her guests freshly baked bread and a flask of wine. Joshua compared their meal to the holy communion of water drinking and baptism. No one noticed that Joshua hadn't removed his own white robe. Judas ate nothing. Suddenly, he blurted out, 'I must leave. I have somewhere I must be.' Judas bolted for the door. 'Do what you must,' Joshua called out as Judas fled. When darkness fell, the disciples slipped out of the house. They managed to safely rendezvous outside the city gate, near an olive grove. I decided to follow Judas to see what he was up to."

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex XI (b)
Judas

"Caiaphas' words were laced with a counterfeit paternal warmth that imitated sincerity as lust mimics love..."

The Architect passed Poimandres a fresh bottle. The group had grown larger as workers finished their tasks. Poimandres took his drink and kept speaking, "I followed Judas from the house. He ran at a maddening pace towards the temple, his mind torn by doubts. He ran past the temple gates, past

the temple guards, straight into the counting house. He burst through the door, and found Caiaphas frantically counting coins, trying to determine how much money had been stolen during the riot. Judas gasp as the high priest excitedly motioned for him to sit, take a drink of wine and get his breath. Caiaphas' words were laced with a counterfeit paternal warmth that imitated sincerity as lust mimics love, 'Judas, my son, what has happened, are you injured? What happened in the courtyard this afternoon? Do you know where Joshua is hiding?' The high priest poured Judas another goblet of wine that the spy gulped down in one swift motion. 'My Lord, are we doing the right thing, I mean persecuting Joshua? I'm afraid we are making a terrible mistake. I think he may really be the Christ.' Caiaphas studied his trusted servant's face, 'Yes Judas, he is, but he has no place for you in his kingdom. We both know about the agreement you made with Shaitan. Don't you remember my voice in the alley and from the night of your initiation?' Caiaphas' voice had transformed into the sinister voice of Shaitan. Judas nodded, resigned to his fate. His chance meeting with the black clad strangers in Joppa had been no accident. Caiaphas had been pulling the strings all along."

"Judas sighed as he betrayed Joshua to the wicked priest, 'He is hiding in the house of two Essenes living near the northern gate. I left there only a little while ago. His mother, princess Roxanne, was there as well.' 'Good my son,' Caiaphas' voice was still the dark master's, 'You will lead my guards to their house at once.' 'Yes, but first may I ask a small favor?' Judas sounded defeated. 'Yes, of course,' Caiaphas' voice had returned to normal. 'I need to borrow a hundred gold pieces. I have enough at home to repay you in the morning.'

Caiaphas was puzzled by the strange request. He knew Judas had a fortune stored away. 'Where in the world could he be planning to spend so much money?' But Caiaphas needed to get him moving, 'Yes, of course,' the priest answered. He grabbed an old knotted walking cane and limped across the counting office. Judas wondered how the old man had injured his foot but made no mention of it. 'Here, take this bag of coins. Now lead my guards to the house where Joshua is hiding, before he escapes.' 'There is no hurry,' Judas answered, 'Joshua doesn't plan to flee. He doesn't need to. He could vanquish us all if he wished. He knows I am coming.' Judas grabbed a large jug of wine and flung the heavy bag of gold over his shoulder. A cohort of guards followed as he leisurely led them away."

Poimandres stared menacingly at Azrael; "I remember watching you as well brother. You were in the temple with your dark master Samuel. He had finally managed to take full possession of Caiaphas' mind and body. The two of you were enjoying Judas' guilt, weren't you?" The watcher's expression was grave, accusing. Azrael said nothing. The Architect broke the awkward silence, "Enough of this. Azrael's been washed clean. He has taken the water communion. Now he's an angel of light, just like you." "Of course, but it feels like it was just yesterday. Please forgive me. Now as I was saying," the watcher went on with his tale, "When Judas and the temple guards arrived at the house, the front door was wide open. Joshua was sitting on a stool in the threshold. Joseph and Elizabeth were hiding with little Saul under their bed. The guards rushed towards the white clad mystic as he stood. They tried to grab him by his arms, but they couldn't reach him. Invisible figures were

blocking their way. More guards tried, and again they failed. Judas was standing off in the darkened street, his eyes downcast, darting furtively to see what was happening. Joshua stepped away from the doorway, 'I will allow you take me, but no one shall enter this house.' The guards that were pushing against the unseen angels fell forward, seizing Joshua. Others rushed the door, but they were blocked. Eventually they gave up; they had their prisoner."

"Judas silently watched, as Joshua was manhandled and led away. Joshua never looked back towards the dark street where Judas stood, but Judas felt the weight of his eyes nonetheless. The betrayer waited, 'Didn't the guards realize angels were guarding the doorway? Joshua could have killed every one of them instantly.' He was torn within. He knew Joshua was the Christ, but he still didn't accept his message. He just didn't like Joshua, he resented him. He knew he was damned. As he left the scene, he began putting coins into his mouth, one by one, washing them down with wine. I followed as he wandered out through the same city gate the disciples had fled through earlier. He headed towards the high hills of the Judean wastelands." Poimandres put his bottle on the boulder and wept. More demons were cleaning their faces, asking Azrael for the rite of water communion. At this rate, the Architect realized, soon there would be no demons left at all. Poimandres' plan was working.

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex XI (c)
Trial of Joshua

“And then he turned to his mother saying, ‘I forgive you for murdering John. Tomorrow we shall step into the Kingdom of Heaven and you will see the Goddess.’”

For an hour or so the newest angels confessed their sins, unburdening themselves to the others. It was becoming the custom, every time one of the demons transformed, he would tell his story. The builder called to the demons painting the church; “Let the paint set-up for a while and dry. Come over here and take a break.” Poimandres turned to Azrael, “You were at Joshua’s trial, I remember seeing you there when he was condemned.” “Yes Lord, your memory is flawless. We both saw what happened.” “Then Azrael,” the lion-faced builder prodded, “why don’t you tell us what you saw?” “As you wish my Lord,” Azrael began, “It was the second hour after midnight, and Caiaphas had convened an emergency meeting of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the supreme judicial, religious, and administrative council of government. Joshua was brought before the assembly in chains. He had been stripped of his linen robe, only his loincloth remained. The guards had beaten him. There was blood running from his forehead. One of his eyelids was split. Caiaphas slammed his wooden cane against the stone floor. The council members were startled to see him using a cane. ‘Caiaphas has never needed a cane before,’ they whispered among themselves, ‘has he been injured?’”

“The Sanhedrin members stood in three great semi-circles around the outer chamber of the temple. Behind them hung the great purple curtain, concealing the stone altar of Elohim from the eyes of the profane. Several

guards stood near the accused prince, holding him by chains. Caiaphas waited for the council to settle down. He cleared his throat and announced, 'Joshua, prince of Judea, you stand accused of blasphemy, heresy, and forgery. How do you plead?' At first, Joshua said nothing; he looked completely defeated. Then he raised his voice, 'So you say priest, but I've committed no sin in this world.' Caiaphas feigned shock at this bold assertion, and there was a general rumbling of incredulity in the court. 'How dare you Joshua, how dare you claim you are without sin! Such a claim, even I as high priest would shutter!' Joshua just stood there before the court, facing his accusers. 'This is heresy and blasphemy enough as far as I'm concerned,' Caiaphas ranted, 'but you're also accused of committing sacrilege in the temple courtyard, by inciting a riot in which four innocent bystanders were killed.' Again the members of the Sanhedrin murmured, a few shaking their fists at the miserable defendant. 'Joshua!' Caiaphas self-righteously roared, 'You are also accused of treason against the rightful King of Judea.' At that signal, Antipas appeared accompanied by soldiers. They dragged Salome behind them in chains. They had already beaten her."

"Antipas wore a purple robe and Herod's golden crown. He strutted about cocksure, with a condescending air. He raised a scroll in his hand proclaiming, 'I have my father's last will and testament. In it, he names me as his lawful successor. Only an hour ago, the high priest anointed me with oil, making me King of Judea. I declare Joshua is a forger. My sister Salome and her son forged the proclamation that named Joshua as heir to the throne. They are guilty of trying to usurp the throne for themselves.' A long grin drew across

Caiaphas' face. He had the whore Salome and her son where he wanted them. He demanded, 'Salome and Joshua, how do you plead to the charges of treason and forgery?' Joshua said nothing; he was looking at his fallen mother, trying to remember happier times. Salome looked into Joshua's eyes and shouted, 'I was with my father when he declared Joshua his heir, and I was with him when he sent out his proclamation! Joshua is the lawful king!' A guard took the handle of his sword and rammed it into her face, knocking her to the floor."

"Antipas leaned over his injured sister. His face was virulent. He let a large glob of spit drop from his mouth onto her bloody face. The purple clad fool laughed at his wretched relatives. Then he turned to the assembly, 'Enough of this already. They're both guilty. Sanhedrin, pass your sentence quickly. I have a kingdom to rule.' The members of the court chattered loudly among themselves, but then Joshua raised his head, 'Uncle, you have only a short time to rule this kingdom of dirt. But my kingdom is not of this world. I will rule forever beside the Queen of Heaven.' And then he turned to his mother saying, 'I forgive you for murdering John. Tomorrow we shall step into the Kingdom of Heaven and you will see the Goddess.' He lowered his gaze as the guards hit him across the mouth, silencing him."

"Caiaphas was impatient," Azrael continued, "and demanded an immediate verdict. The members of his court unanimously raised their hands, condemning the mother and son. The condemned prisoners were hauled away to a nearby cell to await execution in the morning. Antipas whispered into the high priest's ear as the prisoners were being dragged away, 'I do not want them stoned to death by our guards. There is an ancient legend that the messiah will

be stoned to death by his own people. We do not want him turned into a martyr. Use your influence with the governor; get the Romans to crucify them for treason against the empire. Let the foreigners take the blame for their deaths.’ Caiaphas nodded as Antipas abruptly left the temple.” Azrael wiped a little bead of sweat from his brow as he finished his story. The angels and demons were utterly amazed. They could not understand why Joshua had surrendered himself so willingly to his enemies.

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

***Codex XI (d)
Double or Nothing***

“Pilate slumped down into the leather chair behind his desk. He pulled open a drawer, removing a sharp stiletto. Then he stepped over to the polished brass mirror, hanging on the wall over his washbasin.”

“Azrael, please continue. You’ve got everyone’s attention,” Poimandres urged. The Architect nodded, “Yes Azrael, even the meanest demon in the group is listening. Please go on.” The angel opened a fresh bottle of water and continued; “It was now four hours after midnight. I followed Caiaphas as he limped across the courtyard to the Roman garrison. He demanded to see Pilate, and in a minute or two we were standing in front of his heavy office door, as a centurion cautiously knocked. Pilate was already awake when he opened the door. He had already received news of Salome’s arrest. He saw his plans for escaping the auditor’s slipping away. Caiaphas shoved his way into the office,

‘My lord governor, please forgive the late hour, but we have important business to discuss that won’t wait until morning.’

“Caiaphas, what in the hell is going on? I’ve heard your men have arrested princess Salome and her son the king. Do you know what this means? Joshua’s already been confirmed as King of Judea by the senate, by the imperial foreign office, and by Caesar himself. As far as we’re concerned, he’s already king. Have you any idea what you’ve done?’ The Roman appeared genuinely outraged. But his anger was only to hide his fear. He desperately needed Salome’s money to cover-up his embezzlement. Caiaphas limped across the office, his cane clicking against the stone floor. He stepped to the barred office window, and looked out at the flickering torches along the walls of the fortress. His eyes followed as centurions patrolled the wall. And then the twisted priest turned to the governor, and callously asked, ‘How much money have you taken from the imperial coffers? Didn’t you know Salome has no money of her own? Everything she spends is borrowed. Borrowed from the temple treasury, borrowed through my good graces. I’ve already heard from that whore about your arrangement with her. And I know why you need the money. You need it tonight, before the auditors arrive in the morning.’ Caiaphas stated the cold facts. Pilate was floored, exposed, and cornered by the sinister merchant of faith.”

“Go on Azrael, go on,” Poimandres urged the angel to continue. Azrael nodded, “And then I heard the governor, ‘Salome has no money?’ ‘Not one gold shekel she can call her own,’ the vile priest hissed. ‘She took you for a fool governor, as she’s taken every man to cross her path. But don’t worry. From

what I've heard, your people have a way of working off your debts, the slave-galleys.' Caiaphas enjoyed mocking his overlord. It was sweet revenge. Pilate slumped down into the leather chair behind his desk. He pulled open a drawer, removing a sharp stiletto. Then he stepped over to the polished brass mirror, hanging on the wall over his washbasin. 'Caiaphas,' the dejected man's voice was flat, unemotional, 'we Romans have learned from those whom we've conquered. I've learned from the Greeks how to die well, by slicing open the veins of my wrists, and plunging them into cool water to ease the pain. It will be like falling asleep. And Caiaphas, I've learned from you as well. You've taught me about human treachery.' Pilate then poured a pitcher of cool water into the washbasin as he looked into the mirror. There was no fear in his eyes, only a gambler resignation."

"But at the last moment, Caiaphas interrupted, 'I have a proposal for you governor. I require a favor. I need you to execute Joshua and Salome for high treason against the empire. If I have the two executed, they may become martyrs for a cause neither Rome nor Judea can contain. The people will blame Antipas and turn against his government. I cannot afford to have this happen. But the people already hate you and your occupation. There's little you can do to incite their hatred further. If you have them executed by Roman centurions, your rule will be no less popular than it is already. Governor, we can help each other. Execute the traitors in the morning, and tonight I'll deliver to you as many bags of gold as you need to prove to the auditors your bookkeeping is flawless. You can still save yourself. I also have friends who owe me in Rome. In a few months, I can arrange to have you transferred out of here to a more,

shall we say, friendly post. You can put this place and your financial problems behind you. You're a smart man governor; you know an opportunity when you see it. I'm offering you a way out.' Caiaphas was a gifted salesman, and he couldn't afford to have Pilate open his veins, at least not yet."

"Pilate relaxed his grip on the stiletto, still pressing it against his wrist. Was this another throw of the dice? For a few moments hope crept into his mind, then he remembered the senate confirmation from Rome. It still lay on his desk. Hope sank again, as he watched the high priest standing behind him, his reflection caught in the mirror. 'Caiaphas,' he admitted, 'that is an elegant plan, if only the senate and Caesar hadn't already confirmed Joshua as the new king. Neither you nor I have the power to undo a confirmation signed by Caesar himself.' Pilate made a half turn and pointed to the parchment lying on his desk. The priest picked up the parchment. He looked at the perfectly lettered calligraphy, naming Joshua as the heir to the throne. He eyed Caesar's large signature, Gaius Decius, and felt the wax seal into which the ruler of the known world had pressed his signet ring.⁶⁶ Caiaphas had never received a document from the great Caesar himself, even though he had loaned thousands to the ungrateful man's family. Pilate turned away from the mirror to see what the priest was doing. Caiaphas moved his fingers across the raised edges of the wax seal; realizing that it represented a power he could never buy. Overcome by hatred and envy, he rolled the parchment in his hand and put it to the lamp

⁶⁶ Caesar Gaius Quintus Decius reigned from September 249 AD until June 251 AD. One of the so-called 'barracks emperors' because of their short reigns often conducted over the course of several military campaigns. Gaius Decius died in battle against the Goths at the Battle of Abritus in June 251 AD. This passage confirms that the dates for Joshua's life were later post-dated by church historians. (Dyson Teal)

flame on the desk. 'This confirmation never arrived. I'll send my men to hunt down and kill the mail couriers before they have a chance to leave the city. I already know where they're sleeping tonight, by morning they'll be dead.' Caiaphas didn't give the governor a chance to protest. The die was cast."

"Pilate looked aghast as the high priest held the document with Caesar's signature in the fire. But there was an elegant simplicity to this solution. After all, Pilate's acknowledgement to Rome had been sent through the very same couriers, those poor unfortunates who would soon depart the land of the living. Perhaps the confirmation and the messengers had been lost at sea? Who would know, these kinds of misfortunes happened frequently enough. As long as he could prove to the auditor's that he had all of the gold assessed and ready for shipment back to Rome, he would be safe. 'Very well priest, bring your prisoners here in the morning. I'll have them crucified at sunrise on the hill called Golgotha, just outside the city. There will be plenty of witnesses to report that the Romans, not the Judeans, were responsible. Caiaphas, I expect the money in my treasury tonight, and I want to be transferred out of this miserable country.' Pilate turned away from the priest and returned to the water basin. He lowered his hands into the cool water, rubbing them vigorously, 'I wash my hands of this matter; it's your responsibility to see that everything goes according to plan. I'll proclaim that Antipas enjoys Roman approval of his reign. I'll take care of the legalities later. Now leave, I never want to hear of this again.' Caiaphas hurried from the chamber as Pilate was rubbing his hands. But his hands were stained with blood, and try as he might,

he couldn't wash them clean.”⁶⁷ Azrael was pouring water from his bottle, over his hands, rubbing them vigorously.

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

***Codex XI (e)
Death of Joshua***

“Roxanne stayed back; holding Saul in her arms as her sister and son hung from those cursed olive posts. She could hear her sister moaning, she saw her son's chest heaving. She let out a soul splitting wail, ‘Sophia, please, take them now!’ and both expired. The torture was over.”

Poimandres exclaimed, “Graphic! Dramatic! I had no idea about this deal between Pilate and Caiaphas. I knew there was something strange afoot. Why would the Romans execute Joshua, when it was a Judean court that convicted him? It all makes sense now. I was with Joshua and Salome when they were convicted, and I followed them as they were led down into the temple dungeon. They were shoved into a small cave like cell, cold iron bars slammed behind them. The only light came from a small oil lamp attached to the limestone wall. The bleeding prisoners fell to the floor. Joshua strained to lift himself as he put his arms around Salome. She had been a beautiful girl once. But she had been seduced by the temptations of the world. Just outside the cell, I saw the angels Raphael and Ariel doing just as they had been ordered, nothing at all.”

⁶⁷ Matthew 27:24 Pilate washes his hands of Jesus. (Angelica Herald)

Poimandres continued, “Joshua called out to Sophia and immediately she appeared in the cell. She wailed. She wanted to heal his wounds at once. But she knew she couldn’t. Everything depended on his act of self-sacrifice. She wrapped her arms around the suffering mortals. She remained with them until daylight, when the temple guards came and took them away. She kissed Joshua and Salome saying, ‘I will see you in Heaven soon, it will be short.’ And then she disappeared as the guards flung open the cell door, and violently pulled the mother and son out. They shoved the prisoners up the twisting limestone stairway to the surface where they emerged from the fortress. They were now standing in the same courtyard where the riot had broken out the day before. The guards turned their prisoners over to a group of Roman centurions.”

“The governor was expecting trouble from Joshua’s followers, so he had doubled the size of the execution squad. Two Roman horsemen rode up to the prisoners, their horses dragging two olive tree poles. The executioners worked quickly, five men to each prison. Two burly centurions grabbed Joshua by his arms, two by his legs. The fifth had a mallet and two sharp wooden stakes. Joshua was laid across the wooden pole, his arms stretched out over his head. They crossed his wrists one over the other, pressing them hard against the pole. The centurion drove the stake through both wrists and into the olive pole with one powerful blow. A second blow drove the stake the rest of the way. Joshua’s pain was excruciating. His body heaved forward; every nerve was on fire.”⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Crucifixion was intended to produce a particularly slow and painful death. The term excruciating derives from “crucifying.” Crucifixion to an upright pole or tree trunk was called a *crux simplex*. The single pole crucifixion was quite common. (Dyson Teal)

The executioners then repeated the process, driving a stake through his ankles. The other team was staking Salome. It was over in less than a minute.”

