The Concepts of Powers and Spiritual Struggle in Ephesians

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Introduction.

Ever since I can remember, I have been fascinated by the concept of angels and demons having an influence on the things I do. I remember hearing stories of missionaries encountering demons and demonically possessed people in India and Africa. I heard stories of people in life and death situations. Somewhere, maybe across the country or the world, someone would get an urge to pray for the person(s) in peril, and angels would appear from nowhere and protect them. I heard stories of Ouigi boards and the evil that occur from accessing the demonic realm through the use of a board game that could be purchased at a toy store. As I've grown older, this interest has not faded. Rather, it seems that my interest increases as materials on the subject and the popularity of the subject seems to increase as well.

Spiritual warfare has lately become a widely discussed and controversial issue in Christian circles. What was once seen as a subject discussed in fringe "charismatic" churches has become a popular subject for Bible studies and for Sunday sermons in mainstream churches. It has become a popular subject in Christian literature. Entire sections of Christian bookstores are devoted to spiritual warfare, with books ranging from fictional stories in which the main characters, through prayer, empower angels to fight against demons, to books intended as guides or inspiration in dealing with the spirit realm as Christians. There are increasingly more books by Christians in academia that take a scholarly approach to understanding the ways which spiritual forces were understood by the New Testament authors.

For centuries, Westerners have relied on rationalism to understand the world we live in. Many Western Christians have relied on rationalism to understand and interpret scripture. Within a materialistic and rationalistic lens, the issue of a biblical perspective for the topic of spiritual warfare may be pushed aside as an issue that seems to have little significance today, or as an issue that is just plain absurd. There are reasons, however, to consider the issue. There is an emerging popularity of the subject in Christian circles, with topics such as exorcism, deliverance ministry, territorial spirits, magic, witchcraft, sorcery, the occult, mother goddess traditions, psychics, and communicating with spirits being discussed in sermons, Bible studies, and conferences. In light of these trends, it is important for anyone interested in the subject to be able to work towards interpreting what is the biblical perspective on spiritual warfare. Whether and how we are to apply to our own lives what we learn from looking into the biblical perspective may differ for each of us.

The New Testament letter to the Ephesians is often a main focal point of discussion when biblical teaching on spiritual warfare occurs, because so many of its passages concern "power", "powers", "authorities", "principalities", and other related language. Ephesians contains a higher percentage of language regarding "power" and "powers" than any other New Testament epistle. According to Clint Arnold, "this percentage is not limited to one word group. Each word group denoting power in Ephesians contains a higher percentage of power terms than is contained in all other epistles attributed to Paul."[1]

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[1] C. E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (2nd ed; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 1.

In this work I make a distinction between terms relating to "power" and terms relating to the "powers". When I refer to "power", I am referring to the power of God and/or Christ. When I am referring to the "powers", I am referring to the lists of "powers" such as that found in Ephesians 1:21 (rule, authority, power, dominion, title). When I refer to power terms, I am including words that would fall under both groups, "power" and the "powers".

There are, of course, different ways to interpret Ephesians' language regarding the "powers" in Ephesians. One person may see the "powers" as referring to human social, political or military structures. Another may interpret the "powers" as referring to good or evil (or both) spiritual beings that may have some effect on humanity. The issue on which this thesis focuses is what the author of Ephesians thought he was referring to with the use of these terms. The conclusion of the thesis will be that he was referring to spiritual beings that had an effect on humanity.

I will seek to demonstrate that the author was referring to spiritual beings in the following ways. First, I will briefly show that each of these interpretations (of the "powers" referring to sociopolitical structures and of spiritual forces) has been made by scholars since the work of Otto Everling (whose work concerning "powers" is considered foundational) in 1888. I will show that these interpretations did not take fully into account the available historical evidence related to this topic.[2] I will then seek to lay out an historical context for the writing of Ephesians.

I will examine themes in the Qumran Essene writings (the Dead Sea Scrolls) that are mirrored in Ephesians. I will also explore the use of similar language in other

religious texts of the era (mostly, but not limited to Jewish writings such as Qumran writings, psuedapigrapha, etc.) to gain an understanding of what such language may have meant to its author and audience. I will explore the cultural situation at Ephesus and Asia Minor in an attempt to understand how the audience of Ephesians might have understood the use of "power" and "powers" language.

Once I have established what the language probably meant to its contemporaries, I will then take a close look at the passages in Ephesians that I consider to deal with the role of spiritual forces, leading up to the famous passage of Ephesians 6:10-18 (the armor of God). I will show that the warfare language in Ephesians 6 reflects a belief in unseen forces that affect the course of human affairs.

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[2] I do not intend to suggest that I fully take into account all available historical evidence related to this issue. Rather, I will re-explore evidence that has been looked at by some scholars, as well as further

1. How have the "Powers" previously been understood?

In recent years, much scholarship on the topic of "spiritual warfare" and on the epistle to the Ephesians has been done by Clint E. Arnold. It seems that almost any serious discussion on the topic of "spiritual warfare" or on Ephesians, whether in Bible dictionaries, commentaries, and encyclopedias, or in other academic literary works will cite Arnold and his works as a source. Inasmuch, this work is indebted to Arnold and his many works.[3]

According to Arnold, "Any discussion of the 'powers' would be incomplete without reference to the foundational work of Otto Everling published in 1888 entitled, *Die paulinische Angelologie und Damonologie*.[4] Everling sees the "powers" terminology and thought in Ephesians rooted in an 'unmistakable connection to pre-Christian Jewish and heathen religious designations and cultic activity' (p. 119)."[5] In his work, Everling argues that the author of specific passages, such as Ephesians 2:2, is influenced by the Jewish demonology found in psuedapigrapha works such *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees*. He commits twelve pages of his work to Ephesians, concluding that Ephesians teaches "the existence of a multitude of devilish beings which live in the air under the supreme command of Satan" (p. 109).