The angels and demons were shocked by Poimandres’ vivid account. The ancient watcher wiped perspiration from his ebony face with his bandana, “Now with both victims staked to the poles, the Roman drivers kicked the sides of their mounts. The horses pulled the poles through the dusty courtyard into the streets. The poles twisted on the ropes, causing the victim’s bodies to be dragged against the streets lacerating their flesh. A bloody trail was left behind the horses as they moved towards the city gate facing Golgotha. The victims had finally stopped screaming. A large crowd converged along the macabre procession. Centurions lined the streets, as an officer read aloud a proclamation, declaring Prince Joshua and Princess Salome guilty of treason against the empire. The crowds became louder and louder. They began throwing stones at the soldiers, shoving them, some even trying to break through to the victims. The Romans were brutal, shoving back against the onlookers, kicking, hitting, and smashing their shields into the faces of the protesters. The whole scene was truly unbelievable, ghastly,” the watcher’s voice trembled.

“The news spread through the streets like locust across an ancient nightmare. Word quickly reached Joseph, Elizabeth, and Roxanne. The three ran in the direction of the street noise. Elizabeth grabbed her little boy, bringing him along. They reached the street where the prince and princess were being dragged. They screamed, looking on in horror. Unable to help, the distraught friends followed along as closely as possible. When the ghastly

procession reached the city gate, it turned towards Golgotha. Centurions had already dug two deep postholes. They untied the two olive poles from the horses, lifted the poles upright and dropped them into the holes, thump... thump. Both posts were now standing upright, side-by-side on top of the hill. Centurions surrounded the place, preventing onlookers from getting too close to the victims.”

“It was now mid-morning, the day was growing warmer. Dust from the commotion settled over the scene. Salome was faintly moaning. Joshua was still breathing, but he made no sound. Joseph and Elizabeth got as close as the centurions would allow. Roxanne stayed back; holding Saul in her arms as her sister and son hung from those cursed olive posts. She could hear her sister moaning, she saw her son’s chest heaving. She let out a soul splitting wail, ‘Sophia, please, take them now!’ and both expired. The torture was over. I watched as Sophia opened Heaven’s gate for their souls. She gave her prince a long embrace. Christ kissed her, promising he would never leave her again. He knew he was lying, but for the moment it didn’t matter. Salome’s soul darted like every other soul into the fountain, but when it emerged from the other side, it still wasn’t clear. She still had to atone for her mistakes. Her little fiery spark flew straight back to Earth to be born yet again.”

“The bodies were left hanging for most of the day. Thousands of people came out to see the dead prince and princess. Some were curious; most were outraged. But no one challenged the armed centurions. Roxanne stayed there throughout the day. She scribbled a note and gave it to a Roman guard, asking him to deliver it to her brother. Joseph and Elizabeth went home with their son.

A cooling breeze settled over the hills as evening approached. The king's soldiers came up the hill and relieved the Romans. They lifted the poles from the ground and removed the corpses. They tossed the bodies into the back of an oxcart and rode down to where Roxanne was waiting. They stopped in front of the mourning princess as she looked into the cart. The captain of the guard spoke in dutiful fashion, 'Princess Roxanne, your brother, the King has granted your request. Will you be accompanying us back to Masada?' 'Yes,' she said in a low voice, 'I wish to take them home to our family's burial vaults.' She left with the soldiers, riding behind the oxcart."

The demon Naqael was sitting at the back the assembly. He blurted out, "Lord Poimandres, did Christ's death atone for humanities' sins as his church taught? Is this why Joshua allowed himself to be so brutally murdered? Was his blood truly magical?" Naqael's question was important. It was the greatest stumbling block Samuel had thrown under the feet of humanity. The watcher thought about it for a few moments. He wanted to be clear in his answer, "Naqael, many years after Joshua's death, a false church arose in his name. It claimed Joshua rose from the grave three days after his execution. This claim was a lie perpetrated by Samuel and his priests of Shaitan. These false teachers claimed that if a person had faith that Joshua had died for their sins, they would be forgiven and atoned for through his magical blood. Nothing could be further from the truth."⁶⁹ Joshua taught that humanity had to be fully reintegrated or

⁶⁹ Vicarious atonement is the term given to a number of Christian theories for atonement regarding Jesus' death as a substitute for others. The third century French Bishop Irenaeus first argued the theory of vicarious atonement. Several objections are traditionally raised against the theory although the idea is still popular in many fundamentalist denominations. These objections included: (a) Substitution in legal/criminal matters is illegal and unethical. (b) An innocent should not be made to suffer for the guilty.

enlightened to become one with the Goddess. He taught his followers to strive for the complete integration of body, spirit, and soul into a single, ever-present awareness. This was his secret doctrine of the holy trinity. Through reintegration, a person's soul would be saved, finding atonement or at-one-ness with the Goddess. He taught people to discover their own Christ-consciousness. He brought this gnosis or knowledge to humanity, but he didn't sacrifice himself so people could avoid making sacrifices of their own. His death had no magical powers. This was simply a lie taught many years after his death to confuse humanity. Naqael, there's no magical blood; nobody can change who and what you are for you. You must want to change." Poimandres was pointing towards the demons, "Each of you must do the heavy lifting. You must do the difficult work for yourselves. It was Christ's mission to lead humanity back to the Goddess, not to carry them back. Now I'm showing each of you the way back to your angelic natures."

Naqael flipped the coin; he saw the light. He was crying for joy, wiping the harlequin's makeup from his face. He asked for some water, and received the water-drinker's communion. Now there were only a handful of demons left. Poimandres went on to finish his story, "For a little while, I followed Roxanne and the oxcart carrying the bodies. I followed them deep into the desert until it was evening. And then I heard a sound that I felt drawn to investigate. It was a disturbing, gagging noise. It sounded like it was coming from up the road. I

(c) Vicarious atonement causes God the father to act unjustly towards his own son. (d) Vicarious atonement was completely unnecessary. (e) Vicarious atonement derogates the character of God. (f) Vicarious atonement removes the necessity for personal responsibility for one's own ethical choices. These arguments are often accepted by progressive denominations today, and appear to be more in line with the original teachings of the early Church. (Dyson Teal)

flew forward towards the horizon. A few miles away, I found the source of the noise; it was Judas who had left Jerusalem before dawn. He had been walking the parched road all day. Carrying the heavy bag of gold and large jug of wine had slowed his progress. Every few minutes, he would take a coin from the bag and place it in his mouth. He left it there for a moment, and then took a large swig of wine, washing the coin down his throat. Apparently, he had been swallowing gold all day. The heavy coins were lodged in the traitor's stomach and bowels."

"Judas was blind drunk. As the sun waned, he staggered towards the side of the road, following the edge of a cliff. He had no idea the oxcart carrying Joshua's remains was following a few miles behind. He finished off the last of the wine and gold, as he fumbled and swayed in the twilight. His guts were twisting in agony as his bowels pushed to move the heavy metal through his intestines. His stomach was distended; he couldn't urinate due to the pressure against his engorged bladder. The inability to piss multiplied the effects of the alcohol. The pain was maddening. He staggered closer and closer to the edge of the cliff. Before his drunken eyes, he thought he saw the image of his dark master, standing in the middle of the road. He abruptly turned away from the specter, stepping straight off into the abyss. His body smashed against the valley floor with a sickening thud, splitting his belly wide open. Coins and wine erupted from his carcass like seeds from an overripe pomegranate, spilling on the ground."

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex XII (a)
Purple Haze

“He opened the tin and removed a large pinch of ground herb. He stuffed the pipe, fired it, and inhaled. In a few moments the feeling was wonderful. He no longer felt the chill of winter. His problems vanished into the purple haze...”

Poimandres’ story left the assembly pensive. The Architect tried to keep the group focused. He sent a few angels back to the church to complete their tasks. But many others were too troubled to work. Azrael made a suggestion, “Perhaps I should explain how Joshua’s message became corrupted by Samuel.” “Yes please,” the Architect quickly agreed. Azrael grabbed his water and began; “I silently watched as the hour grew late, and the fire weak in the dining hall at Masada. Sitting in his father’s chair, Antipas studied the woolen wall coverings insulating the cold room.⁷⁰ The tapestries appeared dull in the dim lamplight. He turned to the table beside him; it still had the old king’s opium pipe and a tin box filled with crushed poppies. He opened the tin and removed a large pinch of ground herb. He stuffed the pipe, fired it, and inhaled. In a few moments the feeling was wonderful. He no longer felt the chill of winter. His problems vanished into the purple haze, his mind wandered, straining to remember what had vexed him. ‘Oh yes,’ he remembered now. Now it seemed a trifling matter. It was that troublesome cult, the Children of Light. Not that he particularly care one way or the other about religion. The whole business was just a way to skim taxes from the poor, disguised as tithes for the temple. No, as far as he was

⁷⁰ Herod Antipas (reigned 250-253 AD) king of Judea. After inheriting his throne from his father Herod the Great, Antipas ruled as a client of the Roman Empire. As Joshua predicted at his trial, Antipas died early in his reign due to a drug overdose or ‘brain fever.’ (Dyson Teal)

concerned, as long as they stayed out of politics, he didn't care what they believed."

"But there was the rub, wasn't it? Antipas pulled at his jet-black beard. He reached over to refill his father's pipe, and inhaled once more. These Children of Light were refusing to pay their temple tax, and their numbers were growing, particularly in the cities. It didn't matter if a few poor cave dwellers refused to pay their tithe, but it became an issue as they made converts in the cities. More and more were refusing to pay their tithe. Caiaphas was putting pressure on him to do something about it. For weeks, he had been held up in semi-seclusion at Masada, only a hundred yards or so from the family tombs holding the bodies of Herod, Joshua, and Salome. He was filled with indecision. His father had never allowed him to make important choices, and now he didn't know how to rule. It would be terribly unpopular for him to antagonize the Children of Light, especially after the death of Joshua. But he couldn't afford to cross Caiaphas either. The high priest was demanding his tithe, and his loans would dry up if the temple banker didn't get his money." Azrael sighed, "But now with the intoxicating purple smoke filling his lungs, Antipas recognized the solution to his problem. He couldn't imagine why he had failed to see it earlier. He would order the arrest of a dozen or so prominent members of the Children of Light in Jerusalem. His soldiers would order the mystics to either pay their tithes to the temple or be stoned to death for heresy. Those who refused to pay their tithes would pay with their lives. This would send a clear message throughout the kingdom that Antipas wasn't to be trifled with."

Codex XII (b)
Martyrdom of the Saints

“My God requires no gold or silver. My God is not of this world. I have been atoned for by Christ, who was incarnate in Joshua, the true King of Judea. My soul will become one with holy wisdom, the Queen of Heaven. Your temple has nothing to offer.”

Some angels were assembling the church pews and pulpit. Others were installing the stained-glass window. Poimandres noticed a few of the demons whispering with one another. He called to the small group, “What troubles you?” Beelzebub answered, “Lord Poimandres, we’re confused. If Joshua was killed, and he didn’t rise again, then why were his followers so obsessed with his resurrection? And what became of the Children of Light, did they survive? And what became of Joshua’s other mother, Roxanne?” A smile spread across the watcher’s dark face, “You do have a lot of questions, but if the Architect has nothing pressing, I’ll tell you what I remember.” The lion-faced builder was nodding, “The work is coming along. We have time to listen.” “Well then,” Beelzebub asked again, “What happened to the Children of Light after Antipas issued his deadly order? Did they pay his taxes or not?”

Poimandres took a fresh bottle from the cooler; “I was standing one morning in a narrow street in Jerusalem. I watched as the morning light shimmered in a dusty cloud, rising from the cobbled stone street. It was the street where Elizabeth and Joseph lived, the same street from where Joshua was led away two years earlier. Children were playing in the street, laughing, and dodging passing horses and donkeys, stirring up the dust that had caught my attention. Linens were hung out, drying in the crisp morning air. Merchants

harked their wares, selling household items; bread, oil, fruits, common enough things in a common enough neighborhood. Little Saul was running back and forth between two older boys, as they tossed a leather ball to one another over his head, laughing as they deliberately threw it too high for him to grab. He ran back and forth, jumping as high as he could, but he could never quite reach it. It was a peaceful morning,” Poimandres sighed, “I longed for a mortal’s childhood, so I could experience the wonders of chasing that ball. Joseph was working in his carpentry shop behind his house, making a chair for a patron. Elizabeth was hanging out wet clothing, on a line strung in the alley between her house and the neighbor’s.”

“As she reached into her basket for a piece of clothing, she heard horses rushing through the street. The children instinctively froze, then scattered from the street, making way for the passing horsemen. Little Saul ran towards his parent’s house, stopping in the doorway. Joseph heard the sound of the horses as well, thinking nothing of it. But Elizabeth was anxious, she was expecting a visit from her friend, the princess Roxanne. Perhaps she was being escorted by her brother’s soldiers.”

“The horsemen stopped in the street, near the door where Saul was standing. About fifty of the king’s soldiers dismounted and dispersed, blocking the streets and alleys. The captain remained mounted as he pulled out a parchment from a leather tube. Clearing his throat, he began reading at the top of his lungs; ‘Our king, his most excellent Antipas, son of Herod, and friend of Caesar, does justly decree that no household is exempt from paying the king’s taxes, the kingdom’s contribution to our Roman protectors, nor the temples’

holy tithe. Any householder who refuses to pay the tithe shall forfeit their lives to the king's justice. His Excellency has heard there lives amongst our people a sect calling itself the Children of Light. He has heard this cult teaches its followers to refuse to pay the temple tithe. The king hears such things with grave displeasure, and therefore decrees that henceforth his own soldiers will collect the temple obligations."

"The captain then withdrew another document and opened it. Before reading, he eyed the people standing about in the humble neighborhood. A large group of people now lined the narrow streets. They suspiciously eyed the soldiers who were blocking all of the exits. I heard low murmurs in the crowd, but no voice was loud enough to draw attention. No voice except the captain's as he began reading again; 'I have a list of suspected cult members living in this neighborhood. They have failed to pay their temple obligation. As I call your name, come forward to pay your tithes to these collectors,' the captain motioned towards several soldiers holding canvas bags, 'or you shall be punished.' He began calling names, 'Aaron son of Benjamin husband of Rachael, Jude son of Caleb husband of Ruth, Joseph son of Joseph husband of Elizabeth...' Joseph heard his name and looked surreptitiously to his wife. What should he do his eyes wondered? Her eyes flashed back a tiger's fiery gaze. He understood her meaning perfectly."

Poimandres continued, "The carpenter said nothing. He and his wife stood before their door with their little boy, hiding behind his father's legs. The captain ordered his collectors to begin going from house to house, asking the occupant's names and checking them against the list. Each time they identified

someone on the list, they demanded the temple tithe. Most complied. They ran inside their dwellings, reached under their beds or hearthstones, and retrieved their hidden treasures, a few silver coins to pay as tribute to the temple. But a few refused. They loudly denounced the temple and its priests. These people were roughly ushered to a side alley at spear point. When the collectors called out Joseph's name, he and his strong willed wife stepped forward. The collector demanded, 'Do you have tribute for the temple?' Joseph said nothing. The collector again demanded, 'This list indicates that you have paid your due to the king and to Caesar, but not to God.' Joseph looked into the collector's gray eyes and answered, 'My God requires no gold or silver. My God is not of this world. I have been atoned for by Christ, who was incarnate in Joshua, the true King of Judea. My soul will become one with holy wisdom, the Queen of Heaven. Your temple has nothing to offer.' The collector flashed with rage as he slapped the carpenter's face. Before Joseph could return the collector's blow, several soldiers grabbed him, pulling him and Elizabeth aside with the others who refused to pay."

"An hour or more passed, as the collectors continued their work. Eventually, they had either collected the money owed, or the delinquents themselves. Those who refused to ante-up, were herded into a narrow dead end alley. Guards with crossed javelins and drawn swords prevented their escape. The crowd grew larger as the collectors finished their task. Little Saul was hiding behind a rainwater cistern, watching as his parents were marshaled into the alley. He was silently crying. Nobody seemed to notice him or the other children, whose parents had been taken by the soldiers. The captain rode into

the alley. He yelled to the people herded there, 'You have been deemed heretics by our king and his most righteous high priest. Your lives are forfeit to the temple!' Then he turned on his horse and yelled to the crowd of onlookers, 'Who among you good citizens that have paid your taxes, who among you will assist me in carrying out the king's justice?' For a moment or two the crowd remained silent, but then I heard voices, 'I will help, why shouldn't they have to pay the tithe? I'll help, pick me. I'll help too.' Soon a roaring cry rose in the streets, 'Stone them! Stone the heretics! Kill them, stone them all!' The ugly mass of humanity grew louder and louder. Men began pulling up paving stones from the streets, and bricks from the walls of their own houses. The furious mass grew more excited, yelling and screaming, lusting for blood, craving the deaths of those who shared their laundry lines and made their chairs. Such was the ugly nature of man," lamented the watcher.

"In a minute or two the crowd transformed itself into a homicidal mob that the soldiers could no longer contain. They withdrew their picket line, allowing the stone-carrying mob to close in on the unfortunates clustered in the alley. Joseph and Elizabeth were with the others, pressed against the alley wall, facing the mob as it rushed into the narrow passage. The martyrs formed a tight group as the men stood before their wives, protecting them as long as possible. They began praying, 'Our mother who lives in Heaven, Holy is her name, On Earth as it is in Heaven...' before the stones flew into the cluster of huddled people. Large paver stones and bricks smashed the victim's faces and arms, their legs and heads. The terrible mob quickly pummeled the martyrs into a bloody pulp."

“Saul was still crouching behind the wooden cistern in front of his house. He didn’t understand what was happening. Hours passed and night fell over the terrible scene, but the child remained hidden behind the barrel. That evening, Roxanne finally arrived at her friends’ house. She found the place empty. She tore through the rooms looking for Saul, under the bedding, behind the furnishings, in the carpentry shop. But he was nowhere to be found. So she stopped looking and began singing an Essene song. Softly and melodiously, she sang with a tenderness that would have calmed the soul of the wildest beast. Cautiously, the frightened child crawled out from his hiding place, still holding his leather ball. He crawled towards Roxanne and buried his face in the folds of her dress. She put her arms around the boy and rocked him. Later that night, she took the orphan from the city as her own.” Beelzebub and the others were completely engrossed by the story.

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex XII (c)
Saint Paul

“Saul would teach the Greeks and the Romans, even if he didn’t sincerely believe himself. As long as he had faith, someday he would know. He cried aloud, tearing at the hem of his robe, promising his dead mother that his faith would sustain him.”

The Architect was puzzled, “Watcher, what does any of this have to do with my daughter’s death. Her loss is the only thing that matters. I’m overwhelmed by guilt. Did Sophia and Christ eventually redeem humanity? So

far, all I have learned is that the mortal's lives were truly miserable, filled with nothing but murder, lies, and betrayals." Poimandres sounded grave, "I understand great builder, but you must be patient. Soon I'll reveal everything. I have the answers to your questions. But first, I must explain what happened to Saul after his parents were murdered."

"I watched as Saul matured into manhood," the watcher began, "and I remember being with him one evening, as he read a letter from his friend Thomas. He was reading by lamplight, tugging nervously at his long beard. It was late. Earlier that same day, his adopted mother Roxanne had died. It had been a terrible day. Saul put the letter down on the table and stood. He walked to the mouth of his cave. It was the same cave where Joshua was born, so many years ago. He looked out into the night, watching the twinkling stars. He noticed the reflected glow from the cave lamps along the edge of the sea. He tried to remember the faces of his parents, but they were only faint memories. He tried to remember their voices, but he couldn't. They were lost forever. He tried to remember his childhood home in Jerusalem, but all he remembered was the night Roxanne had rescued him."