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examine evidence found in the Qumran writings of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

[3] Much of the history of the interpretation of "power" and "powers" is taken from Arnold's work, *Power and Magic*.

[4] O. Everling, *Die paulinische Angelologie und Damonologie*, (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973); as cited in Arnold, *Power and Magic* 42.

[5] Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 42.

Martin Dibelius built upon the work of Everling in his work titled, *Die Geisterwelt im Glauben des Paulus*, published in 1909. Dibelius develops Everling's work by arguing the significance of Paul's view of the spirit world to his theological and religious thought. Dibelius states:

> The place of the belief in the spirit realm (*Geisterglaubens*) in the religion of Paul is of special significance for eschatology and Christology. One may not push it aside as peripheral, for every single concept reaches into the center of his piety: one loses a portion of the Pauline faith when one rejects it. (p. 5)

Dibelius devotes fifty pages of his work to Ephesians and Colossions. He, like Everling, examines Jewish apocalyptic writings as the main source for Paul's spirit-world understanding. Dibelius also examines other Jewish and Hellenistic writings of the era.

Many works since Everling's and Dibelius' concerning "powers" in Ephesians and Paul's writings have sought to understand the "powers" in terms of contemporary life. In 1956, G.B. Caird emphasized a "structural" interpretation of the "powers" in his work, *Principalities and Powers: A Study in Pauline Theology*.[6] For Caird, the "powers" are to be understood as political or social structures.[7]

Heinrich Schlier authored a work titled *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament*, published in 1961.[8] Schlier seeks to discover "which phenomena are meant by these 'powers' and which meaning or reality corresponds to the terms 'principalities and powers'" (p. 9). He interprets the "air" in Ephesians 2:2 as a sort of spiritual "atmosphere". He proposes that Paul regards this spiritual atmosphere as the way in which the "powers" implement their control. He views, then, that the control by the

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[6] G.B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956). As cited in Arnold, *Power and Magic*.

[7] Interestingly, twenty years later Caird changed his position on the interpretation of "powers". According to Arnold, *Power and Magic*, he argued in *Paul's Letters from Prison* (Oxford, 1976) that Paul refers to spiritual beings which operated in and through the structures when he wrote about "powers".

"powers" is a general spirit or attitude in a nation or an area that is present in institutions and is spread by the institutions.[9] Schlier explains that the morality of these "powers" throughout the Pauline epistles is evil and against God (pp. 14-15).

Hendrik Berkhof took a similar approach to Schlier in his 1962 work, *Christ and the Powers*. Berkhof says, "One can even doubt whether Paul conceived of the powers as personal beings. In any case this aspect is so secondary that it makes little difference whether he did or not" (p. 24). For Berkhof, the "powers" are to be understood as "structures of earthly existence" (p. 23). Ephesians, then, lays out a basis for the social action of Christians.

Walter Wink has undertaken what the *Dictionary of Paul and his letters* (DPHL) calls the most comprehensive study of the subject.[10] In 1984 his *Naming the Powers* was published. In 1986 his *Unmasking the Powers* was published, and a third work, *Engaging the Powers*, was published in 1992.[11] Wink surveys the whole range of Paul's use of the language of power, not just instances where it clearly refers to nonhuman dimensions of reality. He concludes that Paul used inexact and interchangeable language of power to refer at the same time to the inner and outer aspects of any given appearance of power.[12] He decides that Paul did believe in the reality of an unseen spiritual world, but his perspective is very subtle. Paul had worked to demythologize a worldview including spirits by expanding the list of enemies of Christ and his followers to include

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[8] Heinrich Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament*, QD 3 (Freiburg: Herder, 1961).
[9] Arnold, *Power and Magic* 44.
[10] Gerarld F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, eds, *Dictionary of Paul and his letters* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1993) 747.
[11] Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers. The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984)
[12] DPHL 747.

law, sin, flesh and death. So Wink argues that the "powers" are heavenly and earthly, divine and human, spiritual and political, invisible and structural. [13]

In his attempt to discover the meaning behind the "powers" language in Ephesians, Arnold, in his book, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians*, declares that "the question of why the epistle was written is at the root of the continuing problem of how to understand the message of Ephesians."[14] He is the first to approach the issue this way. Arnold concludes that Ephesians was "written to a group of churches in western Asia Minor needing help in developing a Christian perspective on the "powers" and encouragement in their ongoing struggles with these pernicious spirit-forces".[15] The "powers" represent real hostile spiritual forces that new Christians truly feared, and an understanding of the Christian's available power in a triumphant Christ was necessary.

Many other works have been published in an attempt to explain the meaning of the "powers" language in Ephesians, some arguing for an explanation of earthly powers and some for an explanation of spiritual powers. I have found that I am in agreement with many of these scholars, such as Arnold. Arnold focuses on an approach to understanding the "powers" through his aims to discover the reason Ephesians was written. This means taking a close look at the situation in Ephesus and surrounding Asia Minor to see what life was like for these people. I believe this is an important approach and Arnold has done much important work, but I think he does not look closely enough at the connections between Ephesians and other Jewish texts, specifically the Dead Sea Scrolls.

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[13] DPHL 747. For a critique of Wink, see Arnold, *Power and Magic* 48-51, 129-34, 198-201.
[14] Arnold, *Power and Magic* 3.

In my next chapter, I will show the existence the Qumran Essenes believed themselves to live in. There are many themes found in the Qumran writings that are paralleled in Ephesians, and if we can understood what these themes meant to the Qumran Essenes, we may have our first clue to understanding what the themes meant for the author and readers of Ephesians.

I am not going to assert that the writings found at Qumran were direct influences on the writer of Ephesians. I will show that similar language and themes were used in a context that most definitely referred to spiritual beings. From there we may be able to infer that those ideas may have been part of the religious intellectual ferment during the era, which may explain why the author of Ephesians used the language.