"Roxanne had died that morning. She was seventy-five years old. She had been the daughter of a king. She had raised Joshua as her own son, only to see him crucified. And then she had raised another orphaned son. She was a shrewd woman, and luckily Antipas had died early into his reign. A younger brother, Ben-Herod, became the next king. Ben-Herod had a soft place for his older sister. He had allowed his sister and Saul to live with him at Masada. Ben-Herod provided Saul with the finest education the king's nephew could

receive. And Roxanne raised young Saul within the Essene religious community.” Poimandres reached for his bandana, wiping sweat from his brow.

“Her tired heart had stopped beating as she lay resting in her bed. Saul had been sitting beside her. She didn’t suffer. Her soul just left her body behind, moving on to be with Sophia. Saul wiped his eyes as he looked out into the dark canopy of space. Roxanne had convinced her brother to allow Saul to study Greek and Latin. He was fluent in both languages. He studied under renowned Greek philosophers in Egypt and Asia Minor. His religious education had introduced him to the teachings of Joshua. He studied under many of the original disciples. He knew everything there was to know about Joshua, but still he doubted. He respected the old disciples, but he could not bring his rational, philosophically trained mind, to believe Joshua was actually the Christ. ‘How could Joshua be the Christ?’ he privately wondered. His own parents had died for this belief; his foster mother fervently believed her son was the Christ. He tried to remember the night, twenty-eight years earlier, when Joshua had played with him, right before he was killed. He tried to remember the sound of Joshua’s voice as he sung. He tried to remember, but he couldn’t. Joshua’s voice was lost forever, gone like a fugitive dream in the groggy morning.”

Poimandres put away his bandana; “Saul was still considering the letter from Thomas, one of the original disciples. Thomas had just completed a new book. It was a collection of Joshua’s sayings, and he wanted Saul to come to

Greece to teach with him.⁷¹ Thomas was getting old; he needed a younger teacher to help lead the Christian Greek community. And Saul wanted nothing more than to leave Judea behind forever. Now with Roxanne gone, he had no reason to stay. He had taken the rite of the water-drinking communion, just as Joshua had taught his followers. But still, he didn't really believe. How could Joshua have been the Christ? Christ was a cosmic force or cosmic logos, the pure word before creation.⁷² He believed in the Christ force as an Archon of pure knowledge. But he couldn't believe Sophia was an actual goddess, anymore than he believed she had a real lover. And he certainly didn't believe the cosmic Christ had actually come to Earth as a human. Privately, he remained a disciple of Plato, greatest of the Greek philosophers, and of his most famous student, Plotinus.”⁷³

The watcher continued, “As Saul looked into the night sky, he knew it was time for a change. He stepped back into the cave and picked up the letter from Thomas. He quickly scribbled an affirmative reply. Athens was the city of Plato, of Socrates, and Aristotle. It was a cosmopolitan city, so utterly different

⁷¹ The *Gospel of Thomas* is a well preserved early Christian, non-canonical collection of Joshua's sayings discovered near Nag Hammadi Egypt in 1945. Scholars speculate that these codices were buried in response to a letter from Bishop Irenaeus declaring a strict canon of Christian scripture. The gospel was written in Greek, as was the *Corpus Gnostica*. The original text was bound in a leather codex designated as Codex II, and is composed of 114 sayings attributed to Joshua. Almost half of these sayings resemble those found in the canonical gospels, while the others were previously unknown. The *Corpus Gnostica* codices were discovered in earthenware jars, hidden in a cave, a few hundred yards from the discovery site of the Nag Hammadi collection. (Dyson Teal)

⁷² *Logos* (Greek) for “word.” *Logos* is a technical term in philosophy, used to denote the active principles of order and knowledge. Neo-classical philosophers identified the term with the divine animating principle pervading the universe. The term is closely related to the Greek term, *Christos* meaning ‘pure or crystal clear.’ Therefore, the Christ or the Word, are both philosophical terms denoting pure, undifferentiated knowledge. (Dyson Teal)

⁷³ Plotinus was a third century neo-platonic philosopher, most famous for being the author of the *Enneads*. Saint Paul and Bishop Valentinus were both heavily influenced by neo-platonic philosophy. (Dyson Teal)

from the empty deserts of Judea. He wanted out of the desert, out of the caves, and away from the past. He wanted to forget the murder of his parents. He wanted a new life, and then in an flash of insight, he realized he could become a new man.”

“He resolved to become a teacher of a new and wonderful philosophy, a system of ethics uniting faith with knowledge. He had never really understood Roxanne’s favorite gospel, the Pistis Sophia, before now. In that gospel, Joshua taught that both faith and wisdom are equally important for atonement with God.⁷⁴ He didn’t believe that Joshua had been the Christ incarnate, but it no longer mattered. He had faith that someday, somehow, he would experience gnosis.⁷⁵ Someday, he would no longer need faith; someday he would actually know that Joshua was the Christ. Saul would teach the Greeks and the Romans, even if he did not sincerely believe himself. As long as he had faith, someday he would know. He cried aloud, tearing at the hem of his robe, promising his dead mother that his faith would sustain him. And then as a token of a new beginning, he returned to the letter and signed it... Paul. A new name to symbolize a new life. Faith would sustain him. He folded his reply and blew out the oil lamp on the table. Then he retired to his straw mat for a few fitful hours of rest. Early the next morning, he posted his letter to Athens, then set off on foot for the coast to find a ship to Greece.”

⁷⁴ The *Pistis Sophia* is an important Gnostic text, possibly written by the disciple Thomas, teacher of Saint Paul. It relates the Gnostic teachings of the transfigured Joshua to the assembled disciples, including his mothers Roxanne and Salome. The *Pistis Sophia* also relates the complex structures and hierarchies of heaven and hell. (Dyson Teal)

⁷⁵ *Gnosis* (Greek) meaning ‘to know.’ Gnosis is revealed knowledge of profound spiritual truths, especially the knowledge possessed by the ancient Gnostics. (Dyson Teal)

Codex XII (d)
Constantine the Great ⁷⁶

'My lord, your empire has no soul. We have no single belief or purpose, holding us together. We are a realm of strangers. The empire is only as strong as its strongest general, and right now that is you. But who will come next? The empire needs something stronger than the army to unite it. It requires something stronger than you. It needs an idea, an imaginary king in heaven who will reign forever.'

"Poimandres," the Architect was speaking, "I am still confused. How did Joshua's message become so perverted by Samuel? I know that Christ's mission on Earth profoundly altered history, but I still do not understand how this affected my daughter. And I still do not know how you managed to capture the dreaming god, Ancient of Days." As the Architect uttered the beast's name, Poimandres felt a strong kick in the shoebox. He pressed down on the lid. The noisy prisoner settled down. "Builder," the watcher replied, "I will tell you how I captured the Ancient One, and I'll tell you everything about the deaths of Christ, Sophia, and Samuel. But to understand the twilight of the gods, we must learn more about this noble human, named Paul." Azrael had been waiting for a chance to speak, "Poimandres, I played a role in transforming Paul's words into something monstrous. Perhaps we should begin there?" The watcher agreed.

Azrael grabbed a fresh bottle and began, "I was in the habit of watching the Roman Emperor Constantine. He was in a dark and sullen mood, pacing back and forth along a long reception hall. At either end of the hall were great

⁷⁶ Flavius Aurelius Constantinus (272-337 AD) commonly known as Constantine the Great, was Roman Emperor from 306 to 337 AD. Well known for being the first Roman Emperor to convert to Christianity, he reversed the persecutions of his predecessors and issued a public proclamation, adopting Christianity as his preferred religion in 325 AD. He was the founder of Constantinople. (Dyson Teal)

double archways, guarded by black clad praetorians, standing at attention. Along the whole length of the hall, scale models and architectural renderings for his new capital city, were set-up across long tables. The new capital would be a glorious city named for the emperor himself, Constantinople. He studied the scaled down city, the coliseum, and a new temple to his favorite god, the Sol Invictus.⁷⁷ He adopted sun worship after briefly seeing a halo over a bridge, before defeating his last opponent for control of the empire. His temple to the sun would be the centerpiece of his new capital, a city built between Asia and Europe, bridging the eastern and western worlds.”

Azrael continued, “But for now, the city was largely in the minds of his architects and engineers. He appeared more tired and worn than his fifty-five years would have warranted. He wore a simple purple robe, leather slippers, and carried a leather parchment tube under his arm. His eyes were gray, his hair silvery, with only hints it had ever been darker. His face was weathered, leathery, and blotched. He had the features of a lifelong soldier. The emperor wasn’t alone. As he paced back and forth, one set of eyes intently followed him. These were the eyes of his chief advisor, a writer and author. He was the most trusted man in Constantine’s small inner circle. His name was Josephus the Judean.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *Sol Invictus* (Latin) meaning invincible sun was the official solar god of the late Roman Empire. The cult of the Invincible Sun appears to have originated in the Egyptian cult of *Ra* and the Greek solar gods *Apollo* and *Christos*. Several Caesars favored the solar deity. These Caesar’s had their images depicted with a solar halo framing their faces on Roman coins. Constantine was the last Roman Caesar to appear on imperial currency with a solar halo framing his face. The birthday of the Invincible Sun was celebrated on December 25th, and is believed to be the origins for the date of Christmas. (Dyson Teal)

⁷⁸ Josephus (235-327 AD) also known as Titus Flavius Josephus was a Romano-Judean historian of priestly and royal ancestry. He recorded Judean history with a special emphasis on the various Judean

“Josephus also wore a plain purple robe, his hair as white as snow, his eyes old, but still as sharp as a bird of prey’s. He appeared to me, to be very old, perhaps in his early nineties, and yet the younger emperor did not share his vigor. Perhaps it was the weight of responsibility resting on Constantine’s shoulders. Perhaps the many problems plaguing the empire wore away at him, or perhaps the constant civil wars with his rivals. Regardless, he was not a happy man. He was filled with an impatience felt by those driven by a mission, while sensing the inevitability of death closing in over the horizon.”

“Josephus watched the soldier turned emperor, as he paced up and down the length of the pink marble lined hall. ‘What was worrying the emperor?’ wondered the old Judean. ‘Was it the attacks by northern barbarians that perpetually plagued the empire? Was it the internecine conflict with the Persians? Was it the raging inflation that debased the currency, causing merchants to give up their trades to become vagabond religious hermits?’ No doubt the empire was in a depleted state. Only force held it together. Perhaps he was concerned about the many religious factions, competing against one another for adherents. Each in their nefarious way was determined to undermine the authority of the state. But the old man remained quiet, patiently watching his client, eyeing the ruler of the western world like a caged lion, pacing back and forth in its cage. Josephus smiled, yes indeed; client was a good term for the emperor. After everything was said and done, Constantine was only a client. He had worked for the ruler since Constantine’s army

rebellions against the Roman occupation. Reportedly, he witnessed Joshua’s trial and is credited by many as recording some of the earliest historical accounts of Jesus Christ outside the gospels. (Dyson Teal)

stormed the Milvian Bridge, taking the capital. Before that, he had worked for the emperor Maxentius, and before that, the emperor Diocletian, and before that, he had been a local historian in Judea. Josephus never forgot his Judean roots. He had made a small fortune, selling a popular history about his people's struggle against the Romans. At heart, he was still a writer; he enjoyed the creative process, the research, and the correspondence with his sources. And now, he had what every armchair historian longs for, a front row seat to history being made. He was the closest advisor to the emperor. He could help mold and shape history itself, not just passively record it."

Azrael took a sip, "It was proving a long afternoon for the old writer. He felt trapped, watching the fitful ruler. Was the emperor trying to decide to eat his companion or examine the model buildings? Josephus was used to his patron's dark moods, but his old legs were growing weaker, standing there for so long. He longed for the liberty to sit in the royal presence for a few moments without appearing disrespectful. His feet were going numb; he inadvertently shifted his weight from one leg to the other, sighing aloud. Constantine turned towards him like a beast that has heard the stirring of a waterfowl in the reeds. His ears drew back like a cat's, the moment before it pounces on some feckless creature. Josephus straightened his back, facing his client. Constantine approached his elderly advisor, motioning for him to come closer. Josephus was relieved to have the chance to move as he kept pace with the leader. 'Josephus,' the emperor spoke in a low, almost intimate tone, 'I have no peace; this world gives me no pleasure at all. How shall I ever find joy?' Josephus slowly shook his head. 'Josephus, have you any idea what I have in this tube?'

'No my lord,' the writer answered, 'but I can see you are vexed by its contents.'
Constantine stopped in his tracts, pulling from the leather tube two documents,
both with the imperial wax seal. He gave the documents to his companion.
Josephus read the first scroll. It was a rather dull report from the pontiff of the
official deities."

"I read the report over the old man's shoulders," Azrael explained, "It was
a matter of fact report, confirming the state religion was losing money and
adherents to the many minor cults cropping up across the empire. The pontiff
*complained that the cult of Mithras was growing too powerful in the military.*⁷⁹
The cult of Isis had migrated from its home country, attracting new followers
all over the empire. There were disturbing reports of a Judean offshoot
religion, its adherents called themselves the Children of Light or Christians.
Josephus was well aware of this sect from his youth, when he served as a clerk
for the high priest Caiaphas. He had been a young man, but he remembered
Prince Joshua, his mother Roxanne, and cousin John the Baptist. He was at the
trial when the prince was condemned. He had never forgotten those twisted
events. Indeed, how could he? They had been the catalyst leading to the final
Judean rebellion against the Romans. It was a failed attempt, a disastrous
rebellion that precipitated the mass migration of his people across the empire.
And as they spread, some carried with them stories about Joshua. Their belief
that Joshua had been the Christ was blasphemy to the tradition bound author,

⁷⁹ The Cult of Mithras was a solar religion originating in Persia. It became popular with the Roman military from the 1st to 4th centuries AD. Information on the religion is based mainly on interpretations of its surviving monuments. The religion had a complex system of seven grades of initiation with ritual meals. December 25th was considered to be the birthday of Mithras. Many scholars see elements of Mithraism within early Christianity. (Dyson Teal)

but he still recorded these tales for his Roman audience. The tale of the rebellion and of this odd religious sect had made fascinating reading, first bringing him to Diocletian's notice."

"The old author finished reading the pontiff's report and re-rolled the parchment. He laid it across the rooftops of the miniature Constantinople. Then he cleared his throat, 'My lord, when I was a young man in Judea, our people had one language, one tradition, one religion, and one priesthood. As long as our people shared one faith, we stood as one united people. I learned that strength comes from a unity of faith and culture. But when my people began embracing the teachings of outsiders, we became weak. And when we were no longer united, we became an easy prey for foreigners. My lord, you worry because your people no longer have one heart and mind; they no longer even have one language. There is nothing holding this state together other than force. And as I read the pontiff's report, I knew his suggestion to your most excellent highness was based on fear. His suggestion that you suppress all foreign religions will only make them stronger. Even you my lord, you have embraced the cult of the invincible sun. It is a Greco-Egyptian religion. As long as your people believe in many things, they will never be able to follow just one leader.' Josephus paused as the emperor reflected on his words. The soldier was a sharp man, no doubt, but he was not known for deeply nuanced considerations. 'Pray old man,' the soldier-emperor questioned, 'what do you mean by your words and your account of your people's troubled history?"

Azrael continued, "Josephus pulled a chair near, without asking for permission to sit. It was a bold act in the imperial presence, but Constantine

didn't appear to notice. He simply pulled up another to sit beside the writer. Josephus continued, 'My lord, your empire has no soul. We have no single belief or purpose, holding us together. We are a realm of strangers. The empire is only as strong as its strongest general, and right now that is you. But who will come next? The empire needs something stronger than the army to unite it. It requires something stronger than you. It needs an idea, an imaginary king in heaven who will reign forever. It needs a single religion, just as my own people once shared. Unity of faith can provide the strength, the metal to hold this empire together, long after you are gone. Your new capital, Constantinople, must become the center of a new worldwide faith, embraced by all humanity. And you my lord must be the head of the new faith. Once you control the hearts, minds, and souls of the empire, everything else will be easy to dominate.'

"The old historian stopped to give his words time to penetrate the ruler's mind. The general's mind was sharp. He always sought innovative solutions, unexpected and decisive. The ruler interjected, 'Yes my friend, I know about your people and their religion. But our empire is so large, which religion would the people universally accept? If I support only one religion, all of the others will turn against me. Isn't it far better to favor them all?' The emperor was genuinely puzzled, but Josephus had a ready answer, 'My emperor, my suggestion is a little more nuanced than solutions tried and failed in the past. I suggest you declare for the smallest of the factions, the smallest of the religions, the Christians. They're a tight knit group. Their community has survived several persecutions by your predecessors. They share a common belief while scattered across the empire. If you offer them your royal patronage, they will

embrace you. They will become your most loyal supporters. You will have a small but fiercely loyal core of supporters in every community across the empire. And as others learn that you favor this sect, they will join it. Soon your Christian supporters will grow in numbers. They will give their hearts and their money to you and your new universal church. You will be the head of a church that will unify the empire for a thousand years.”

Azrael smiled, noticing that his listeners were beginning to catch on; “Again Josephus waited for the soldier to process this odd but fascinating tactic. A universal religion mused Constantine, one state, one religion, and one ruler. ‘Now that might work,’ reflected the warrior, ‘A strong organization with simple doctrines and a direct chain of command from the head of state into the hearts and minds of every citizen.’ The emperor tapped his fingers across the rooftops of his models as he posed another question, ‘But aren’t these Christians already divided among themselves? I have heard of a teacher named Thomas and another called Paul. There must be dozens of others. What do you make of them? How would we get them to embrace me as the head of their sect? Certainly they would understand my motives better than their followers?’ The emperor raised a sound point, but Josephus already had a solution, ‘My lord, I’m already in correspondence with a few of these Christian teachers. I know something about their ideas and their strange beliefs. It’s an odd and quirky religion. It’s superstitious, hardly a religion at all. But I am acquainted with a well-known author named Irenaeus.⁸⁰ He is a bishop living in Gaul.’ Josephus

⁸⁰ Saint Irenaeus (270-325 AD) was Bishop of Lugdunum in Gaul, then a part of the Roman Empire (modern Lyons, France). He was an early church father and apologist. His writings were formative in the

chuckled a little as he continued, 'It appears he is the only one in his small Christian community that can read or write, thus making him their leader. I can travel to Gaul to meet with Irenaeus; I can work with him to recast this sect into something we can use. After all, these Christians appear to be simple enough. Once we have taken control of their doctrines, we can interpret their faith in any way we see fit. We will create a better version of Christianity, a universal version, with you my lord as Christ's personal representative on Earth.' Constantine nodded to his advisor, 'Very well, visit this Irenaeus. Pay him, bribe him, extort or threaten him, but put him to work for us. I want to take personal control of this sect.' The emperor stood, stepping over to the model of the sun temple he planned for his new capital. How odd, he thought; his temple would never be dedicated to the invincible sun. Instead, it would become the center of power for the mysterious new god of the Christians."