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[15] Ibid. 167.

2. The Qumran Essene example of the spiritual struggle.

The writings found at Qumran, known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, have much language and many themes that parallel language and themes in Ephesians. Understanding these parallels, and what the themes meant to the Essenes at Qumran, will be our first clue in understanding what the language and themes meant to the author of Ephesians. I will begin by explaining the existence that the Qumran community believed themselves to be in. I will show that for the Qumran Essenes the concept of a struggle against spiritual forces was very real. I will then show similarities between the Qumran existence and the early Christian existence. Later I will focus specifically on similarities in the Qumran writings and in Ephesians.

E.P. Sanders, in his ariticle, *Judaism and the Grand "Christian" Abstractions: love, Mercy, and Grace*, explains that Jesus and the early Christians of the New Testament and the Essenes of the Qumran Community each viewed mainstream Judaism of the era as an unfortunate religion. They each had problems with the Temple, the Priests, and the way the regular people lived their faiths. Moreover, they lived in a time in which they thought the sky was falling. The Mid-East was anything but peaceful, and the Jewish people were waiting for and expecting a Messiah that would restore the throne of David and conquer the Romans and other hostile foreign forces.

The emergence of the Essenes as a sect of Judaism comes in the midst of volatile time during Second Temple Judaism. The temple was the center of worship for Biblical Judaism and was essential for proper Jewish practices, and yet during the time of the

Essenes it was not being operated as instructed by the Torah. Because of this, the Essenes believed that the temple was no longer valid. Since the corrupt temple was invalid, the Essenes used communal living—isolated in the wilderness—and regular communal prayer as a substitute for the temple.[16]

The Essenes viewed themselves as a community of the elect, designated by God to live the pure, holy life for God. In *The Exhortation* of *The Damascus Document*, it is written that God caused a "plant root" to spring from Israel and Aaron. The passage continues-

> And they (the "plant root") considered their iniquity and knew that they were guilty men; but they were like blind men... And God considered their deeds, for they sought him with a whole heart; and he raised up for them a Teacher of Righteousness to lead them in the way of his heart.[17]

The Qumran Essenes viewed themselves as the faithful representatives of God's people. They were the plant root that God had established, out of which would one day grow God's glorious kingdom on earth. They lived in a separate community with its own interpretation of the Mosaic Law, ritual calendar, worship, and detailed instructions leading the lives of its members.

The Teacher of Righteousness, as introduced in the above passage, is understood to be a leader of the Essene movement. He is the legitimate teacher of the people, able to instruct his followers in the mysteries of God. The Qumran community believed that God had revealed his mysteries to the Teacher of Righteousness. The community could take part in the revelation of God's wonderful mysteries.

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[16] Lawrence H. Schiffman, Emanuel Tov, James C. VanderKam, eds, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: 50 Years After Their Discovery*. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society in cooperation with The Shrine of the Book, Israel Museam, 2000).
[17] Gesa Vermes *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998) 127.

As explained in the *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, the Teacher of Righteousness does not appear to be a spiritual being or a Messiah, but rather a guide in the important first steps of returning to lives of righteousness before God. It is difficult to know who the Teacher of Righteousness was, if he was an historical figure at all, but some argue that he held the office of High Priest between the death of Alcimus and the appointment of Jonathan (sometime around 153 BCE).

The followers of God's true doctrine as taught by the Teacher of Righteousness are known as the "sons of light". The "sons of light" were fully initiated Qumran Essenes who follow the rules and guidelines very exactly. Those who seem to be members of the community that are still undergoing their two-year initiation process were referred to as the "sons of dawn". Those who were outside the Essene community and under the influence of the evil Wicked Priest and the Liar are known as the "sons of darkness". There is a definite sense of dualism in the Qumran writings. The Teacher of Righteousness and the Sons of Light stand in opposition to the Wicked Priest, the Liar, and the Sons of Darkness. The *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* states:

> [The Wicked Priest] is an illegitimate sacerdotal rival for the high priesthood and [the Liar] a teacher of the law who rejected the instructions of the Teacher of Righteousness as authoritative (Jeremias, 1963; Stegemann, 1971).[18]

The Wicked Priest and the Liar are probably two different people who, through the teaching of false doctrine and the lures of temptation, influence and lead those who do not follow the Teacher of Righteousness. The Wicked Priest has:

> ...desecrated the holy name of God by which he had been called... First, he amassed to himself great wealth. Alongside this, he is accused of transgressing the statutes of the Torah and especially the laws of purity.[19]

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[18] Lawrence H. Schiffman, James C. VanderKam, eds, *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* 2 vols (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

And the Liar has-

> ...lead many astray by rejecting the Teacher's interpretation of the Torah and has proposed his own instead.[20]

The dualism of the Qumran writings is not simply an earthly dualism in which the righteous "sons of light" were opposed to the unrighteous "sons of darkness". The Qumran Community's religious existence is one with great eschatological importance in which spiritual warfare played a central role. God has created forces of good and evil to combat in an epic struggle, with mankind in the middle. Evil entered the world via spirits having offspring with the daughters of men, and it serves the purpose of rooting out those who are unworthy and would fall away from God. In the Qumran writings, God is in control of the forces of both Good and Evil. There is a paradox in which God ultimately controls the evil spirits (because God is all-powerful), yet the evil spirits are still regarded as dangerous and threats to humanity that must be fought against. The members of the Qumran community believed that one day they would fight in an end times battle against the forces of evil (both spiritual forces and earthly forces).

Anticipation for the final battle between good and evil was important to the Qumran community. But there was a sense of a daily struggle against evil forces in regular life as well. Instruction for demon exorcism exists within the Qumran texts. Members of the Qumran community prayed and used special liturgies to be recited to provide deliverance from evil spirits.[21]

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[19]C.D. Elledge "The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls Course Pack" 37. This was a supplementary course pack authored by Professor Elledge of Gustavus Adolphus College.
[20] C.D. Elledge *Course Pack* 38.
[21] Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 191.

The head of the demonic realm is known as Belial. The Damascus Document states:

> During all those years Belial shall be unleashed against Israel, as He spoke by the hand of Isaiah, son of Amoz, saying *Terror and the pit and the snare are upon you, O inhabitant of the land* (Isa. 24:17). Interpreted, these are the three nets of Belial with which Levi son of Jacob said that he catches Israel by setting them up as three kinds of righteousness. The first is fornication, the second is riches, and the third is profanation of the Temple. DSS 130

Belial is a chief demon. The Encyclopedia to the Dead Sea Scrolls notes that he appears to be the "prince of the kingdom of wickedness" (1QM 17.5-6). The destroying angels and wicked people outside the community are under his dominion (Jub. 14:31-33, 1QM 13.10-13).[22] This is why separation of the community from the wicked outside was paramount. The evil spirits and wicked humans will be punished in the end after the great eschatological battle. The people of the Qumran community believed that after they had taken part in this eschatological battle, fighting as the righteous alongside God's angels against the forces of darkness in the end times, they would be rewarded.

It is clear that the religious existence of the Qumran community involved a belief in an ongoing spiritual struggle leading towards an end times battle. They understood there to be an earthly and spiritual struggle. The wicked priest and the liar and other human forces of wickedness, along with (and under the influence of) Belial and other evil spiritual forces, were opposed to the will of God. These evil forces had made the temple worship invalid, and the Qumran Essenes took it upon themselves to separate from the wicked world and live a strict life of righteousness in anticipation of the coming final battle.

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[22] Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 190.

There are many other similarities we could find between the writings in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament.[23] The significance of the DSS for us is that it shows that Apocalyptic thought and writing were anything but rare. The Jewish worldview of the Old Testament associated God's supremacy with Israel's political success. When Israel had been in turmoil for years, it's people having been taken into captivity again and having experienced decades upon decades of oppression under pagan rulers, many Jews began to abandon the theology of a repentant Jewish people equaling a restoration of peace and prosperity in the Promised Land.[24] People began to look towards apocalypticism and the concept of spiritual dualism and warfare to explain the evils in the world.[25]

Now that we have a basic understanding of what the religious existence was for the people of Qumran, we may examine similarities in themes found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and those of the New Testament and Ephesians. We shall see that there are many similarities. Because of this, some scholars argue that the Qumran scrolls likely came into contact with the people of Asia Minor and probably directly influenced many writings of the New Testament.[26] I do not wish to prove whether or not this is true.

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[23] For example, we may find many similarities between the angelologies of the Qumran community and the New Testament. The *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* explains that the angelologies of the NT and Qumran evolved from Jewish traditions in the OT and in the Apocrypha, and were probably influenced by Greek angelologies of the era. Both the NT writings and Qumran writings identified Michael the archangel with their cause (1QM 17:6-7; Rev 12:7-8). Examples of angelic worship of God and human/angelic co-worship are found in the NT and Qumran writings as well (1Qha11; Lk 2:13-14; Rev 5:11-13). For more information regarding angels in the DSS and NT, look at John J Collins' "Powers in Heaven: God, Gods, and Angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls" and Ester G Chazon's "Liturgical Communion with the Angels at Qumran".

[24] Gregory Boyd , *God At War* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1997) 172, 173.

[25] Look at Bernhard W. Anderson, ed, *The Books of the Bible: The Apocrypha and the New Testament* II (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989) 7 for more information regarding this idea. The introduction to the Apocrypha provides an interesting commentary.

[26] Arnold, *Power and Magic* 34 "Benoit...has postulated that Asia Minor, and especially the region of Ephesus, was a locale which would have been likely to come into contact with the documents [of the Dead Sea Scrolls]. His reasons are based on internal evidence, that is, he sees Ephesians, Colossians, John, 1

Instead I will show that themes found in the Qumran writings (within the context of a real spiritual struggle) appear in Ephesians, and the parallelism may help us understand the original meaning of the language in Ephesians.

One prominent theme found in the writings from the Qumran community as well as in Ephesians is the idea that God has revealed to the community the "mysteries" of God's grace, wisdom and purposes to a chosen people (1QS 4.6, 18-19; 11.5-8; 1QH 4.27-28; 7.27; 10.4-5; 11.9-10; 12.20; 13.13-14. Remember that the Qumran Essenes understood that the Teacher of Righteousness had a special gift from God of wisdom and understanding. Knowing the mysteries of God played a large part in their understanding of being an elect community (1QS 11:5-6).

In Ephesians these themes come up as the writer states, "In him we have redemption through his blood…with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all *wisdom and understanding* (my italics). And he *made known the mystery* of his will…" (Eph 1:7-9), and "In him *we were also chosen*, having been predestined according to the plan of him…" (Eph 1:11), "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of *wisdom and revelation…*" (Eph 1:17).

Also in the Qumran writings and in Ephesians, community virtues such as humility and kindness are highly valued (1QS 2.24-25; 5.25-6.1; "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love," (Eph 4:2).[27] For the Qumran

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John as heavily influenced by the Qumran literature. He conjectures that the Alexandrian Apollo and/or the disciples of John at Ephesus (Acts 18:24-25; 19:2-3) may have introduced the documents to the region."
[27] D.N. Freedman, D.F. Graf, et al. eds, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* Volume II (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 538.

community, virtues naturally follow understanding. Living a virtuous life is important for either community.