Azrael finished his water with a gulp, "Josephus was ecstatic about his assignment. It would take him to a new country, a place he had never been, and it was a tremendous challenge. He would take control of a hybrid faith and transform it into the official state religion. It would be his greatest literary creation, but he would never receive credit for its conception. As the old man was about to take leave of the emperor, he remembered the second scroll he was still holding. He was hesitant to read it, but Constantine made no effort to stop him. It was a very brief legal warrant, pronouncing the death penalty upon

early development of Christian theology. Irenaeus' best-known book, *Against Heresies* (c. 324 AD), is a detailed attack on Gnosticism, especially against the theology taught by Bishop Valentinus and his master Saint Paul. (Dyson Teal)

Constantine's wife, Fausta and his oldest son Crispus.⁸¹ 'Why!' the old man exclaimed in shock. 'How can you order the execution of your own son and wife?' The tired and worn looking soldier turned and stared straight into his companion's eyes, uttering only one word, 'Adultery.' Josephus was shaken. Constantine's son and his second wife, the young and beautiful Fausta, both in their early twenties, fair, strong, and virile. Adultery. Josephus wanted to leave, but the emperor placed his hand on the old man's shoulder, 'Do you want to know how I'll execute them?' He certainly didn't want to know, but the emperor answered anyway, 'I will strangle my son before my wife's eyes, and then I'll strangle her before my court.' The emperor left the marble hall. Josephus remained frozen. He decided it was best not to be seen around the palace that afternoon. Now he understood why the old soldier had been pacing so frantically all morning. That which troubled him had nothing to do with matters of state or religion, nothing at all."

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

⁸¹ Most historians agree that Crispus and Fausta had an illicit affair. When Constantine found out, he had them executed. It is possible that Constantine became aware of the affair when he learned that Fausta had become pregnant while he was away on a military campaign. Traditional accounts state that upon his deathbed, Constantine asked for and received absolution for these two murders. (Dyson Teal)

Codex XII (e)
Bishop Irenaeus

“An old worn out whore cantered over to his table, asking in a stupefied air if he were interested in her wares. She was plump and round except where it mattered. Her hair was long, stringy, and thinning. Her smile revealed horse ivory dentures, dyed purple from too much wine and the Gaelic beer that passed as fine beverages in the region.”

“Azrael, I must admit, you have such narrative flair, and a memory for details,” the watcher exclaimed. Everyone in the gathering was on the edges of their seats. “But you can’t stop there, please tell us what happened when Josephus visited Irenaeus. What was this bishop like? What did they discuss?” Azrael nodded, as he reached into the water cooler, grabbing a fresh bottle before resuming his tale; “I secretly flew behind Josephus’ coach as he traveled to Gaul.⁸² Six black mares pulled his couch along muddy paths that passed on maps as imperial roads. Gone were the glory days when the empire was renown for its marvelous stone paved highways. Now, even government agents had to make due with these barbarous traveling conditions. Personally,” the winged angel added, “I was happy to fly. The region was dangerous, full of thieves and bandits; barely distinguishable from the poorly disciplined and rebellious troops who sporadically garrisoned the region. The emperor had sent two-dozen praetorian guards as a protective escort. The small city of Lugdunum was known as a hot bed of political and religious conflict.⁸³ Situated on a high escarpment above the Rhone and Saone rivers, the town boasted a

⁸² Modern France. (Angelica Herald)

⁸³ Modern Lyon. (Angelica Herald)

large brick amphitheater to augment its otherwise rustic décor. Josephus had corresponded with Irenaeus for over three decades, though they had only met briefly in person. What they shared in common was an interest in writing.”

Azrael continuing, “Irenaeus was something of a merchant, mused Josephus as his coach bounced up and down along the rutted road. He sold his talent like a whore sells her body. He had launched his career as a playwright, hacking Greek comedies and Roman oratories. But then he discovered another market, the Egyptian mystery schools. These Egyptian initiatory groups possessed imaginary secrets, ostensibly passed down from the time of the Pharaohs. A person could, for a price, become an initiate into these mysteries. Once initiated, they usually wanted to advance into higher grades to obtain august sounding titles. Irenaeus was the secret master of many of these correspondence cults and secret brotherhoods. He wrote the secret rituals himself, though this should not be construed as diminishing their antiquity,” Azrael sneered. “It was all good business. As far as Josephus could recall, Irenaeus was the Grand Hierophant of the Mysteries of Isis and Osiris, Master Mason of the Temple of Solomon, Exalted Bishop of the Mysteries of Christ, and High Priest of the cult of Mithras.”

“Josephus fumbled around in one of the large wooden trunks he had packed for the journey. In it were several Christian texts, including accounts by Thomas, Philip, and a fellow named Hermes Trismegistus.⁸⁴ But the majority

⁸⁴ Hermes Trismegistus or "thrice-great Hermes." Hermes Trismegistus was a combination of the Greek god Hermes and the Egyptian god Thoth. Hermes Trismegistus is the legendary author of the *Corpus Hermetica*, not to be confused with the *Corpus Gnostica*. (Dyson Teal)

of the books were written by an elderly preacher living in Athens, a Judean named Paul. Paul taught at the Platonic Academy, and was cranking out as many books as Irenaeus.⁸⁵ His books were selling all over the streets of Italy and Greece. With this source material in hand, and with Irenaeus' known skill for disseminating new initiations and religious doctrines, it would be easy to gin out a new religion suiting the emperor's requirements."

"It was nightfall when Josephus' coach and escort climbed up the steep escarpment overlooking the Saone River, and through the negligently guarded gates of Lugdunum. They rode along the narrow brick streets to an inn where Irenaeus reputedly received his mail. The praetorian guards dismounted, acting terribly important in their black uniforms. Josephus smiled, thinking no doubt he would impress these locals as well as his old acquaintance. He was helped from the high steps of the coach and escorted into a tavern below the inn. It was an utterly dingy affair, a rustic half-timber building. The spacing between the timbers were chinked with red brick and plaster, or filled with mud in spots where the plaster had fallen out. The floor was made from rough-hewn planks; an open fireplace dominated the back wall. It was dank and moldy, with oil lanterns placed on tables around the room. A low ceiling confined the space; several patrons with varying degrees of intoxication crowded the bar. Travelers were enjoying what passed for fine dining in this region of the empire. The captain of Josephus' bodyguard posted a couple of praetorians outside the doorway, while sending more upstairs to the rooms he rented for the

⁸⁵ Plato founded the Academy around 387 BC. It was renowned as a center for philosophical and scientific education. It remained open until 529 AD when the fundamentalist Christian Emperor Justinian ordered it closed. (Dyson Teal)

elderly author. Josephus looked around. As expected, the tavern was filled with every sort of rift raft the western empire could dredge up from its nether regions.”

“There were traveling merchants, peddlers, and still others bearing no description at all. Josephus went to the bar, a couple of patrons slid to either side, making room as he ordered his poison. Everyone had seen him arrive with an imperial escort. The patrons were guarded but a little curious, but not too curious. They understood a government agent was not to be trifled with. He ordered a bottle of wine, some cheese and bread, and found an empty table near the fireplace. Again he looked about the room, hoping he might see his writing companion, but no one appeared familiar. He checked every face he could make out in the dim light, but no Irenaeus. He looked over the room a second time, still nothing. Then his eyes landed on a crumpled form they had skimmed over at first, a figure lying slumped over a table in a back corner. The figure was unidentifiable. It wore a dirty tunic, leather trousers, with oily, grayish black hair. A walking cane was leaning against the table. Three bottles of Gaelic wine, emptied, and clustered on the table, stood as sentinels protecting the sleeping creature who had drained them earlier. Josephus nodded knowingly, he had found Irenaeus just as he had expected, dissipated, drunk, and passed out.”

“An old worn out whore cantered over to his table, asking in a stupefied air if he were interested in her wares. She was plump and round except where it mattered. Her hair was long, stringy, and thinning. Her smile revealed horse ivory dentures, dyed purple from too much wine and the Gaelic beer that passed as fine beverages in the region. He smiled, offering her a seat. ‘No my dear,’ he

pleasantly answered, 'I am far too old for those pleasures anymore. I wouldn't arise to your expectations,' he conceded. But he was still happy for a little company. 'Dear, may I offer you some of my employer's money for your congenial conversation on this lonely evening?' As soon as he made his unusual request, it began raining, long silvery sheets slicing through the night air, making the comforts of the dingy tavern more inviting. The prostitute nodded, accepting a silver piece stamped with Constantine's idealized profile. 'Young lady,' Josephus lied twice and early into the conversation, 'What's your name?' 'Hilda, my Lord. And yours?' 'I am known as Josephus. I'm a writer and an advisor to an important senator in Rome. Pray tell me dear, have you heard of a writer from these parts called Irenaeus?' Hilda appeared puzzled, she knew almost every man in the region, particularly the artists and writers when they were flush with money. 'No friend, that name is unfamiliar.' 'Oh, I understand,' continued the old traveler, 'and the patron of Bacchus slumped over the table in the back, may I ask his name?' ⁸⁶ Hilda looked back towards the figure half hidden in the dark, and recognized him instantly, 'Oh my lord, he's a highly respected member of our community. He is the Christian bishop of the city, Bishop Cicero!' 'Indeed,' replied Josephus, barely hiding his contempt. 'Pretty Hilda,' Josephus lied again, 'let us go wake the revered bishop. Perhaps he will share his wisdom and insights into the mysteries of Christ.' Hilda frowned, appearing disappointed, 'Lord, are you sure you only require my conversational skills this evening?' Josephus paused, remembering the days when he had enjoyed the pleasures of women. But not tonight, he had business

⁸⁶ Bacchus was the Greek god of wine. (Dyson Teal)

to attend to. 'No my dear, please we shall wake the esteemed bishop. I want you to introduce me.'

Azrael's eyes grew bright as his story progressed, "The two sauntered over to the sleeping ghost, taking seats at his table. Hilda gently pushed on the figure's shoulder. Nothing. She pushed a little harder, still nothing. She gave him a good hard shove, and the ghost transformed into a groggy, cranky inebriate rising from a dreamless stupor. 'What do you want?' the drunk's cold dark eyes split open, seeing the familiar whore. 'I have no money for you tonight woman, find another,' but Hilda would not let him return to his slumber. 'Bishop Cicero, you have an important guest, a rich stranger from Rome.' The drunken bishop raised his head, turning to see the other person seated at the table. The stranger spoke, 'Bishop, I hope you have received my letters, pray remember, I've sent these concerning a writing project for which my client wishes to engage your services?' Irenaeus instantly bolted upright. He felt the rush of cold sobriety flushing the wine from his veins. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes while uttering a pathetic excuse, 'Oh my Lord Josephus, I wasn't expecting you here for another fortnight. My apologies, please forgive me.' 'Think nothing of it,' Josephus offered, 'Now Hilda, please take these coins and exchange them at the bar for three fine bottles of wine. We have work to do.' As soon as she left the table, Josephus pulled a parchment from his sleeve, 'I have an imperial contract for you. Soon you will be a very rich man.' Irenaeus sat back in his chair, rubbing his dirty hands through his oily hair. His face was dark, his nose long and crooked, his body slightly built. His left leg was twisted and deformed. As soon as Hilda returned, Josephus suggested they take their

bottles and retire upstairs.” Azrael held up his water bottle, and toasted his listeners, “Cheers!”

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

***Codex XII (f)
Religion is the Opiate of the Masses ⁸⁷***

“Joshua’s story will be linked to the greatest period in Roman history, his story will remind the masses of the once powerful and glorious empire. He will be as real as Augustus and just as distant in history.”

Nearly all of the demons had flipped the coin and taken the water communion, transforming themselves into angels. All except five, who stubbornly refused to listen to anything said at the assembly. These five, Cassiel, Haniel, Kushiell, Muriel and Raziel, were sitting under a large oak tree, just outside hearing from the others. They were the crew responsible for painting the interior of the church. The painters were talking among themselves, bitterly denouncing the others for turning from their evil ways. Raziel was the most headstrong, “I refuse to listen to anything Poimandres says. I do not trust him.” Kushiell, Muriel, and Cassiel were nodding as Haniel added, “Look at those fools over there, soaking up every word Poimandres and Azrael spit out. And the Architect, he’s no better; I thought he was one of us. But now I’m not so sure. I don’t trust the builder. Look at Azrael sitting there with

⁸⁷ “Religion is the opiate of the masses,” is the most frequently quoted statement by Karl Marx. Translated from the German original, “*Die Religion, ist das Opium des Volkes.*” The quotation is from the introduction of his 1843, *Contribution to Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*. Interestingly, Hegel was allegedly an Illuminati Grand Master, and thus an initiate of the Children of Light. (Dyson Teal)

Poimandres, acting like he's better than us." Kushiell jumped in, "It is disgusting the way they have all washed their faces. They're all smiling. Even their wings have turned white. It's revolting." Cassiel had been listening to his companions without comment; he was a quiet, brooding type. He offered a suggestion, "I think we need to know what's going on over there. I'm going over to listen. Maybe I can convince some of the others to come back to our side." The other four demons quickly agreed, so he crossed the worksite and approached the assembly of angels.

The Architect called out as Cassiel drew near, "Friend, you and the other painters have shown no interest in our conversation. Now that you have completed your tasks, perhaps you would like to join us?" Cassiel frowned, "Honored Architect, I do not trust the watcher, and I do not like what he's done to our friends. We're not angels of light. Poimandres is full of lies. We are the all powerful Archons. We're the personifications of the darkest and most grotesque desires and emotions. Our purpose is to embody these powerful forces, and to carry them into the new universe. Without our dark powers, our new home will be still and empty, a universe filled with lifeless stardust. Put an end to these lies before it's too late, before everything we have worked to build is ruined." Cassiel stood his ground as the Architect answered, "Brother, without the box, without the soul of Ancient of Days, everything we've done will be in vain. Look at your brothers. Look at Azrael. Can you really tell me there isn't a dual nature in each of us? The only thing your brothers have done is to turn away from their pain and suffering. They've turned away from the wickedness that ruled their souls. You too are an angel of light, if you chose to become one."

“Never!” Cassiel yelled back, “I will prove to you that Poimandres lies!” “Shut up! Enough of this!” the lion roared, “Either sit down and listen or go back and join the others!” Cassiel crossed his arms defiantly, but as he looked at the angel’s faces, he was less certain. He moved to a bench as two angels slid aside, making room for him. ‘I will listen,’ he muttered, ‘but I will not believe.’

Poimandres spoke, “Azrael, your tale isn’t finished. Please, tell us what happened when Josephus found Irenaeus.” Azrael looked at Cassiel and silently prayed to the higher gods that the demon would hear and understand. Then he spoke, “I followed the three mortals to Irenaeus’ room on the second floor of the inn. It was a rustic room with a window that opened over the street in front of the tavern. There was a small writing table, two straight chairs, and a rope bed. An oil lamp hung from the ceiling and another was placed on the table. The floor was dirty, the bed linens foul, and the quilts tattered from years of public service. Hilda sat at the edge of the bed as soon as they entered. She heaved, her weight made it difficult for her climb the stairs. Josephus reached up to the oil lamp and lit it from his candle. His bodyguards stationed themselves at the door.”

“Irenaeus moved even slower than Hilda; his limp was pronounced as he leaned into his cane. The spirit of Samuel was powerful in the dissipate writer. The demon had taken the author’s body when he was still young and sober. Irenaeus reeked of stale wine and putrid vomit; his clothing was filthy and torn, little more than rotten threads. Strange thought Josephus, Irenaeus was reputedly a successful author. He had invented so many dues paying rites. Where had the money gone? The fowl-smelling bishop took a seat at the table

and pushed open the window shutters. Josephus joined him as the bishop lit the table lamp.”

“I watched from the corner of the small room,” Azrael went on, “as Josephus lifted a large leather bag. It was full of scrolls, books, and letters. The emperor’s agent pulled the contract from his sleeve and placed it in front of the bishop, ‘This contract has been issued by Constantine himself, on my recommendation. We wish to hire you to write some books, religious fictions if you will. I understand this is your strong point. The emperor is convinced the empire has grown weak and decadent due to the proliferation of religions, cults, secret societies, and esoteric nonsense. He’s convinced the old state religion of the Olympian gods is too worn and dated for the modern age.’ Josephus paused for a moment to gauge the effect of his words. The Gaelic writer had an intense expression; he was absorbing, listening. Josephus continued, ‘The emperor believes we need a new and vigorous religion for this new age. We require a grand religion, embraced by every citizen from Britain to Syria, from Egypt to Gaul. We need a universal religion that promotes the power of the state, respect for ancient traditions, and respect for the emperor. A simple religion understood by every citizen. This church will receive its authority from the emperor. It will hold the keys to heaven and the afterlife, while curtailing humanities’ passions in this life. In short, my client wants us to do nothing less than conquer the hearts of his subjects, just as he has already conquered their lands.”

“I watched,” Azrael continued, “as Irenaeus reached for the closest bottle of wine, and popped the cork. He took a huge swig and wiped his mouth with

the back of his hand. He ran his hands through his greasy hair, and pushed back against the open window. Josephus could not read his expression, so he turned to Hilda. But she was of no use at all. Irenaeus moved his hand towards the contract, tapping his fingers across it. 'How much?' he finally asked. 'Two thousand aureus, plus an imperial pension of five hundred aureus a year for the rest of your life.'⁸⁸ It is his serene highness's wish that you be well compensated for your literary genius.' Josephus waited; he was responsible for the specifics of the contract. Irenaeus stammered for a moment, then nodded. Josephus could not contain his curiosity, 'Friend, what has happened to you? I know you earn plenty of money from peddling degrees in your mystical orders, and I'm sure the Christians pay you handsomely as their preacher. Why are you in such dire straits?'"

"My friend,' the bishop muttered, 'money and I have never been long term acquaintances. For every time we meet, we're soon parted. I lose much of my coin, trying to earn more by playing the ponies. Some of my money goes to the local whores for their fine services. And I have a great fondness for the ruby liquid made by our local farmers. And of course, nobody wants to drink alone. Those fellows you saw tonight down in the tavern, I often cover their tabs as well as my own. I'm ashamed to confess, the rest has just been wasted.'

Josephus frowned. He had always worked hard for his clients, earning every silver denarius. He wasn't about to waste money on self-dissipating lusts or squander it on whores. But whatever, this Gaul could do as he wished as long

⁸⁸ *Aureus* (Latin) meaning 'golden.' The Aureus was a Roman gold coin, issued from the 1st Century BC to the beginning of the 4th Century AD. (Dyson Teal)

as he agreed to work according to the terms in the contract. The inebriate signed the document, 'Agreed, signed, and done.' Irenaeus grinned, 'Now when do we begin? I already have some ideas for the project.'

Cassiel was still sitting on the bench, glaring at Azrael. Azrael used his water bottle as a prop, "Josephus pulled the cork from a bottle, taking a drink, 'I am all ears bishop. I've traveled a long way to hear your ideas. I have brought these Christian books with me because I believe this faith can serve as the core for our own new religion. But I want to hear you ideas.' A poorly hidden sarcasm dripped from Josephus' lips. Irenaeus had better produce, or he would have his bodyguards execute the fowl-smelling cripple. The thoughts of Samuel were raced within the mortal drunkard, 'What an opportunity,' the old demon roared. Samuel had a mind for details, and as the old saying goes, the devil is in the details. He knew exactly how to play this opportunity. Through the pen of Irenaeus, he would turn the world upside down; he would turn the words of Christ and Sophia into something monstrous. He would create a counterfeit church to bury the true church under a mound of filth. But he had to be cautious with Josephus. The old man had his own agenda."

"Samuel thought quickly, speaking through the mouth of the filthy bishop, 'I have some ideas, plans to be precise.' The Bishop of Lugdunum shifted in his seat, taking a bold swig of wine. Then he reached over and grabbed some scrolls from Josephus' leather pack. 'Hilda,' Irenaeus called to the whore who had almost fallen asleep, 'Go to my room across the hall, and bring back these books.' As she rose from the bed, he scribbled the names of some books in his collection. She left the room with the list. The bishop cleared his throat, 'My

esteemed friend, as you know, I maintain an extensive network of correspondences, friends such as yourself, from across the empire. Most of these fine people do not know me very well. Many have never even met me. Still others know me by entirely different names and identities. You yourself, dearest friend, have we ever really met, or did you not learn about me from mutual friends, and thus our exchange of letters began, twenty perhaps thirty years ago? Who remembers? Do you?’ Josephus shook his head, perhaps he was mistaken about having met Irenaeus before now.”