More importantly there exists a similar sense of dualism underlying the community rules of the Qumran community and the exhortations in Ephesians. We have seen in the Qumran writings the definite sense of a struggle between God and God's elect community of righteous believers against the hosts and armies of wickedness. The two sides are lead by "the spirits of light and darkness," (1QS 3.13-4.26). The writers speak of the "sons of light" who "walk in the light" and who are opposed to the "sons of darkness" who "walk in the darkness" (1QM 1.1, 7, 10; 3.6, 9; 13.16; 14.17; 1QS 1.10; 3.21; 4.11-12). The "sons of light" are required to stay away from the "sons of darkness"(1QS 5.10-20).

These themes of "sons of light" versus "sons of darkness" come to mind with language such as "the powers of this dark world" and "the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12), as well as "children of light" (Eph 5:8) having "nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness" (Eph 5:11). The author of Ephesians writes "They [the unbelieving Gentiles] are darkened from their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts," (Eph 4:18). Later the author continues with this theme, "For you were once darkness, but now you are the light of the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness..." (Eph 5:8-11).

For the Qumran community, the call to separate from the "sons of darkness" has a definite sociological meaning. In the community, association with outsiders is unusual.

Ephesians nowhere suggests a similar withdrawal from society. Rather, the believer's general conduct and activities in society are in view when the author mentions "the fruit of the light" and such. [28]

Another parallel theme with a sense of dualism is the referral of Belial as "prince of the kingdom of wickedness" (1QM 17.5-6), or in Ephesians, to Satan as "the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient," (Eph 2:2). [29] The Qumran community understood the "sons of darkness" to be under the influence of an evil angel. "In the hand of the Angel of Darkness is total dominion over the sons of deceit; they walk on paths of darkness," (1QS 3:20-21).[30] The Qumran community clearly believed that people outside of the elect community ("sons of darkness", "sons of deceit") were inspired by an evil angelic power. It seems that the author of Ephesians also understood people outside of the elect community ("sons of disobedience") to be inspired an evil angelic power.

These themes that parallel between Qumran documents and Ephesians definitely existed within a context of a spiritual struggle of good versus evil for the Qumran community. This may suggest that the same is true for those found in Ephesians. In the Qumran community, the "Sons of Darkness" were under the influence of evil spiritual beings. The writer of Ephesians states that those who walk in the darkness are under the influence of and following the ruler of the kingdom of the air. If the evil spiritual beings were real for the Essenes at Qumran, it would stand to reason that the "ruler of the air" is a real spiritual being from the perspective of the author of Ephesians. We may be able to

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[28] Leander E. Keck et al. eds, *New Interpreters Bible* volume XI (Nashville: Abingdone Press, 2000) 437.

[29] Ephesians never names Satan, and it is possible that this passage is not referring to Satan. According to the Anderson, *Books of the Bible: The Apocrypha and the New Testament* 286, Jewish readers would have understood this passage to be referring to the devil.

use the Qumran texts as an antecedent to help us interpret the "powers and principalities" in Ephesians as spiritual beings. This is just the tip of the iceberg as to evidence that may suggest that Paul was writing of evil spiritual beings when he writes of "powers", "principalities", "authorities", and the like. I will explore the matter deeper.

Let us look specifically at the "powers" related terms in Ephesians to gain an understanding of how the language was used in other religious writings. If we find that terms in Ephesians with sociopolitical significance are used in other religious texts in reference to spiritual beings, then this will strengthen the argument that the author of Ephesians understands there to be spiritual forces affecting the course of humanity.

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[30] As cited in Keck, *New Interpreters Bible* 389.

3. Key Terms in Ephesians and their historical context.

Understanding the Qumran situation and the themes found in the Dead Sea Scrolls helps us understand the dualistic framework and the conceptions of cosmic forces of the community. We can see that similar themes appear in Ephesians. This may be our first clue that the author of Ephesians was referring to spiritual forces when writing of "authority, power and dominion" (Eph 1:21) and such. The next step to understanding the meaning of these terms (and other similar terms that appear throughout the epistle) is to examine these specific terms in a greater level of detail.

The terms *archai* (principalities), *dynameis* (powers), *exousiai* (authorities), *archontes* (rulers), *thronoi* (thrones), *kyriotētes* (dominions), and *kosmokratores* (world rulers) or terms similar to them occur often in the NT. Many times they are used in conjunction with each other. These words and others related to these are found throughout the epistle to the Ephesians. Understanding the meaning of these words and similar words used parallel to these is crucial to understanding if the terms and the text in which they appear might be about spiritual beings and forces.

This collection of terms, used in the NT primarily in letters attributed to Paul, was probably influenced from a reservoir of similar terminology in 1st century CE Jewish and pagan belief in reference to the spiritual realm. The terms are found throughout the OT pseudopigrapha, particularly the apocalyptic writings (2 En. 20:1; 1 En. 41:9; 61:10; *Testament of Levi* 3:8; *Testament of Solomen* 8:2; 18:2; 20:15). Many of the terms also

appear in the Greek Magical Payri (PGM) denoting different spiritual beings (PGM I. 215; III. 35; IV. 1193, 1275, 1599, 2198-99; XXIIb. 2,4,7).[31]

I will begin by examining the Greek word *kyriotēs*, or dominion. The Greek word for dominion used in Eph 1:21 appears four times in the NT. In extrabiblical literature the word appears very rarely, and means 'lordship, rule'. The ordinary Greek word for "Lord", *kyrie*, similar to the dominion used in Eph 1:21 is found in a fragment of the Jewish *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*. The author is said to have been brought up into a fifth level of heaven where he saw "angels who are called lords" (quoted by Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* V 11,77,2).[32] In Acts 10:4 we find the use of this word, *kyrie*, as Cornelius, a Roman centurion "distinctly saw an angel of God, who came too him..." (NRSV). "Cornelius stared at him in fear. 'What is it, Lord?' he asked." In these instances an ordinary word with sociopolitical implications is used in reference to spiritual beings.

Other words with sociopolitical implications at face value, similar to the "dominion" in Eph 1:21, were also used to refer to spiritual beings. Paul writes of "many gods and many lords [*kyrioi*]" in 1 Cor 8:5. According to the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Paul associates the "many gods and many lords" with demons (1 Cor 10:20).[33] The *Dictionary of Deities and Demons* (DDD) cites the dominion of Eph 1:21 as "part of an enumeration of supernatural powers."[34] We must investigate the other terms before I can comfortably make that claim.

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[31] Freedman, et al. *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
[32] K. van der Toorn, P.W. van der Horst et al, eds. *Dictionary of Deities and Demons* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1992).
[33] DPHL 748.
[34] DDD.

The prefix *Arch-* was the most frequently used prefix for Greek words denoting positions of human power.[35] The Greek word *arche*, and the Latin translation *principium*, has a meaning of primacy in time or rank. It is an absract term for power, often used referring to the power held by someone in a position of political, social or economic authority. Again, it is a word with sociopolitical implications. It may be, then, that we should interpret NT uses of *arche*, or similar words such as *archai* or *archon* (principalities, authorities), in terms of political, social or economic meaning. The DDD explains that political terminology was applied to supernatural beings as a figurative extension. The spiritual beings were understood to occupy vague positions of authority over other spiritual beings and/or human beings. When the word *arche* appears in religious texts, it seems usually to refer to supernatural angelic or demonic beings.

In 1 Enoch 6:8, *archai* is used of twenty angels, each of whom commands ten angels of lesser status. The organization of the angelic beings may have a military origin. The Israelite army was arranged under leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens (Exod 18:21, 25; Deut 1:15; 1 Macc 3:55; 1QM 3.16-17; 4.1-5, 15-17). The use of the Ethiopic equivalent to *archai* as angelic powers continues in 1 Enoch 61:10: "And he will call all the host of heavens, and all the holy ones above, and the host of the Lord, and the Cherubim, and the Seraphim and the Ophannim, and all the angels of power, and all the angels of the principalities (or possibly 'of the Dominions')."[36]

The term, *archon*, similar to the other terms examined, has political meanings of 'high official' or 'chief magistrate', and it's common use was in reference to various high public officials. During the late Hellenistic and early Roman period the term was used in

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[35] DPHS 748.
[36] Ibid.

reference to spiritual beings and planetary deities who were understood to occupy a particular rank in a hierarchy of spiritual beings. [37]

Philo writes of a popular conception that the sun, moon and stars were gods. He argues that Moses thought of the heavenly bodies as *archontes*, which govern beings that exist on the earth or in the air beneath the moon (*De spec. leg.* 1.13-14). The term *kosmokratores* (world rulers) was also used of the planets. The term personified the planets as rulers of the heavenly spheres (a term used with some frequency later in the Greek magical papyri).[38]

> While these supernatural beings were not unambiguously regarded as good or evil, there was a strong tendency to regard them as hostile if not evil.[39]

Archontes is used in 1 Corinthians 2:6,8 referring to "rulers of this age". The DPHL states that this seems to be the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew term for used by the Qumran community to refer to an angelic "Ruler/Prince of Light" (1QS 3:20).[40]

Exousiai, "authority", is most often used in the NT for the right or authorization to use power granted by an office.[41] The word is used in reference to spiritual beings in the *Testament of Levi* 3:8. In the *Testament*, the *exousiai* occupy the highest heaven and are in the very presence of God, along with the *thronoi*, 'thrones'. They are also used of spiritual beings in 1 Enoch 61:10 and 2 Enoch 20:1.[42] Interestingly, in these cases the spiritual beings are not evil beings, but servants of God.

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[37] DDD
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] DPHS 748
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

The use of the term *kosmokratoras,* "world rulers" or "cosmic powers", is interesting in that the term does not appear anywhere else in the NT or the LXX, whereas the terms "ruler" (arche) and "authority" (exousia) preceeding *kosmokratoras* are found elsewhere in the NT.[43] We've seen, however, that the term does appear in Greek magical papyri (often in reference to the gods Helios, Ra, Hermes, and Sarapis). We've also seen that the term appears in astrological texts in reference to the planets. The term is found, too, in a Roman inscription in reference to the gods Sarapis and Mithras, and it is found in Jewish magical texts in reference to astral-demonic powers of the zodiac that afflict humans in various ways. Arnold suggests that Paul uses the term in reference to Artemis and other local deities, and that Paul wishes to demote their positions as inferior to God and Christ.[44] Although the term appears nowhere else in the NT or the LXX, it is most probable that both Gentile and Jewish readers of the Ephesians text were familiar with the use of the term in reference to spiritual beings. Paul possibly uses the terms "rulers" and "authorities" alongside "cosmic powers" to express that evil spiritual powers spread through the heavens and the earth.

The use of sociopolitical terms signifying spiritual beings is found in other Jewish texts as well. In Dan 10 what we presume to be an angel tells Daniel, "…your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia," (NIV).

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[43] Clint E. Arnold, ed, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2002) 311. From here forth I will cite this source as ZIBBC. See alo *New Interpreters Bible* 460 for imformation regarding Paul demoting Artemis and other local deities as inferior to Christ.

[44] Clint E. Arnold, "The 'Exorcism' of Ephesians 6.12 in Recent Research: A Critique of Wesley Carr's View of the Rule of Evil Powers in First-Century AD Belief," *(JSNT* 1987) 113-121. As cited in *New Interpreters Bible* 460.