“I am known by some as a priest of Isis, by others as a Christian bishop, and by still others as a Master Mason of Solomon. But the truth is, few really know me. I make my living selling initiations, degrees, baptisms, whatever crap the people want. You made a good choice when you recommended me to the emperor. I know the hearts and minds of the people like no other. Why do you think I write such good books? ⁸⁹ I’m in the business of selling hope. I will create a religion to serve everyone’s purposes. You were right about Christianity; it’s perfect for our task. We do not need to create something from scratch; we need only adapt and refine this little faith.’ Josephus remained silent. So far he was less than impressed, but he saw potential in Irenaeus’ ramblings. ‘I have always found your mystical style to be so much detritus, but I know it sells to the common folk,’ Josephus sneered.

“The bishop continued; ‘The emperor needs a hierarchical religion, organized like the old state religion of the Olympian gods. The emperor must be

⁸⁹ In Friedrich Nietzsche’s book *Ecce Homo*, we find the chapter heading, “Why do I write such good books?” Nietzsche was the philosopher who first declared the “death of god.” Interestingly, Nietzsche was an alleged Illuminati master. (Dyson Teal)

the head of this new faith, Pontiff Maximus, with his bishops running the daily business of the church. The church should be an agent of the state, controlling local worship and burial rites, while holding the keys to salvation. And the faith must be universal. There can be no opposition or other forms of Christianity tolerated. To do all of this, we must re-write the whole Christian myth. We must turn it into a beast to serve its new master.’ ‘And how are we to do this?’ interrupted Josephus. ‘Christianity already has its own teachers, its own beliefs, and its own history.’ ‘My friend,’ answered Irenaeus, ‘that is why fate has thrown us together. We’re going to re-write history.’

Azrael paused for a moment to catch his breath; “Hilda made a loud thump as she pushed the door open with her foot, her chubby arms filled with books from the adjoining room. She tossed her literary burdens on the bed, and then fell across it herself. Irenaeus rummaged through his books. He found a couple that he was looking for and placed them on the table, ‘These are Christian accounts of their prophet Joshua. He lived at the time of the high priest Caiaphas and King Herod, about two generations ago.’ The old historian nodded, ‘Yes, I witnessed prince Joshua’s trial for treason, when I was a young clerk, working in the temple. Caiaphas claimed that Joshua conspired to steal the throne for himself. And this book of yours, its author is the famous preacher Paul. This fellow was only a child when Joshua died. He must be well over eighty years old by now.’ Josephus was remembering his past; ‘Irenaeus, this much I know about the Christians. They’re dangerous to our civil order. They were a threat to the old order in Judea, and they are a threat to the empire. Their message of heavenly reward encourages them to reject this world. They

believe in a goddess Sophia. And believe me, there is no place for a woman in our new religion. We need a masculine faith, a warrior's faith. The empire is growing weaker and weaker through its effeminate and religious decadence.' Josephus bolted another gulp of wine as he frowned at the passed out whore."

"Irenaeus was turning through the pages of the worn book as he prattled on, 'Yes, there are several writers circulating these Joshua stories. Trust me Josephus, they have made our work much easier. They have already created a popular market for Joshua stories. All we need to do is edit and re-write these stories to suit our purposes. We will cut out any references to Sophia, or we will use a gender-neutral reference, such as Spiritus Sanctus.⁹⁰ We will turn Joshua into a superhuman god who performed all kinds of miracles. He will turn water into wine, walk on water, and raise the dead. And then just like the popular stories of Dionysus or Osiris, we will have him die as a sacrifice nailed to a tree. He will rise again three days later, just as the new moon rises after three nights of darkness."

"A good idea,' Josephus interrupted, 'but there is a problem. There are a few old people still alive, who knew Joshua. Nobody will believe your silly story that he rose from the dead. There were too many witnesses to his execution.' Irenaeus smiled, tapping his pen against his book. He took a swig of wine before answering the objection, 'Oh Josephus, please have some faith in my myth spinning. No mythological deity ever lived in the here and now; no they have always lived back then, back in the good old days, the mythological past."

⁹⁰ *Spiritus Sanctus* (Latin) meaning Holy Spirit. One of the three aspects of the Christian Trinity. Originally it was the feminine aspect of God. (Dyson Teal)

We will turn the world Joshua lived in, into the distant past, two or three centuries ago, during the time of the first great Caesars, the time of Julius and Augustus. Too far back for anyone to have known him, too far back for anyone to challenge our narrative, but not so far back that people will claim he is only a myth. Joshua's story will be linked to the greatest period in Roman history, his story will remind the masses of the once powerful and glorious empire. He will be as real as Augustus and just as distant in history. We will write these stories as if his original disciples wrote them, just as the stories in circulation now. I'll take the most popular accounts of his life, a few of his sermons like this one,' Irenaeus was underlining the sermon on the mountain as he spoke, 'and a few anecdotes from his life. I will mix and blend these accounts together with stories of other deities, and soon we will have two or three good books about our god-man.' He paused for a moment thinking, 'Josephus, in the Judean faith, is there a belief in the Christ?' Irenaeus already knew the answer, but he waited for the historian to answer."

"Josephus was looking out the window, noticing the first orange hints of morning, remembering what it had been like to see the sunrise in his homeland. He felt empty and alone as he answered his co-conspirator, 'No, we certainly do not believe in Christ or Sophia. As far as I know, these are both Greek deities. Christos is a solar deity and Sophia is the goddess of wisdom. I have no personal interest in these Greek myths.' The Gaelic drunkard interrupted, 'I understand, but we can make something of this Greek connection. Joshua needs a Greek sounding name. He needs to be someone the modern audience can relate to; we'll translate his name from Joshua into the Greek, Jesus. This will

make him more appealing to the Greek and Roman mind.’ Josephus smiled; he appreciated the way his conspirator thought. The Gaelic hack was beginning to earn his gold. And then another problem occurred to Josephus, ‘So how will we to get our version of the Joshua, I mean the Jesus story out? There are so many other writers cranking out Joshua stories. We know Paul is still writing, but there are dozens of others. Our version of Christianity will be like all the others.”

“My friend,’ Irenaeus interrupted the doubting old man, ‘we have the resources of our employer at our disposal. We will send out the emperor’s tax collectors to buy every book, tract, and scroll by these Christian writers, from every book vendor and library in the empire. We will pay a bounty to anyone bringing these books to our agents for collection and burning. After I have completed our new gospels, you will ask your patron to call a great council of Christian leaders at his new capital. At this council, the emperor will offer a state salary to any Christian leader that recognizes his authority over the church. He shall make them the bishops of his new universal church. The bishops will endorse our story of the miracle working Jesus. But for those few that reject our generous offer, well, Constantine can be very persuasive.’

Josephus nodded, recalling the day a few weeks earlier, when the emperor had strangled his own wife and son. Yes, Constantine would be quite persuasive with the bishops; their sense of self-preservation would bring them around. They would see the light.”

“Josephus was sipping his wine, ‘Bishop, what do you suggest we do about the Gnostics? How do we stop their prattling on about Sophia? They’ll

just keep on writing. It's maddening, they honestly believe she is real.' Samuel silently fumed, 'Yes human, she is very real. That's my damned problem,' but of course Irenaeus said nothing of the sort. Instead the bishop answered, 'Josephus, our Jesus story must be taken as a literal account of events that took place three centuries ago. Jesus must be seen as a living god, who founded the church the emperor now heads. We must insist that there is only one authority on religion matters, the emperor and his bishops. After our gospels are circulated, we must prevent any others from being published. Anyone who does so will be declared a heretic and burned. Soon, the people will be too afraid of the combined power of the church and state, to challenge our claim of divine authority.'

Azrael was speaking at an excited pace, "The vile bishop's mind was on fire. As he spoke, his hand raced through the gospels on the table. He was circling lines, paragraphs, and marking through other sections of the texts. He was already re-writing the gospels of the Children of Light, turning them into something sinister. The bishop continued, 'I will also write another book, under my own name. I'll call it, 'Against the Heresies of the Gnostics.''⁹¹ I will discuss their failings, disparaging them to our academics in the universities and libraries. I know many of the bookish philosophers who inhabit our halls of learning. Some will help us refute the Gnostic teachings. Within a generation or two, their teachings will die out."

⁹¹ *Against Heresies* (c. 323-324 AD) by Bishop Irenaeus is a detailed attack on Gnosticism. In this book, Irenaeus emphasized the importance of Christian unity, through the humble acceptance of one doctrinal authority, the emperor and his bishops. (Dyson Teal)

“Irenaeus stood, stepping across the room to a water basin. He soaked a towel and wrapped it around his head, ‘It helps my headaches.’ The sun was rising over the city walls. Josephus was still looking out the window, sipping his wine, ‘Our Jesus needs a special something, a hook that will make him unique. Irenaeus, are you familiar with my people’s tradition of the scapegoat?’ The bishop nodded, refreshing his towel with more cool water. Josephus went on, ‘Every year the high priest would transfer the sins of the people onto a goat, releasing it into the wilderness on the Day of Atonement. The goat carried our sins with it to die in the wilderness, vicariously atoning for the people’s sins. It is now a forgotten rite, but I still remember seeing the goat released into the wilderness when I was young. I remember the priests would place a bloody crown of thorns on the poor animal’s head before freeing it. Now that was a powerful ritual; it is still burned into my memory. I still remember the blank staring eyes of those damn animals as they wandered from the city. The death of Jesus must be more than just a miraculous resurrection from the dead like Dionysus or Osiris. It must have a special meaning, a meaning that keeps the faith fresh and alive. Jesus’ death must become a sacrifice, atonement for the sins of humanity. He must become the sacrificial Lamb of God.”

“As I looked at the elderly writer,” Azrael confided, “he seemed to me to be praying. His hands were folded over his chest, his eyes closed, deep in contemplation. Irenaeus hung his head from the open window and inhaled the fresh morning air. He listened as the guests of the inn gathered in the tavern for breakfast. ‘Yes,’ he whispered fiendishly, and then louder so Josephus could hear, ‘Yes old mortal, yes that’s it. That’s the hook. I bow to your brilliance old

man. It's so fucking original. It's salvation from original sin. Atonement by the death of another. Atonement through a sacrificial goat-man. Our religion will offer the masses salvation from their petty personal sins. It will relieve their little guilt-ridden hearts from their petty, whorish, drunken deeds. No more mystical shit about Sophia and Christ. No more personal responsibility, and no more talk about union with the goddess through her consort. The Gnostic's crap will be buried under our salvation message, drowned in Jesus' blood. Just like your damn bloody goats."

Azrael's voice rose as he approached the crescendo of his tale, "Josephus wasn't comfortable with this evil wretch. Something was terribly wrong about Irenaeus; he was far darker than he had imagined, far more sinister than anyone at the emperor's court. The elderly historian lifted himself from his chair, 'Write the stories as you see fit. But make them convincing. I have to sell them to Constantine himself. And if the emperor frowns upon your final product, well his patience for failure is quite limited.' Josephus turned and opened the door; his bodyguards were still dutifully standing outside. He stopped for a moment to give his final instructions, 'I want these stories ready for publication within six months. No later. You will send them to me by imperial couriers. As soon as I approve your drafts, I will order their copying and distribution. I plan to return to Rome within a day. I'll order the purchase or confiscation of every other Christian book in circulation. If the emperor is pleased with our work, I'll ask him to convene a meeting of Christian writers and leaders. And we need to consider Paul. I doubt we can buy him. He is what they call a true believer.' Irenaeus nodded, 'Strange creatures, these true

believers. They are either mad or...' 'Or they are right,' Josephus cut the bishop short, 'Either way, Paul will be a problem.' The crippled bishop didn't bother to look up as his employer closed the door. Samuel's mind was on fire as he crossed through scriptures, scrawling in new details along the margins." Cassiel was more confused than ever. In his heart, he too was having doubts.

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

***Codex XII (g)
Travesty at Nicea***

"I knew them both, Christ as well as Paul. But as I weigh these two in my mind, the god-man Christ and the mortal Paul, I cannot help but find Christ lacking."

Cassiel was troubled. It was disturbing to see so many of his companions transformed into angels. He needed the opinions of the other demons. He stood during the short break, waving to his friends near the oak, "Come over here, you should hear this." The remaining demons were nervous. They chattered among themselves for a few moments before sauntering over to the benches. The angels made room for them on the benches and passed them bottles of water. Cassiel whispered to Haniel, "It is Ok, we're just listening." "Fine, we'll listen," Haniel agreed, "but I'm not buying into anything the watcher has to say."

Poimandres was speaking, "Azrael, tell us what happened after Josephus left Irenaeus to do his dirty work." Azrael took a swig of water and began, "It had been two years since Josephus' meeting with Irenaeus. The vile bishop had completed his part of the task in a few months, but it took time for imperial

agents to buy or confiscate Christian books, to bribe local bishops, and to copy and distribute the new gospels. The emperor proclaimed that a grand ecumenical council would be held near his new capital. I followed as the emperor rode in royal procession from the gates of the new capital that bore his name, Constantinople. In the middle of the city, he was building a gigantic cathedral. It would be named Hagia Sophia or the church of holy wisdom, dedicated to Sophia herself.⁹² Josephus had cringed at the name; but the soldier emperor didn't care. He still liked it, and Sophia was popular with the Greek masses, so the name remained. The emperor was escorted by hundreds of black clad praetorian guards, senators wearing purple robes, and church officials. Josephus had the honor of riding at the right hand of Constantine as they led this majestic procession from the city into the nearby suburb of Nicea."

"Josephus was pleased with the new gospels composed by Irenaeus. Gone were any references to a female deity. Gone were any strange ideas of cosmic atonement or personal responsibility for salvation. This new Christianity was a simple man's faith, simple enough for the masses to embrace, one deity, one state, one emperor.⁹³ Josephus had convinced the emperor to spend a fortune buying books about Sophia and Christ, all to be burned. Soon it would be imperial policy to give preference for governmental employment to adherents of the new religion. And it had taken some persuasion, but Josephus

⁹² *Hagia Sophia* (Greek) meaning holy wisdom. Dedicated in 325 AD, the Hagia Sophia served as the cathedral of Constantinople until 1453 AD. It was converted to a mosque in 1453 when the city fell to the forces of Islam under the Ottoman Turks. In 1934 it was secularized and opened as a museum. (Dyson Teal)

⁹³ *"Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Führer,"* or One People, One Empire, One Leader, was a Nazi slogan intended to cement support in the German people's minds for Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime. (Dyson Teal)

had convinced the emperor to announce an empire wide tax break for anyone converting to the new faith. He had even paid the traveling and lodging expenses of those in attendance at the council.”

“Constantine intended to merge the Christian factions together into one universal church under his control. Most of the Christian leaders were already on board. Through well-placed bribes and political favors, these preachers had reached the conclusion that accepting Irenaeus’ gospels was essential to their own fortunes. There were only a few obstinate holdouts, like the popular preacher Paul and his Egyptian sidekick Valentinus. These two worried Josephus, they were already in the city, and they had declined the emperor’s offer to pay their expenses. Irenaeus was in the city as well, having arrived earlier from southern Gaul. He had rented the summer palace of a prominent senator for his stay, and had ordered a whole vineyard’s stock for his personal use. The vile bishop had even hired all of the whores at a prominent brothel to serve as his harem.”

Azrael continued, “As the emperor’s procession twisted through the narrow streets, cheering onlookers pressed forward for a closer look at their ruler. The historian scorned the cheering masses. They were just like sheep, the new religion would suit them perfectly, a rulebook for human sheep. But then it occurred to the elderly Judean, a disturbing and obvious problem he had overlooked before, ‘What in God’s name would this new uniformity of faith bode for his own people? Surely they would never accept the new religion.’ The historian’s mind was vexed, and then he smiled, realizing the new religion

needed a link to the past. The history of his nation would provide such a link, hopefully guaranteeing a future for his people.”

Azrael turned to Poimandres and asked, “Great watcher, weren’t you with Paul and Valentinus at the time?” Poimandres nodded, “Yes brother, I followed them into town earlier in the day. I was quite fond of Paul. I spent years watching as he struggled against his deepest doubts. I knew him better than he knew himself. Azrael, I must admit that I loved Paul. I cared about him as I have cared for few mortals. I had a greater respect for him than I did for his imperfect god. I knew them both, Christ as well as Paul. But as I weigh these two in my mind, the god-man Christ and the mortal Paul, I cannot help but find Christ lacking. Christ was what he was, a middle realm deity created for one purpose, that he dutifully performed. But Paul had to sustain himself on faith alone. He could not work miracles; he had no supernatural powers, and yet in the end he was triumphant. Yes brother, I knew them both very well. I respected Christ, particularly for his self-sacrifice at the end, but I loved and admired Paul.”

Poimandres was still speaking, “I was with Paul when he traveled to the emperor’s council. He and his young disciple Valentinus rode into the gates of Nicea on two old mares. Paul had been a preacher for nearly fifty years; he was now seventy-seven years old. He was still healthy, lean, strong in mind and body, but his hair and beard were as white as his linen robe. He had thousands of disciples; had founded dozens of churches, and had written hundreds of books. He had come close to true Gnosis or a real knowing, but his logical, philosophical mind prevented him from taking a final leap of faith. I

knew his heart,” Poimandres confessed, “and he genuinely wanted to know. His salvation depended on it. His books had transformed thousands of lives. Now imperial agents were burning them in front of libraries. He was furious. He intended to be heard by the emperor and the council.”

Poimandres continued, “Paul was outraged when he read the new gospels about the babbling miracle worker Jesus. ‘What a load of rubbish,’ the old preacher fumed, as he rode his tired mare through the city gates. ‘Whoever wrote those damned books knew his Greek mythology well enough, but he knew nothing of the real Joshua, nothing of Sophia or Christ. I’ll tell you brother Valentinus; he’s an imposture, a faker. A terrible con artist wrote these books.’ Valentinus nodded to his master, but said nothing. They both suspected who had really written these fake gospels. The voice in all three books closely paralleled the writing style in the newly penned rag, ‘Against the Gnostics,’ by the Gaelic hack Irenaeus.⁹⁴ It was no coincidence this fraud had published his rant against the true church at the exact time these Jesus stories appeared. Paul realized the emperor was trying to hijack the Christian faith. The old preacher was going to fight back. He would not allow his life’s work to be burned on the rubbish heap of history. ‘Brother Paul, there’s a small inn up ahead. It looks like a place we can afford to spend the night,’ Valentinus pointed ahead and they directed their horses to the humble inn.”

⁹⁴ Historians and linguistics experts have long recognized that the narrative style and vocabulary of the three synoptic gospels are remarkable similar to Irenaeus’ writing style. Until now, this similarity was attributed to the notion that Irenaeus had translated and heavily edited the original gospels. It now appears likely that he actually wrote all three. (Dyson Teal)

“That night, neither traveler could sleep. They lay wide-awake in their rough cots with the oil lamp extinguished. Valentinus was worrying aloud, ‘These new gospels say nothing about Sophia. There’s nothing about the nature of man or the human soul. Brother, are we to think that everything written before is meaningless? Are we to believe that only the death and magical reanimation of this god-man Jesus is important? And brother, what is this strange idea of forgiveness through the magical blood of Jesus? Where is the personal responsibility?’ Valentinus twisted on his cot to face his master, ‘Brother, are you listening? This is unbelievable; it’s sacrilege. It’s a lie, written by that Gaelic liar. What are we going to do to stop him?’”

“Paul was listening as he slowly pulled on his long white beard. He felt a darker force at work, darker than just the emperor and a corrupt scribbler. He felt a darkness he had not felt since the day his parents were murdered. It was the presence of the adversary, the dark angel his Essene masters called Samuel. He whispered to his young friend, ‘Brother Valentinus, did your teachers in Alexandria ever speak of an ancient sect known as the priests of Shaitan?’ The young Egyptian had not thought about the dark priests for years. Egyptian parents would tell their children tales of the evil priesthood to keep their naughty offspring in line. And when Valentinus was grown, he learned that the evil priesthood was no mere fable. It had existed in the distant past, during the time of Pharaoh Ramses, but it was hopefully long extinct. ‘Yes brother, I’ve heard stories about these wicked priests. They worshipped a fallen demon named Samuel, an enemy of Sophia and Christ. But as a student of Plato, I have never believed in the personification of evil.’ Paul turned in his cot and

responded with one nearly inaudible word, 'Believe.' Valentinus lay awake the rest of night as his elderly friend slipped into a peaceful slumber." Poimandres pressed his elbow on the shoebox. He felt his prisoner kicking.

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

***Codex XII (h)
Whores of Babylon***

"I'm a teacher from Corinth, from Ephesus, from Tarsus, and from Judea. I'm one of the last to have seen Joshua with his own eyes. I'm the former prince called Saul, raised by Joshua's own mother Roxanna. I was once shipwrecked and taken for dead on the shores of Malta. I'm a disciple of Christ. To the world I'm known as Paul."

The watcher reached down and pulled up some grass, stuffing it into the shoebox, "Be still, old timer... be still." The prisoner settled down. Cassiel motioned for his demonic companions to draw near. "Brothers," he whispered, "do you believe what we are hearing? Are they telling the truth? Have we been wrong?" Haniel and Raziel would not hear it. "Cassiel," Raziel fumed, "They lie! You said as much yourself." But Muriel and Kushiel were changing their tunes, "I must admit, these stories are making sense," Muriel confessed as Kushiel added, "And Poimandres has no reason to lie. He already has the box. He's in control. We cannot complete our task without the beast." Cassiel again whispered, "We will keep listening. We will find out what happened to Samuel. Until then, we should listen." Poimandres cleared his voice, "I hope I'm not interrupting your conversation. Does your group have something they would

like to add?" Cassiel and the others were silent. "No? Then perhaps we should hear what happened to Paul and Valentinus when they attended the emperor's council?"

The angels and demons shouted to hear more, so Poimandres continued; "The next morning, I watched as the sun rose over Nicea. The city was already wide-awake. Thousands of people crowded the streets. Merchants were laying out their wares, food vendors were putting out fresh fruits, meats, and breads for the onslaught of business expected during the council. Paul and Valentinus were up early as well. I noticed poor Valentinus had not slept a wink. They left the inn at sunrise, and hit the crowded streets. Valentinus had that grumpy, sleepy feeling, but Paul was focused, intent on reaching the auditorium. He wanted to watch Constantine's procession from a distance."

"The two preachers shoved their way through the hustling crowds. The streets were lined with imperial troops, decked out in their finest armor with purple feathers on their leather helmets. The two disciples found a brick wall to stand on with a good view. Paul nudged Valentinus in the arm, 'Do you still have your pass?' The emperor had sent official passes to every Christian preacher in the empire. 'Yes brother, I still have it. Do you still have yours?' Valentinus impatiently answered. 'Just checking,' Paul answered, 'I did not expect to see such large crowds and so many troops.'" His words were cut short by the piercing blast of trumpets in the cool morning air. They sounded again and again, with dozens of heavy drums beating a path along the road."

"The imperial procession emerged like a scarlet serpent, winding its way up from the harbor through the narrow streets. The emperor was at the head of

the serpent, wearing white armor with a lion mane collar and leopard skin cape, bear skin boots, and a seven pronged golden laurel crown.⁹⁵ He was magnificent. Josephus, as always, was riding next to his client. Behind the ruler rode hundreds of scarlet clad bishops, each wearing a brand new robe and miter, imitating an Egyptian priest's headgear.⁹⁶ At the head of this priestly procession was the bishop from Gaul, Irenaeus. He was dressed more extravagantly than the rest. He wore golden slippers encrusted with gemstones and carried a golden scepter. His white mare was led through the streets by two nude young pages. Behind him rode two scantily clad young women, carrying flasks of wine in golden goblets."

"Paul's eyes were wide; straining to see the faces of those passing in the scarlet procession. His worst fears were confirmed. These were the faces of his disciples, his students, and his friends. What had the emperor done to turn their hearts? His eyes welled with tears as he felt Valentinus pulling on his sleeve, 'Brother Paul, isn't that James? It is! Look it's James!' the young Egyptian shouted, 'James! James! Over here, over here!' Valentinus waved frantically to draw his friend's attention. One of the red clad bishops turned towards the two men standing on the wall. Yes, it was indeed James, but his eyes betrayed an utter disdain for his former friends. He was now one of Irenaeus' men. He had

⁹⁵ Revelations 13:1-10 'And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with seven horns. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's; and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.' (Angelica Herald)

⁹⁶ The miter is the official ceremonial headdress of a Christian bishop. It consists of a tall pointed hat creased across the top with two scarlet ribbons hanging down the back. The origins for the miter go back to the headdresses worn by Egyptian and Judean priests of ancient times. (Dyson Teal)

sold his soul like the rest for a government pension, fine robes and title, and the right to collect the new church's tithes."

"Paul turned away. He had seen enough. It was time to make their way through the crowd to the auditorium. 'Brother Valentinus, get out your pass. We may appear a little out of place,' Paul scoffed as he leapt from the wall into the crowd. The two nudged and shoved their way to the line of soldiers guarding the council entrance. They showed their passes, and the soldiers called to their centurion. A gold braided officer approached. He looked over the documents. He checked the imperial seals and looked closely at the modestly clad white haired man and his dark skinned companion. Then he asked, 'Why didn't you pick-up your robes during this week's festivities? The emperor has provided your official dress. Come with me. I'll find a couple of extra robes and miters for you to wear.' 'No sir, that won't be necessary,' Paul's voice was polite but direct. 'Centurion, as you can see, we are guests of the emperor. May we please pass?' The centurion motioned them forward and escorted them into the building."

Poimandres went on, "The auditorium was filling to capacity. Hundreds of bishops were finding places to sit. Valentinus pulled on Paul's sleeve, 'Look brother, at the front, the emperor's already seated on his throne.'" Paul said nothing, steadily moving through crowd. As soon as the two were recognized, a silence fell over the assembly. Every face turned, every eye focusing on Paul as he pushed into the center of the gathering. Valentinus stopped short behind his master, frozen like a rodent by the soulless stare of a serpent. Paul stopped, but he wasn't frozen. He stood there with the conviction that his cause was just.

These were the faces of men he had once trusted. He had known some since their days in the desert. Others he had met teaching in Athens or at the library in Alexandria. Their expressions were filled with scorn. There were also unfamiliar faces in the assembly. Paul's inner voice warned that they were priests of Shaitan. He walked forward towards the dais on which Constantine, Josephus, and Irenaeus were seated. Valentinus cautiously followed his master."

"The sound of a gong clanged from behind the dais and the emperor stood. Every head in the building bowed, except for Paul's. Constantine turned left and right, smiling, and waving to those he knew. Then he raised his arms declaring, 'In the name of the most holy and invincible god, and of his only son, I call this council into order.' A roar of applause thundered through the auditorium as the bishops leapt to their feet, shouting wildly, causing the building to vibrate like a giant drum. Irenaeus leaned into his walking stick and stepped closer to the master of the world. Constantine raised his arms again for silence, and the mass of red clad sycophants was stilled. 'I have called this council to assist in the great work of our invincible god, and to endorse the gospels of his only son, the demigod Jesus.' Again the bishops shouted, again Paul and Valentinus remained unmoved, and again the emperor signaled for silence. 'As you, my brothers in the worship of Jesus already know, I am a soldier. I am the strong arm of this eternal empire. But I am not a religious scholar. I have complete confidence in the judgment of these two great men of faith,' he turned pointing to Josephus and Irenaeus. 'They exercise my authority in all ecclesiastical matters. I turn over the responsibility for conducting the

holy business of this council to them. My bishops, I order you to listen and heed the wisdom of my two great councilors. Hear their words and abide according.’ Constantine stepped down, leaving the stage. He walked to the front exit, passing immediately beside Paul and Valentinus, without bothering to look either in the face.”

As Poimandres spoke, he was looking directly at Cassiel, Haniel, and Raziel. The demons turned away, feeling a surge of guilt. The watcher knew they were ready to crack, “Constantine was a beast who had risen from the sea of politics, an anti-Christ imposing on humanity the image of a false god. And there was nothing Paul could do; yet he refused to leave. He could have just turned around, disappearing back into the relative safety of the Judean desert. Or he could have fled with his friend to Egypt. But he didn’t budge. He stood there like a man before the spokesmen of hell. Irenaeus hobbled to the edge of the platform and peered straight into Paul’s eyes.”

“The bishop from Gaul motioned towards Paul and Valentinus as he spoke, ‘Brothers in Jesus Christ, give us your names. Why aren’t you wearing your robes? From where do you come?’ Irenaeus waited for Paul to reply, still grinning from ear to ear with razor thin lips. Paul’s seventy-seven years were not evident in his bearing. He was animated, alert, and clear-headed, unblemished before the eyes of God. ‘Bishop Irenaeus... hum. So it’s bishop now?’ Paul began with a condescending sneer, ‘I believe you already know who I am. I’m a teacher from Corinth, from Ephesus, from Tarsus, and from Judea. I’m one of the last to have seen Joshua with his own eyes. I’m the former prince called Saul, raised by Joshua’s own mother Roxanna. I was once shipwrecked

*and taken for dead on the shores of Malta. I'm a disciple of Christ. To the world I'm known as Paul.'*⁹⁷ *The elderly teacher paused for a moment, watching the reactions in the chamber. Many averted their eyes, trying to hide their gazes. Others grew angry, while Irenaeus' expression remained inscrutable. Valentinus' heart was pounding as fear engulfed him. He could feel his pulse throbbing in his head. The young disciple involuntarily stepped back from his aged master as if to say, I barely know this man."*

"Irenaeus lathered his next words with false sincerity, 'Oh yes brother Paul, by the name of Christ Jesus and the grace of God... thanksgiving! I had grown worried that bandits or the privations of nature had prevented you from reaching this august council. Bring me a robe and bishop's miter for Paul. His books and letters are such a gift to our faith. We shall place his letters into the cannon of our church forever.' Irenaeus was given a robe and miter that he held out for Paul, as he slithered endearingly, 'We will place your beautiful letters in the New Book, right after the three great gospels telling the story of our Lord Jesus Christ.' 'What was Irenaeus' plan?' Paul silently fumed. 'It was far more sinister than anything he had imagined. The wretched Gaul was not just erasing the true message of Christ; he intended to pervert the message by using Paul's own letters to give credibility to the forgeries."

"Paul tugged at his long white beard, 'Bishop Irenaeus, about these strange books. I wonder about their origins. Who were these three, Luke, Matthew, and Mark? I have never met them, and over the years, I've met almost everyone who knew Joshua. These books claim Joshua was a superman,

⁹⁷ For Paul's shipwreck on Malta see Acts 27:1- 44 (Angelica Herald)

a miracle worker, a healer, and that he rose from the dead. This is sacrilege. I was there on the day he was crucified. I stood beside his mother as she watched her son die. Joshua was buried in the tomb of the kings of Judea. I saw his body myself, when I placed his mother Roxanna beside him almost fifty years ago. His name wasn't Jesus. It was Joshua. He was filled by the spirit of Christ, the holy consort of Sophia, our goddess in heaven. He taught that Christ comes to every person with a message of atonement; and that we are all fragments of Sophia's soul. Through her grace, every soul will be united with the queen of heaven. I know nothing of your silly resurrected god-man Jesus."

Poimandres paused, allowing Paul's words to sink into the hearts of the demons, "Irenaeus' expression froze, an angry glint was in his eyes. He dropped the robe and miter he was holding for Paul. Valentinus warily slipped back a few more steps. 'Brother Paul, I should remind you of where you are, and before whom you stand. If you question this council's authority, you question Constantine. I urge you to govern your tongue,' he limped to the edge of the stage, stepping on the unused robe. 'This council has authority in all religious matters. We have already cast secret ballots on the legitimacy of the gospels you have questioned. I ask this council to now vote publicly, before God and the world, 'Does this council adopt these gospels to be the official and literal account of the life, teachings, and death of Jesus Christ? Do we hold that Jesus Christ was the son of God incarnate, inseparable and indivisible, and that he was the creator of the universe?' The assembly raised their voices in one thunderous acclamation. Irenaeus leaned heavily into his cane, yelling excitedly, 'Does this council now declare that there is only one true God, and that his only begotten

son is Jesus?’ Louder screams of approval rang through the building. ‘Does this council now declare as heresy any teachings that proclaim the existence of a false goddess Sophia, or the lie that Jesus Christ was her consort?’ The audience sprang up, roaring its approval. Irenaeus was screaming at the top of his lungs, ‘Does this council now decree that Jesus lived over three hundred years ago, and that there is no greater authority than this council concerning his life, teachings, death, and resurrection?’ The council was in a frantic, roaring chant, ‘Yes Irenaeus! Yes! Yes Irenaeus! Yes to everything! Hail Irenaeus! Hail Jesus!’”

“The bishop from Gaul turned to Josephus who was slumped down in his seat. The old writer’s face was a wretched shade of gray. His nerves were fried; he wanted nothing more than to disappear from the stage of history and be forgotten. But he couldn’t. He was condemned by his own vanity to play out his role in this despicable charade. Josephus slowly stood before the assembly. ‘Bishop Irenaeus,’ he announced, immediately the cheering crowd became silent, ‘our new holy book must include the stories of our ancient God. The people of Judea have a great tradition of prophesy. We have many books telling God’s story. Let us vote on whether the New Book should include this great history?’ The question was shouted out across the assembly, and once more the chorus of voices rang out supporting the motion. Josephus sat back down as the roaring continued. His mind was racing, acutely aware he had unleashed a monster that could easily turn on his own people.”

The five remaining demons were shocked. Poimandres took a sip of water and then continued, “Through all of the cheering and voting, Paul

remained unmoved as he looked directly at Irenaeus. Valentinus slipping back a few more steps. Irenaeus leaned into his cane, stepping down from the dais to stand before Paul. He looked into the old man's face. Paul sensed the dragon's soul in the dissipate writer. Irenaeus began circling the apostle, pulling his clubfoot along like a prisoner dragging a ball and chain. Then he pressed his chest against Paul's and whispered, 'You have heard the lots cast by your brothers. God would not allow this council to error. How say you old man? With whom do you cast your lot, with the god of this world or the next?' Their faces were only inches apart. Paul smelled the putrid odor of onions and wine on the wretch's breath. He stepped back before raising his voice, 'I put my faith in holy wisdom, and in her messenger of light, the Christ. Joshua was the voice of Christ on Earth. Soon, I will stand before Christ and holy Sophia in the Kingdom of Heaven. I shall be atoned for and made pure in their spirit. I walk with God.' Irenaeus flung his arms around Paul tightly, shouting into his ear, 'Shut up you old fool! Today you will have the chance to find out if they're real!'

"Then he pushed Paul away, and turned on Valentinus who had moved yet further away. 'And you there Valentinus,' the demon demanded, 'how say you, how do you cast your lot?' Valentinus was covered in hot sweat; his hands balled into tight fists. His response was barely audible, 'I cast my lot with the holy universal church.' 'See there,' Irenaeus shouted, 'Bring a bishop's robe for our brother Valentinus. Our brother has seen the light!' Valentinus was quickly decked out in a scarlet robe. 'Paul,' Irenaeus declared with his arms outstretched, 'this council declares you a false prophet, a teacher of lies and heresy. I now demand this council vote. Should Paul receive the ultimate

penalty reserved for heretics?’ The fools in the chamber began shouting, ‘Burn Him! Burn Him! Burn the teacher of lies! Burn the heretic!’ Irenaeus waved for the guards standing at the doors of the chamber. They hurriedly grabbed Paul under his arms. Irenaeus shouted to a centurion, “Set up a pole in front of the auditorium, lash him to it and set him ablaze!”

Poimandres’ voice was choked with emotion, “Valentinus watched as his master was led from the chamber, but he was too frightened to protest. Paul never looked back to his companion. ‘Valentinus, follow me,’ Irenaeus ordered. The Gaul led the Egyptian and the whole assembly out into the public square in front of the building. Paul was tied to a wooden pole. A soldier took a fiery torch and put it to some dried branches piled around the stake. The fire spread around Paul’s feet and legs. He didn’t scream until the first tongues of flame wrapped around his torso. His body shook. He pulled at the ropes, trying to free his hands. He looked across the sea of faces; he saw Irenaeus laughing. Valentinus was there, looking away, his face distorted by smoke and heat. Paul was already in hell, mocked by an assembly of demons and their vile underworld lord.” Poimandres looked at his five demonic companions, they were experiencing a new emotion... shame.

The watcher continued, “And then the excruciating pain ceased. Paul’s mind and eyes were clear. He watched through the smoke and flames as two white clad figures approached him. They stopped, standing a few feet before him. It was Joshua, just as Paul remembered him. And beside Joshua was the most beautiful woman Paul had ever seen. He was looking into the eyes of the beloved. Sophia was there. He no longer needed faith. He saw everything

clearly. He had finally received the holy gnosis he had sought his entire life. He knew Joshua was the Christ. He wept for joy, as the monsters burned him. Sophia climbed over the burning branches, passing unseen through the flames. She raised her hands to his eyes and closed his eyelids, 'Sleep Paul, sleep. When you awaken, you will be with me in Heaven.' Valentinus and the others saw nothing, only Paul's burning body. When the charred corpse was removed from the blackened stake, Irenaeus laughed, 'A proper end for a heretic, wouldn't you say, Valentinus?' The Egyptian said nothing, averting his eyes from the burned remains of his friend. 'Valentinus,' the vile bishop gloated, 'I want you to join me at my villa. I have plenty of everything this world can offer to help you forget your troubles. Come, let us celebrate the birth of our new religion. Let us drink and make merry.' Valentinus reluctantly followed his new master as the mass of bishops dispersed into the neither regions of the city."

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex XII (i)
Death of a Pimp

“Irenaeus was dangerously drunk; having finished his frantic business with the girls, he was eating a large onion. He was completely naked, covered in wine and body fluids. It was a disgusting sight. Then he said something garbled and indistinct, before rolling over on his back across the marble floor. He began gurgling; spewing wine from his mouth...”

The five remaining demons, Cassiel, Haniel, Kushiel, Muriel and Raziel now doubted their former convictions. They were whispering among themselves, agitated by guilt and shame. Kushiel was the first to speak, “Lord Poimandres, were we misled by our former Lord Samuel? Is what you’re telling us true? Can we really become like you and the others? Can we really become angels of light?” Kushiel was weeping as was Cassiel and Haniel. Poimandres asked one of the angels to take some water over to the demons. The five took the water, thanking the watcher. “Yes Kushiel,” Poimandres answered, “you can transform yourselves just as the others have, if only you’ll forgive... yourself. The miracle of atonement is really so simple, but it is difficult to achieve. You cannot just want to change; you must know that you are already pure. Inside each of you, there is an angel of light waiting to be revealed. Listen to me my brothers. I have a further tale of transformation. I have the story of how Valentinus changed the world. Even your former master Samuel was transformed. And if Samuel could change, do you doubt you too can become angels?” The five demons were ready to listen. This was the first they had heard of Samuel becoming an angel. How was this possible, wasn’t he long dead? Kushiel spoke up, “But Poimandres, our lord Samuel is dead. He perished with the mortals of the lower realm. How can an angel of light die?”