The Qumran community used the term "princes" in reference to angels several times (4Q403 1 i 1, 11; 4Q405 23 ii 10) and these are combined in the title "chief princes" (4Q403 1 ii 20, 21; 4Q405 8-9 5-6). As we have seen earlier, the Qumran community designates Belial (another name designated for Satan in the NT) as the "prince of the dominion of ungodliness" (1QM 17.5-6). In the synoptic gospels Satan is sometimes referred to as the *archon tōn daimoniōn* (prince of demons) (Matt 9:34; 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15). Elsewhere in the NT Satan is called "the prince of this world" (Jn 12:31; Jn 14:30, Jn 16:11), and in Eph 2:2, Paul writes of the "prince of the power of the air", or in other words, the prince whose domain is the air. Philo states that the air was regarded as the dwelling place of evil spirits in the ancient world, and the DDD claims that the title of the "prince of the power of the air" in Eph 2:2 is clearly designated for Satan. [45]

The notion of Satan or some other evil angelic being as prince of, or leading a host of evil angels or demons does not appear to be older than the second century BCE.

According to the DDD-

> The context for the conception of Satan as ruler of this world or age is the apocalyptic world view which consisted in a temporal or eschatological dualism in which the present age is dominated by wickedness through the influence of Satan, while the imminent future age will be inaugurated by the victory of God over all evil (Matt 12:32; Luke 16:18; Gal 1:4). The introduction of the future era will be accomplished by the intervention of God (either directly or through a human agent, i.e. a Messiah), and will be preceded by the destruction of the wicked and the final deliverance of the righteous. [46]

This apocalyptic worldview consisting in an eschatological dualism is clearly present in the writings of the Qumran Community, and it appears that traces of an eschatological dualism are existent in some NT writings. If some writers of the NT and some of the

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[45] DDD

early Christian community did hold an apocalyptic worldview consisting of an eschatological dualism in which Satan influences and contributes to the wickedness of the current human condition, this would be significant in understanding NT texts that use language that may refer to spiritual beings affecting humanity.

Terms similar to those in Ephesians occur in both Jewish and Pagan contexts. The terms can refer to strictly human institutions or to spiritual beings and entities. A context of eschatological dualism often surrounds the terms when used of supernatural entities. Overtones of that very context can be discerned in Ephesians. Thus, the thematic conceptual context of Ephesians favors the idea that Ephesians is referring to the spiritual entities or beings that are similar to those discussed in other texts that have the same context.

The probability that the language at question in Ephesians is referring to spiritual forces influencing humanity is increasing. Now we must examine the historical situation at Ephesus to understand the cultural context the people who would have read the letter were living in. We will find that the belief in the existence of and the interaction with spirits was a reality to the people of Ephesus and surrounding Asia Minor, and these were issues that would have needed to be addressed by a Christian leader.

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[46] DDD

4. The Audience of Ephesians and its Historical Context.

We have seen that themes from the Qumran community writings with a dualistic framework and a sense of cosmic powers affecting humanity are paralleled in Ephesians. We have seen evidence that language in Ephesians parallels language used in other Jewish and Greek writings in reference to spiritual beings and powers. I will now inspect the religious situation in Ephesus and surrounding Asia Minor to gain an understanding of how the audience of the epistle the Ephesians may have understood such language.

Ephesus was the third largest city in the Roman Empire, and the largest city in Asia Minor, with a population of over 250,000. Ephesus was strategically located near the Cayster River and the Aegean Sea. It was the center for economic and commercial prosperity in Asia Minor. Strabo called Ephesus "the greatest commercial center in Asia this side of the Taurus River," (14.1.24). Likewise, Aelius Aristides spoke of Ephesus as the most prosperous commercial center of the time, with financial affairs of all of Asia Minor being controlled there (*Orat.* 23.24).[47] The *Dictionary of Paul* states that a study of Roman milestone markers demonstrates that mileages to other cities in Asia Minor were measured from Ephesus (French, 698-729).

Just as Ephesus was the center for economic prosperity in Asia Minor, it was a center for religious activity in the region, and even, some would say, a significant center for religious activity in the entire Roman Empire. Ephesus was very much a religiously plural city. It was the sacred home of the Artemis cult. The temple of Artemis was

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[47]DPHS 249.

heralded by ancient writers as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. As many

as fifty other gods and goddesses were worshiped in Ephesus, including the Greek deities

Zeus, Athena, Aphrodite, Asclepius, Apollo, Dionysus, Demeter, Hekate, Tyche, Theos

Hypsistos, Meter Oreia, and Hephaistos. The two Egyptian deities Isis and Sarapis were

also popular in Ephesus. Many people typically worshipped more than one deity, and

religious tolerance was very much present. A Jewish and Christian community thrived as

well.

Ephesus had a reputation in antiquity for magic, shamanism, and other pagan

occult arts. Magic was practiced and predicated on an animistic worldview in which

spiritual beings of good and evil were involved in almost every area of life. For the

people of Ephesus, magic represented a way of harnessing spiritual power through rituals,

incantations and invocations.[48] B.M. Metzger states, "Of all ancient Graeco-Roman

cities, Ephesus, the third largest city in the Empire, was by far the most hospitable to

magicians, sorcerers, and charlatans of all sorts."[49] O. Meinardus states, "Perhaps even

more than Pisidian Antioch, Corinth, and Antioch-on-the-Orontes, this city of traders and

sailors, of courtesans and rakes, swarmed with soothsayers and purveyors of charms."[50]

It seems that magical practices were particularly significant for people in the

lower classes of the Greco-Roman world. David Aune states:

> Those who were educated and affluent associated magical practices with the
> undeducated and poor in the lower strata of society (Origen contra Celsum 6.41;
> 7.4; Philostratus vit. Sophist. 523, 590). Certainly the Greek of the magical
> papyri is the unpretentious common language of the people, not the cultivated,
> literary and atticistic language of the educated. Since the Graeco-Roman

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[48] ZIBBC 303.

[49] B.M Metzger, "St. Paul and the Magicians," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 38 (1944), 27; see also Arnold, *Power and Magic* 14.