The watcher nodded, "Samuel is gone, it is true. There is much I do not understand. But this much I can tell you. When Samuel disappeared, he was transformed. He had become an angel. Listen well, and I'll tell you about young Valentinus. Samuel was transformed by Valentinus' work. On the day that Paul was martyred, I followed Valentinus as he returned with Irenaeus to a large whorehouse in Nicea. There were dozens of bishops lounging around the place, drinking and whoring about. Valentinus recognized one of them, Arius, a young fellow from Rome, who until earlier that day had been a disciple of Paul. Irenaeus called out to the brothel's owner, 'Wine and plenty of it! Also bring me some ripe pears and onions. I'm famished.' The owner complied, and in a few minutes the foul bishop was busy drinking flask after flask of the finest ruby wine. 'You girl and you too, come over here. I've had a long day. I had to light up a heretic,' the bishop laughed as two young prostitutes delivered themselves over to his carnal lust. Arius motioned for Valentinus to join him near an archway opening to the outside. Irenaeus was too busy to notice. As the bishop was drinking and fornicating, the two young men stepped outside to whisper; 'Didn't you and Paul receive my warning?' Arius whispered. 'I sent word to you not to come to Nicea. The emperor and Irenaeus have been conspiring to take control of the church. They were after Paul.' Valentinus nodded. The guilt in his heart was heavy, 'Were you there when I betrayed my master?' Arius nodded. 'What was I to do, should I have died there beside him?' Arius drew closer to the olive-skinned Egyptian, 'If you had been burned today, I would have been left alone to carry the message.' Valentinus was confused, 'What do you mean?' 'We have to get out of here,' Arius' voice was almost inaudible, 'We

need to flee tonight. I have a friend with a boat. He's waiting to set sail for Egypt, just as soon as we can get away."

"Irenaeus was dangerously drunk; having finished his frantic business with the girls, he was eating a large onion. He was completely naked, covered in wine and body fluids. It was a disgusting sight. Then he said something garbled and indistinct, before rolling over on his back across the marble floor. He began gurgling; spewing wine from his mouth, unconsciously vomiting while the two whores sat there laughing. There was no one else in the room. Arius stepped inside and ordered the whores out. Then he bent down, putting his hands under Irenaeus' head. Arius thought about turning the bishop's head so the vomit would empty from his mouth. Instead, he held the vile creature's head still as his stomach emptied its stinking contents up into his mouth, then back down into his lungs. Valentinus could hear the gurgling as Irenaeus' lungs filled with puke, but he stayed back, standing in the archway. In a few minutes it was over, Irenaeus had drowned in his own vomit. Unseen by either witness, Samuel's spirit abandoned the naked body to seek another host."

"Arius stood, satisfied the bishop was dead. 'It is time to leave. Let's go Valentinus, come on,' he motioned to his frozen friend. But Valentinus didn't flee; instead he went back inside, slipping past the naked corpse. He started rummaging through Irenaeus' papers that were carelessly thrown across the bar. 'What are you looking for?' Arius demanded. 'We need to get out of here before those girls tell somebody what has happened.' But Valentinus kept looking through the papers, tossing to the floor those items that didn't appear important. Then he stopped. He had found some books written by Paul. He

frantically turned their pages, seeing lines drawn through sentence after sentence, and where these lines had been crossed out, others were scribbled in, written in Irenaeus' distinct scrawl. Valentinus tossed a few more books aside and found one with fresh parchment and new leather bindings. He opened it and discovered a testament ascribed to someone named Luke, but written in Irenaeus' hand. And beneath an empty wine bottle, he found another gospel written in the bishop's handwriting, signed Matthew. The Egyptian grabbed these and the marked up books by Paul, and wrapped them in a linen towel he found behind the bar. He tied the cloth in a knot and flung it over his shoulder. Arius followed his lead by collecting more manuscripts, bundling them together in a tablecloth. Then they slipped out through the balcony, like stealthy thieves with stolen treasures tossed over their shoulders. 'We need to ditch these robes,' Arius fretted. 'We need to move fast. I know a shortcut down to the pier.' They quickly tossed their robes in some bushes and made their way through dark alleys until they reached the boat. By sunrise they were sailing south towards Egypt."

The watcher continued, "I decided to follow, wanting to learn more about their intentions. 'So what are we to do,' Arius wondered, 'once we arrive in Alexandria? The emperor's spies will discover we have fled, and sooner or later they will find us.' 'We are not going to stay in Alexandria,' Valentinus agreed, 'You are right. It's too dangerous. I know a place far to the south along the Nile, a desert village called Nag Hammadi. There the power of the empire is weak. It's a lawless land between Egypt and Ethiopia. There is a small Essene monastery founded by followers of Job himself. They will give us shelter. And

they have an extensive collection of holy books. There we will be safe. We will re-write the books of Paul and of Joshua from memory.’ Valentinus’ hands were resting across the linen cloth in which he had bundled the forged gospels. Someday these would be the evidence, proving Irenaeus’ gospels were a hoax.”

“Arius,’ Valentinus continued, ‘Nag Hammadi will be the new center of our tradition. Someday the world will understand why Paul had to stand up against the power of the world. Someday the world will thank us for escaping the flames and fleeing, so the message of Sophia and Christ wouldn’t die. Hopefully we will be remembered through our books, not by our acts of cowardice. There was nothing we could have done, he was ready, I believe he saw grace.’ There was truth in Valentinus’ words, but nothing would ever expunge the guilt he carried. Nothing would ever take away the memory of Paul, the way the old man turned his eyes as he was being led away by the guards, the way he screamed as he burned, and then the haunting smile that crossed the old preacher’s face before he closed his eyes for the last time.”

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex XIII (a)
Apotheosis of Samuel

“The miracle of apotheosis was attained on their embrace. The two halves of the son of man became one. Christ was merged into Samuel, and Samuel into Christ. Each one separated, had been a reflection of the other. Each was merely one side of the coin. Now the two sides were one.”

Poimandres finished his story of the disciples’ daring escape to Egypt. The Architect wanted to ask a question, “I am still wondering how the work of Valentinus and Arius prompted Samuel to repent? How did these books change history and destroy the physical universe?” He waited as the ebony watcher took a drink; “Valentinus and his disciple Arius,” Poimandres began, “spent the rest of their lives living and writing at Nag Hammadi. There in that lonely village, they copied the Corpus Gnostica. Yes, I said copied, because I personally dictated it to them. Does this shock you? It’s true; I had finally decided to reveal everything to a couple of simple mortals. They were terribly shocked when they first saw me. But over time they grew accustomed to my presence. Let us be honest with one another. All of this has happened before, and all of it will happen again.⁹⁸ I’ve seen these things repeat themselves over endless cycles, and I’ve witnessed the same tragedies, time, after time, after time. That’s why I decided to capture the vile beast, the master of universal

⁹⁸ This line is inspired by the Gnostic concept of *Eternal Return* or *Eternal Recurrence*. Eternal return was a core philosophy taught by the Pythagorean Illuminati in the sixth century BC. The idea later spread to Egypt, where the Gnostics and the Stoics embraced it. Friedrich Nietzsche, an alleged Illuminati master, posited that the universe has been recurring and will continue to recur in a self-similar form an infinite number of times. With the spread of orthodox Christianity, the concept fell into disuse. The basic premise is that the universe is limited in extent and contains a finite amount of matter, while time is viewed as being an illusion or as a manifestation of universal consciousness and is thus infinite. The universe has no starting or ending point while the matter comprising it is constantly changing its state. The number of possible changes is finite, and so sooner or later the same state will logically recur. It is a purely physical concept involving no supernatural reincarnation. (Dyson Teal)

consciousness.” Poimandres thumped the shoebox. “This is why I refuse to give you the beast. I refuse to witness any more tragedy and death. I’ve already seen too much suffering. Yes my brothers, I dictated the Corpus Gnostica to the mortals. I told them about our discussions around this church.” The group was aghast. How could Poimandres have done such a thing? Such a betrayal! For him to have revealed these secrets to two mortals was unthinkable. The Architect tried to laugh, “Poimandres, you must be joking. You could not have revealed these things to mere mortals. Surely not our private conversations around the construction site. Their feeble minds couldn’t have understood.”

“Enough,” the watcher’s face flushed with purple rage, “I revealed everything. I told them about you builder, and about Samuel, and about each of you,” he pointed to the angels and demons. “I told Valentinus and Arius about this church you’re building. This doorway you have opened so many times in the past, in this horrible place, this place between universes. I told them how Sophia fell into the middle realm due to your oversight Architect! You were her father! You should have guarded her more closely. You knew Apophis was lurking in that ancient swamp, the dreaming mind of the ancient one. I told the mortals how you created Christ from your tears of guilt. Yes Architect, I told them everything. I revealed to them where your son came from, and I told them how humanity was tricked into suffering by the fallen angels. I confessed everything to Valentinus and Arius in the desert village along the Nile. And they spent their sorrowful lives copying, as we sat in their stinking monastery. I told them about Atlantis and the fall of Adam and Eve. I told them about the space traveler Enoch and the world ship ARK. I told them about the old saint Job and

the pharaohs Ramses and Tuthmoses. I gave them the true story of Joshua the Christ, and I revealed the private secrets of Sophia and Christ in their glorious Heaven. And in a moment of weakness, I even confessed my love for her. I revealed everything to those two humans as they wrote it down.” Poimandres had stopped raging. He was no longer angry; he was sobbing, trying to remember her smile.

The Architect’s expression was frozen like marble. The five remaining demons spontaneously transformed into angels of light. They were wailing for joy, wiping their faces clean. “So that’s how you did it,” Azrael was speaking, “That’s how you finally got to Samuel, through the book. He had to see it for himself. He had to read about the terrible things he had done to finally seek atonement!” Poimandres was nodding, “Yes brother, I knew if telling these stories had worked for all of you, then it would work for Samuel as well. But I had to get to him, and the only way to do this was through a written account of our discussions here, after his own death. I knew if I dictated these things to Valentinus and Arius, eventually Samuel would read it.” “So Lord Poimandres,” Azrael was speaking for the group, “What happened after you confessed to the mortals? What became of Valentinus and Arius?” The watcher sighed, “The two men suffered the usual mortal fate. They lived, they wrote, and in due time, they died. But before they died, I instructed them to wrap all of their texts in linen, along with the forged gospels by Irenaeus, and to bury them in clay urns. This they did, and in time, the Corpus Gnostica was unearthed. It was translated by a young disciple and spread across the world by a deeply troubled

young woman. It was only a matter of time before Samuel read it. That's when everything changed forever. The timeline of history was altered."

Azrael interrupted, "So Poimandres, what happened when Samuel finally read the Corpus? How did it transform him, and how did this cause the deaths of Sophia and Christ?" The watcher reached for his bottle, taking a swallow; "Yes Azrael, I've taken the group this far. I will tell you the rest of the story. It was many centuries after the deaths of Valentinus and Arius. Their books had been dug up and translated by the young disciple. I followed the old demon as he was walking alone one night. I followed Samuel on a cold, drizzling evening, wandering the streets of a city named after the goddess of Providence. He was reliving the series of events that had brought him to this place. It had started many years earlier in a town named Princeton, in a land called Jersey. There the young disciple had translated the books. Samuel was there when the books were unearthed. At the time, he possessed the body of an elderly teacher whose own parents had been priests of Shaitan. They had dedicated their child at birth to becoming a host for their wicked god, breaking the child's left leg over and over again, in a sadistic ritual until he was permanently lamed. And when the codices were discovered, the old teacher stole them to conceal his identity. But things went terribly wrong, and the books were eventually published."

"The old demon was restlessly wandering the Earth as he had done for centuries, walking along a puddle-covered sidewalk, running parallel to the river. It was the last day of October; the cold rain was unforgiving. The demon pulled his dark oily overcoat in closely around his neck, as his cane clicked against the pavement. He hurried along the river to a large downtown mall,

where he saw a bookstore and coffeehouse. He frowned, 'Another damned coffeehouse, just like the place they frequented.' He looked into the large display windows facing the sidewalk. Every window was filled with the same book displays, 'Corpus Gnostica, Get It Now!' and, 'Read the Book the Whole World is Talking About, Buy Corpus Gnostica Today.' 'Damn that stupid boy,' Samuel fumed. 'I should have burned the damn codices when I had the chance.' Even worse, he realized, the humans were taking it seriously. The Corpus had released an avalanche of religious piety. Sophia and Christ were redeeming more souls than ever. 'At this rate,' the demon fumed; 'the whole damn planet will be atoned for in no time.'

"Samuel stopped in mid-step along the wet sidewalk, and slammed the brass handle of his cane into a window, shattering the glass. He grabbed a copy of the book, and thrust it into the folds of his coat, before limping away. He found an all night breakfast place, filled with the sort of people who inhabit all night joints. Self-styled authors, actors and artists, police and other late shift workers, prostitutes, and students trying to sober up before morning classes. He squinted in the harsh neon lighting; tattered band flyers littered the walls. He limped to the front counter, taking a seat. On his left was a cop, on his right a prostitute or actress, he couldn't tell which. 'Perfect,' Samuel sneered, 'some things never change.' He ordered coffee, and pulled the book from his coat. He leafed through the first few pages; he had never bothered to read it before. 'So it was actually dictated by Poimandres. Now that's a name I haven't heard in a while,' the demon sneered. He frantically drank cup after cup, rapidly turning

the pages. I was amazed by the rate at which he read. He was finished within an hour.”

“I should have killed Valentinus in Nicea when I had the chance,’ the ancient demon lamented as he closed the book. ‘I should have wiped out those damn Children of Light. We had this whole fucking planet to ourselves, if only my priests had done their jobs. But they were all idiots, fools, pure rift raft.’ Samuel furiously pushed away the book. He turned his attention to the other patrons in the diner, noticing that something was terribly wrong. Studying their faces, he realized they were all happy. ‘What’s going on here?’ He began reading their lips in the eerie neon light, watching a woman speaking with another about her love for Sophia and Christ. A policeman with a broad smile walked into the place, with a paperback copy of the Corpus tucked under his arm, well worn from many readings. In a corner at the back of the room, a prostitute and her John were deeply engaged in conversation, but to his chagrin they were not negotiating a price. They were talking about their experiences of Christ consciousness after reading the book. He soon realized that everyone in the diner had experienced some level of spiritual awakening.”

“I watched,” Poimandres continued, “as the demon quickly paid his tab with an old silver dollar, before hurrying out onto the street. I picked up the coin without notice, and followed him until morning. Everyone he saw was either carrying the Corpus or talking about it. ‘By the parental gods,’ he wailed, ‘how could this have happened. I made this planet a living hell for these wretched creatures, and now they’re flocking to Sophia and Christ like droves of winter geese.’ I followed him until he settled in a small park by the river. He sat

on a bench beside a heroine addict. He reached into his overcoat, pulling out some heroine in a little plastic bag along with a spoon, syringe, and lighter. He offered it to the poor man, hoping to amuse himself. 'No thanks, man!' the addict waved his hand as he got up from the bench, 'I am clean brother. I've found Sophia and Christ. I am one with God. Here man, you need to read this. You need to find Sophia too.' The former junkie handed Samuel a worn copy of the Corpus."

"Samuel's eyes were filled with disgust as he watched the former junkie walking away. 'It is hopeless! It's over! I'm finished,' the old villain finally admitted, pressing his face into his dirty hands. I knew," Poimandres continued, "that his long struggle was finally coming to an end. He held his face in his hands for some time, crying and remembering. He lamented the deaths of his parents so long ago. He remembered the dismemberment of his mother, and the universe's first patricide when he killed his father in self-defense. He remembered his exile on Nemesis. He remembered his first disastrous meeting with Sophia and his devious temptation of Eve. The throbbing pain in his foot, reminded him of Christ. He wailed as he remembered murdering the old saint Job, poisoning Joshua's real mother, and crucifying Joshua himself. He yelled as he remembered burning Paul, and tricking humanity into accepting a false god. He remembered everything and wept bitterly."

"I watched," Poimandres confessed, "as a child's small hand reached over from behind the bench, touching the wailing demon on the shoulder. Samuel lifted his head from his tear-drenched hands and turned to see a little girl standing behind him. She was finally here. He rocked back and forth on the

bench, thanking the parental gods. She was finally here! His eyes were filled with tears; his body was shaking. Sophie's eyes sparkled like golden orbs. Her dress was light blue with white lace ruffles around the arms and on the lower trim. A purple scarf was tied around her waist. Her hair was golden yellow and her skin was pale. Samuel looked into her eyes for what seemed an eternity. His eyes made a full confession, his tears renounced everything he had done, everything he had been, and everything he had caused. She came around the bench and sat beside the exhausted demigod. She put her hands under his chin and held his head, as she looked deeply into his soul. He was asking for atonement. He was finally willing to ask for help."

"I still didn't reveal myself to either. Why should I have?" Poimandres asked his silent friends. "I could do nothing for Samuel. Sophia was all he needed. I watched and listened as he shook with waves of emotion, accepting her forgiveness. Then he mustered the strength to ask, 'Why Sophia? Why did all of this happen? Why didn't you give me and the other Archons bodies when we first met? Why all of this suffering?' She turned her eyes away; ashamed of the way she had lost control of her perfect cosmos. She looked back into the fallen angel's eyes, and confessed, 'Samuel, I was so afraid when you first appeared. I was afraid of you and your companions, because I couldn't control you. I had hoped you and the others would just go away, but I was wrong. You were mad with rage, driven insane by the ancient one,' she was crying. She put her hands on Samuel's face, and then," Poimandres' voice was trembling, "the goddess asked the demon to... forgive her. This wasn't what she had planned. She had been so self-confident; she had been so certain the source of evil was

Samuel and his Archons. But now she finally accepted the truth. She had committed one of the greatest sins of all... the sin of pride. Ultimately, the entire universe had paid the penalty for her arrogance.”

Poimandres wiped some tears away with his bandana; “I remained unseen as the two gods silently sat on the bench. They shared an unspoken communion, a catharsis that shattered the framework of creation. Samuel finally understood the meaning of unconditional love, ‘Yes Sophia, I’ve always loved you. I forgive you. Please take me away from this terrible place.’ She nodded, laying her head against his shoulder. At that moment time stopped, and the city of Providence and the physical universe it was in, fell away. Reality collapsed, unwrapping into a twisting spectrum of color, sound, vibration, and pure undifferentiated consciousness. The two beings passed through the ninth veil into the realm of pure of light. Sophia took Samuel by the hand and led him into her Kingdom of Heaven. She led the crippled god with his shattered raven black wings, into the center of her garden, to the Fountain of Forgetfulness. Christ was already there, having just portrayed the mortal junkie; he was waiting for his beloved and his long tormented brother. Samuel recognized his twin immediately; and limped forward to the angel. The two embraced. The struggle for reintegration was over. The work of atonement finished. The miracle of apotheosis was attained on their embrace.⁹⁹ The two halves of the son of man became one. Christ was merged into Samuel, and Samuel into

⁹⁹ *Apotheosis* (Greek) meaning “to deify.” It is the glorification of a subject to the divine level. In theology, the term apotheosis refers to the idea that an individual has been raised to a godlike stature. Here Samuel has finally risen to his angelic potential through the act of reintegration with Christ. (Dyson Teal)

Christ. Each one separated, had been a reflection of the other. Each merely one side of the coin. Now the two sides were one.”

Poimandres pulled Samuel’s silver dollar from his jeans pocket and rolled it between his fingers, “Christ was different now, more complete, more self-aware, ‘Sophie, my work here is finished,” Christ solemnly declared. ‘I have only one thing left to do. Now we’re both complete. I’ve reunited with my brother, and you have now atoned for every fragment of your soul. You’re whole once more. I must complete my mission. I must take you back to our father in the higher realm.’ He knew the drama was nearly over. His purpose was ingrained in his very being, but still he hesitated. He didn’t want to leave the middle plane, to leave the fountain, to leave Heaven, ending his life with Sophie. He longed for just a little more time, one more walk through the gardens to smell just one more flower, making love with her for just a little while longer. But he knew his time had come. It had always been his destiny to take her back to their father. There was nothing left for him to do now except to lead her by the hand into the fountain. She looked into his eyes, smiling radiantly, as they passed into the clear water containing every memory and every weary soul that had ever existed. They were all gathered together into the radiant spiritual water, merging into the body of their creator, Sophia. The great work was finished; Sophia and Christ emerged through the watery spray onto the desert plains of the higher realm. They rose through the puddle of tears the Architect had cried so long ago. I followed them through the veil to the higher realm. Brother builder, you were still sitting on the same boulder you

were on when you created Christ. You were still patiently waiting for them to return.” “Yes brother,” the Architect nodded, “I remember.”

“Once again she had transformed into a child,” Poimandres explained, “I watched as Christ led her, placing her small hands into yours.” The old lion had broken down, weeping as the watcher continued, “Architect, I watched as you knelt down before your long lost daughter. You were rejoicing. You were so relieved. You were so overwhelmed, thanking the parental gods for her safe return. I watched as you embraced her, hugging her, wrapping your powerful arms around her, refusing to let go. ‘Sophia, my child, you’ve finally come home. You are safe. You’re with me now. We will be together forever.’ But as Christ placed her hand into your palms, she felt his grip becoming fixed and cold. It felt like her hand was slipping away from a marble phantom, his hand suddenly rigid in an instance. She spontaneously turned to check her lover. But it was too late. Christ had returned to his original state, he had transformed back into a pillar of clay. ‘No!’ she wailed, ‘No, darling... not you!’ She turned, flinging her arms around the clay figure, screaming and wailing. But you my brother,” Poimandres stared accusingly at the lion-faced builder, “you just looked on helplessly. ‘No father no! Not him, he cannot die!’ She crushed the dry clay figure in her tight embrace; it crumbled into broken fragments like a shattered urn.

“Sophia fell to the ground, lifting the bits of reddish clay that had been her lover. She screamed and wailed. Her tears fell on Christ’s dusty remains, but he didn’t return. ‘Bring him back!’ she demanded. But you just shook your head. You gave her a pretty sorry answer I think,” Poimandres sneered, “You

said, 'I can do nothing. He has served his purpose. Sophie, he couldn't remain here on the higher plane with you and me. He freely gave his life to bring you back. It was his purpose, and now he has returned to the dust from whence he came.' 'No father, damn you! No, bring him back!' she hissed. She cursed you Architect! She slammed her fists into your chest. You hadn't expected her to fall in love with him had you? No! He was simply an errand boy with a single purpose, disposable. Shameful! You tried to take her by the hand, but she pulled away. She began rolling in the dust, crying and withering. Her blue dress was covered in the red clay that had once been the son of man. I watched as you knelt down beside her, trying to comfort her, but she just lay there in the dust."

The Architect was shaken. He remembered every second of this terrible scene, but he had no idea there had been a witness. He had hoped to keep these things a secret forever. But Poimandres was telling everyone. The angels were frozen; they had never heard the watcher speaking so harshly to the builder. Poimandres went on, "I heard a powerful wind from the distant ocher mountains, howling across the lonely plain. You looked out over the horizon, knowing it was the breath of the wretched one. I saw you pulling on your daughter's arm, yelling, 'Sophie, it's time to leave! We must hurry!' You urged her to get up, but she refused. The evil wind was growing stronger, blowing Christ's dust away, coloring the air with a reddish haze. But she still refused to leave. She was covered in his dust, her face buried in the ground. Brother Architect, you were frantic. You grabbed her by the shoulders turning her over. If she wouldn't come willingly, then you would carry her. But when you turned

her over, she was already gone. I was there brother. I remember the horror on your face when you saw her eyes glazed over, her face frozen with the grim pallor of death. Brother,” Poimandres confessed, “I was as shocked as you. I loved her as much as you. No Architect, I loved her more than you ever did! I loved her unconditionally, even though she never knew I existed. Who was I to interfere in her life with Christ? It’s you builder, who must carry the guilt for her death.” Poimandres’ black face had turned a violent shade of purple. He was standing, shouting directly into the lion’s face, “Architect, you broke her heart! You became the destroyer of worlds as well as their creator. I watched as you cursed the hot ocher wind. And in the distance, I could hear the terrible laughter, the mocking laughter of the giant hare. I saw you shaking your fists towards the horizon as you rocked back and forth, holding her in your arms. The drama between men and gods was over. The builder of universes had lost the eternal battle to the weaver of nightmares.” Poimandres was facing the Architect, but the builder turned. He walked away to be alone with his misery and guilt.

*As given by Valentinus, Disciple of Christ,
To his faithful student Arius*

Codex XIII (b)
Final Revelation of Poimandres

“Father,’ the old woman was prattling on as she hoed, ‘I think we’ll see an early winter. The chill’s already so harsh. You should plan to cut the wheat early.’ The old man pretended not to hear. It was like this every year, she always wanted to cut the wheat too early.”

The assembly was shaken by Poimandres’ blunt account. The Architect had seen both deities die, but he had hoped to keep the secret hidden from his companions. But the truth was out. The builder would have to accept the consequences. Azrael turned to the lion-faced builder, offering a weak consolation, “Brother, you had no way of knowing she would die from heartbreak. There was no way you could have known she would fall in love with him on the other side.” The Architect said nothing. He kept his eyes fixed on the finished church across the yard. Azrael then turned to the watcher, “My Lord, there’s still one mystery left unanswered, and I suppose with the church now finished it’s time to asked the question directly; so how did you capture Ancient of Days?” Poimandres placed his hands on either side of the shoebox, keeping it squarely on his lap. He thumped the lid.

Everyone heard the prisoner give a loud kick as Poimandres answered; “Everything exists in cycles. Even the ancient one manifests itself through cycles; birth, maturity, old age, and finally death. The ancient one had died and was about to be reborn. The eternal wheel was still turning, and I was alone, patiently waiting. I watched fine fingers of light from a late afternoon sun, rippling through billions of wheat spikes, their stringy husks covered in fine silk beards. Hidden within each husk was a ripening grain, waiting to be eaten by

some passing crows. Endless fields of wheat covered the realm to the end of the horizon. Golden whips thrashing back and forth, driven by forlorn winds, pouring through distant mountain valleys. Yellow stalks shivered in the nasty chill, bending this way and that in endless waves across the prairie. It was a parched sea, a canvas of potential, stretching from one horizon to the other. I sat on a craggy rock at a cliff's edge on a lonely mountain. I watched the wheat bending back and forth, like a billion pilgrims bowing to long forgotten gods."

"I sat there, my legs tucked up, my face lashed by steely winds, carrying an eerie chill from the first wintry storms already brewing in the higher elevations. My eyes focused on a point far away, a small dark speck set adrift, lost in the mist of the golden sea. It was a typical prairie farmhouse, completely rustic. The porch had two old rocking chairs with a plank table set between them. A dusty path led from the house to a small vegetable garden."

"I knew this place well. I had watched its inhabitants forever. The occupants didn't seem to be aware I was watching and listening. Their actions never betrayed any suspicions I existed. But perhaps they already knew and simply didn't care. They were working outside, tending their garden. The old man was kneeling on the ground. He was carefully pulling up turnips, knocking off the black earth, cutting off the green leaves with a rusty knife, tossing them into a wicker basket. His dark skin was weathered, his face scarred by wisdom. He had lost his right eye in a long forgotten struggle, but he saw everything clearly though the other. Hidden in his blue overalls pocket was a half-full bottle of bourbon, from which he took a sip when he thought his wife wasn't looking. As he steadily pulled up the turnips, he hummed an old spiritual he

knew by heart. It was a song that rippled through the folds of time and space, breathing fresh life into the void. A few yards away, the old woman was busy hoeing scattered weeds. Her skin as dark as ebony, it was perfect and smooth. She wore a linen dress wrapped tightly around her waist, with a single red rose set carefully in her hair. Her face reminded me of an obsidian idol from a long forgotten temple. Her hair was silvery blue, her eyes were deep portals, filled with stars."

"The two were talking to one another," the watcher whispered, "as I discretely listened from the distant mountains, 'Father,' the old woman was prattling on as she hoed, 'I think we'll see an early winter. The chill's already so harsh. You should plan to cut the wheat early.' The old man pretended not to hear. It was like this every year, she always wanted to cut the wheat too early. He was smiling, enjoying the cool breeze as it brushed his face. He was still pulling up turnips, when he pushed aside a large clump of leaves, discovering a small nest. It was a rabbit's warren, concealed beneath the wide green turnip leaves. The old man carefully held back the leaves as he gently opened the lip of the nest. Under the downy fur the mother had pulled from her stomach, was one tiny black rabbit. It was almost completely black, with a small white streak across its nose. Its eyes were already open. The old man just stared at the small animal, resting in its nest. He appeared mesmerized by its dark eyes. He didn't hear, as she silently approached from behind. He just kept looking into those eyes, and in them he saw... boundless potential. She was now standing tense, poised to strike from behind the kneeling man. The old woman quickly raised her heavy steel hoe, plunging it as hard and as fast as she could towards the

rabbit's nest. But the old man had heard her heaving forward. In an instant, he deflected the sharp blow away from the nest with a quick shove from his shoulder. 'No woman,' he turned yelling, 'Leave it be!' His face was grim. 'Fine, you always were an old fool. You'll never learn,' she hissed angrily, walking back to the farmhouse. I continued watching as the old man knelt before the nest. It seemed to me he was praying. I could faintly hear him whispering, 'Mysteries of mysteries. Our God, born in a warren.' After a few minutes, he collected his basket of turnip greens and followed his wife into the house, where they retired for the evening."

"I waited until well after midnight when microscopic ice crystals filled the air, creating a haunting halo around the full moon. Then I silently made my way down the steep face of the mountain, and crossed the wheat-covered plains towards the farm. The night was terribly cold. I was certain there would be an early winter. I finally reached the farmhouse in the early morning. I silently crept into the vegetable garden, carefully pushing aside leaves until I found the nest. The young rabbit was still there, half buried under its mother's thick fur. I carefully reached into the nest and grabbed it. I took the small creature, pressing it closely to my chest to keep it warm, while I stealthily headed towards the front porch. There, I found a weathered shoebox in which the old man kept his pipes and hemp. I silently dumped these out, and placed the creature in the box. Then I made a nest of turnip leaves for the beast and closed the box. I bound it up tightly with some bailing twine and hurried away under the pale halo of the moon." Poimandres smiled at his audience; everyone in the group, including the Architect, was as confused as ever.

Codex XIII (c)
Dawn of a New Reality

“It depicted the All Seeing Eye of the father god Horus, rising over an uncrowned pyramid, and behind these were the petals of a great red rose. Below the giant rose and pyramid, was a rocky landscape with a twisting path. Walking along this path was a large, dark-skinned man. He was blindfolded, wearing a white tee shirt and blue jeans. He was chasing a black rabbit and a little girl along the spiraling path, up to the unfinished pyramid.”

The church bell began ringing after Poimandres finished his last story. The large bronze bell tolled for the first and only time it would ever sound. Azrael was pulling the rope in the front vestibule, signaling the great work was finished. The booming noise was sharp and metallic, vibrating across the meadow. The bell’s toll announced the end of the angel’s labor, the end of the Architect’s grand design, and the end of Poimandres’ journey across the wasteland of time. But the loud rhythmic clanging was still more. It signaled that the angels were free. Free from their obligations to the Architect, and free from their past sins. It promised them a better future. But for Poimandres, the tolling of the bell declared he was now alone, isolated in this dreadful place forever. Soon he would be left alone with no one to speak to, no one to hear his tales.

“Brothers,” the Architect announced, putting down his last bottle of water, “you are free to leave. Your obligation to me is over; your labor here is done. Your debt to this universe is paid in full. Each of you leaves here, born again, filled with the potential for both good and evil. You are each the navigator of your spirit’s journey on the other side. I pray a wonderful destiny awaits each of you there.” Then he turned to Poimandres, who was still sitting,

holding the shoebox. "Watcher, everything you said about the deaths of Sophia and Christ, it's all true. It was my fault. I should have gone into the pool of tears to save her myself. I failed both of them and brought this misery upon us all. But it's still not too late to save her, if you will only believe in the...

boundless potential. Brother watcher, the appointed time has come. My destiny is fulfilled. Is there nothing else I can say to persuade you to free the beast?"

The Architect's voice carried a tone of resignation. He had nothing left to say, he was prepared to meet his fate. Poimandres looked into the feline eyes of his companion, "No brother, it ends now. I'll never give you Ancient of Days." The Architect frowned, "So our new universe will have no soul. It shall remain a lifeless and empty void. So be it then brother. It has always been your choice. I've fashioned so many universes, and you've seen them all. But enough! I give up. I cannot change your mind. It has always been your choice." The Architect offered his hand to Poimandres as he stood. "Will you see us off then?" the builder asked. Poimandres nodded.

It was a beautiful little building, standing in the meadow, surrounded by forests and mountains. The church had a large, octagonal, stained-glass window set over the front doorway. It depicted the All Seeing Eye of the father god Horus, rising over an uncrowned pyramid, and behind these were the petals of a great red rose. Below the giant rose and pyramid, was a rocky landscape with a twisting path. Walking along this path was a large, dark-skinned man. He was blindfolded, wearing a white tee shirt and blue jeans. He was chasing a black rabbit and a little girl along the spiraling path, up to the unfinished pyramid. Poimandres smiled. It was the first time he had seen the

completed window. The glass workers had done an excellent job. It was stunning, but it was also confusing. Why had they depicted him blindfolded? He laughed, "Could it really be that simple?" The Architect looked into the watcher's dark eyes and nodded, "Sometimes brother, you cannot trust your senses. Sometimes you have to follow your heart... blindly." Poimandres was still holding the box, but he was beginning to understand.

Azrael stopped pulling the rope, but for several moments the dying echo continued to ring in everyone's ears. "Brothers," the Architect announced, "the doorway has opened." With these words a bluish-white light bubble appeared in the center of the sanctuary, floating over the polished wooden floor. Almost immediately, the nearest angels took flight, one after another, flying straight through the front door and into the glowing orb. The orb shook each time an angel flew into it, shimmering and shaking, like a candle flame catching a breeze when someone walks by. In a minute or two, every angel had flown through the portal, all except Azrael. Azrael waited, watching as each of his brothers disappeared into the bluish light. Then he crossed the vestibule to where the Architect and Poimandres were standing. "Brother watcher," he held out his hand as he spoke, "Thank you for saving me. Thank you for everything you've done." Azrael cried as he embraced Poimandres, then he too flew through the bluish light.

Now they were all gone. Only the Architect and Poimandres remained. Both just stood there in the vestibule, silently looking into the blue light. Tears slowly fell from the great cat's eyes, his thoughts turning to his son and daughter. Poimandres' thoughts were with them as well. "Brother," the

Architect finally broke the silence; “I would have saved them if I had known. They were my children. I hope someday you will stop blaming me for what happened. I’ll have to carry the burden for their deaths with me forever.”

Poimandres looked at his companion but said nothing. There was nothing left to say. But after a few moments of reflection, he softly whispered, “Brother, everything that happens is the will of God. I’ve watched your universes rise and fall around me for uncounted ages, like the rising and receding tides of a great cosmic ocean. Everything happened for a reason. Yes brother, I forgive you.”

The Architect nodded, his expression reflected a final and lasting peace.

“Brother,” the Architect said stoically, “Thank you. I’ll put my faith in the highest God alone,” and then he added, “Do you believe God will forgive me?”

Poimandres wasn’t surprised by the Architect’s question, answering immediately, “Brother, there is nothing left to forgive.” The Architect took several steps backward towards the bluish light; “Poimandres, I leave you in the hands of the one that is, and yet you see her not.” Then the great cat-man walked through the portal and disappeared forever, leaving the watcher absolutely alone. The universe was now completely empty. Everything had finally run its course. Poimandres stood there by himself, looking into the bluish light, refusing to follow the others.

He had made up his mind; the suffering in the past had been caused by the wicked mind of the ancient one. At some point it had to end. And yet it had also been his spirit that had animated the former realities. Without the spirit of Ancient of Days, the Architect’s new universe would remain a cold, lifeless space, filled with stale gases and dusty matter, a void without form or meaning.

'Too bad,' his lower lip trembled, 'but it has to end. I'll stay here alone forever, guarding this god-forsaken box. I'll never allow this evil mind to take possession of another realm. The horror ends here, once and for all.'

Poimandres had made his choice. He would take the act of creation away from God. He would derail creation by refusing to participate. The watcher felt several strong kicks from inside the box, "No. Damn you! It's over! Your terrible work is finished; your dark fantasies have come to an end. The Architect is gone; and his workers are gone. His universe is dead! You might as well die too!" The beast stopped kicking for the first time in ages. It had given up. It felt like a dead weight, a stone or something, just lying in the box.

Poimandres was resigned to his lonely fate. He would stand guard at the portal to reality forever. His mind turned to the past, to the lonely world of his memories, to the only world remaining. He remembered Christ and how he sacrificed his life to save Sophia from the hell into which she had fallen. He remembered Sophia's expression when she realized Christ had died for her, and he remembered seeing her die from heartbreak as her father watched on helplessly. He remembered Samuel; the demon's long suffering, his pain and misery, and his eventual redemption. But it had been for nothing. They were all gone. The gods had passed away like half forgotten dreams. He would never again hear her soft voice, and she would never know that he had loved her. She never knew he was watching, feeling her every mood, hearing her every thought, secretly longing to be with her. Now it was too late; she had died so long ago. The finality of it crushed his heart, and the watcher wept. If only he had revealed himself to her. Perhaps she would have loved him... Potentially.

Poimandres knelt down on the church floor, looking at the light orb in the middle of the sanctuary. 'Potentially,' he thought again as he untied the cord around the shoebox, opening the lid for the first time in ages. Immediately, the black rabbit leap out, landing splat on the polished wooden floor in front of the watcher. It turned back, taking a fierce glance at its former captor. Its expression was unfathomable; every emotion was expressed in those haunting jet black eyes. Poimandres looked into the eyes of the abyss, and saw his own shadow. The rabbit laughed, and then leapt straight into the bluish orb.

Poimandres stayed on the floor, watching as the bluish light shimmered. The light just floated there, suspended in mid-air like a soapy bubble, and then it began to shake, growing larger, expanding towards the floor and ceiling, filling up the sanctuary. And then she stepped out from the light. She was radiant, a beautiful child, wearing a blue dress with white fringe ruffles. Tied around her waist was a purple scarf, and in her long yellow hair was a single red rose. She was smiling as Poimandres, still on his knees, shook with joy. He cried, "Sophie... You're alive! Oh Sophie, I love you so much! I should have told you a million times over how much I've always loved you!" The giant watcher and the small girl embraced. She pulled his hands up, motioning for him to rise. He stood there for a moment, looking into the bright blue eyes of his beloved. She was real. Sophia was alive. It had been true all along. The spirit of Ancient of Days had indeed contained everything that was evil, but he had also been the spirit of everything good. His spirit had reanimated Sophia. She was reborn, and she had passed through the portal to come for him. The goddess beckoned the watcher to come with her. She took him by the hands, and as he cried for

joy, she removed the purple scarf from around her waist, and tied it tightly around his eyes. Then together, hand in hand, they stepped through the portal into a new reality.

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To his faithful student Arius*