[50] O. Meinardus, *St. Paul in Ephesus and the Cities of Galatia and Cyprus* (Athens, 1979), 91; see also Arnold, *Power and Magic* 14.

literature which is extant was produced and transmitted by the educated, rarely are the views of the common people adequately represented.[51]

There are six magical names in particular that have a tradition of being associated with Ephesus: *Askion, Kataskion, Lix, Tetrax, Damnameneus,* and *Aisia.* These names were known as the *Ephesia grammata* (Ephesian Letters). They were the names of six powerful spiritual beings that could be called upon for assistance and protection. Plutarch tells us that the "magi" instructed people who were possessed by evil spirits to repeat themselves the magic words in order to drive the demons out.[52] They could be used as spoken charms or as written amulets.

Pausanias, an ancient writer, relates a parable about an Ephesian wrestler who traveled Olympia, Greece, to compete in the games. The wrestler was very successful, unbeaten in match after match. During one of the competitions, however, the referee of the match noticed he was wearing an anklet inscribed with the six *Ephesia grammata* (the magical names invoking spiritual powers). The anklet was removed immediately. His opponent, a wrestler from Miletus, then defeated him three consecutive times. The Ephesian wrestler had lost all magical powers from the anklet.[53] The Lydian king Croesus is said to have saved himself from the funeral pyre by using the Ephesian Grammata.[54]

Interestingly, the Ephesia Grammata appear in the *Testament of Solomon,* In 7:1-8 the Ephesia Grammata "Lix Tetrax" appears as a demon of the wind and is interrogated by Solomon. The demon is then hindered by an angel called Azael. There are other

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[51] David E. Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," *ANRW* II.23.2, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980) 1515-16. As cited in Arnold, *Power and Magic* 15.
[52] ZIBBC 309.
[53] ZIBBC 336.
[54] Arnold, *Power and Magic* 16.

connections between the *Testament of Solomon* and the city of Ephesus as well as to the epistle to the Ephesians. In 8:11 of the *Testament*, Solomon is threatened by a spirit with being bound by the bonds of Artemis. Much of the "power" language found in Ephesians is found also in the Testament. The Testament makes reference to "the ruler of the spirits of the air" (16:3; 18:3; 22:1) and principalities, powers, and authorities in heaven (20:15).

The people of Ephesus and surrounding Asia Minor were concerned with powers that may govern the fate of an individual. A statue of the Ephesian Artemis portrays the goddess wearing as a necklace the signs of the zodiac. This is meant to express that as a Queen of Heaven, she had the power to break the bonds of fate. The Stoic writer Manilius (first century A.D.) writes:

> They [the Egyptian priests] were the first to see, through their art, how fate depends on the wandering stars. Over the course of many centuries they assigned with persistent care to each period of time the events connected with it: the day on which someone is born, the kind of life he shall lead, the influence of every hour on the laws of destiny, and the enormous differences made by small motions....From long observation it was discovered that the stars control the whole world by mysterious laws, that the world itself moves by an eternal principle, and that we can, by reliable signs, recognize the ups and downs of fate.[55]

Some Jewish writings from the Roman period also display a concern about fate, the zodiac, and spirits associated with the sun, moon, stars and planets.[56]

The influence of magical practices in Ephesus is noticeable even in the book of Acts. In Acts 19 Luke tells of the Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who attempted to cast evil spirits out of a demon-possessed man in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches. An evil spirit in a man proclaimed that it knew Jesus and Paul, but did not know them (the sons of Sceva). The demon-possessed man proceeded to overpower and

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[55] ZIBBC 306.

beat the Seven sons. When this was heard throughout Ephesus, a number of believers who had practiced sorcery (presumably exorcisms had been practiced through this "sorcery") publicly burned magical scrolls worth 50,000 days wages.

Luke also writes in Acts that at Ephesus, "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them" (Acts 19:11-12). This is significant in that it shows that if the writer of Ephesians was Paul, it would make sense that Paul was fully aware of the spiritual struggle against the powers that affect humanity.

Spiritual beings affecting humanity was a very real issue for the people of Ephesus. Magical practices were especially common in the city. Fear of the power of spirits was a reality as well, and it would have been something Paul very likely would have needed to address. I believe this is what Paul does with his letter to the Ephesians. He addresses the issue of spiritual beings that may affect humanity, and he shows that Christ is "far above" the spiritual beings. He explains that in Christ, the believer may experience Christ's authority over the spiritual beings in their own lives. In the next chapter I will explore these ideas as I take a closer look at the text of Ephesians in its whole literary context in an attempt to understand the passages in this context.

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[56] ZIBBC 306.

5. Christ superior to the "Powers" and the believer with Christ.

We understand that dualistic themes in Qumran writings of cosmic forces influencing humanity are seen also in Ephesians. Terms that appear in Ephesians appear in other Jewish and Greek sources referring to spiritual beings. The people of Ephesus believed that they experienced daily encounters with magical spiritual forces. We may now examine the passages of Ephesians in the context of the greater letter to gain a comprehensive understanding of what the author was writing about and what his audience would have understood in reading the letter.

There is debate as to whether Ephesians was written by Paul and whether Ephesians was a letter originally addressed and sent to the believers in the city of Ephesus.[57] Many scholars agree that Ephesians stands within the Pauline tradition, and if it is not his letter, it is certainly indebted to his thought. For the remainder of this paper, I am going to side with those who say Ephesians was written by Paul.

We cannot know for certain whether the content of Ephesians was influenced directly by other Jewish and Hellenistic Greek thought, but there are many similarities to be found in each. The structure and contents of Ephesians are very similar to those of Colossians (another letter scholars dispute authorship for). More than one-quarter of the words in Ephesians appear in Colossians as well, and one-third of the words in Colossians appear in Ephesians.

Christ, and the believer "in Christ", is often at the center of Paul's theology in the letter. Paul uses the expression "in Christ" thirty-four times in the letter. The expression

"with Christ" appears many times as well. "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich with mercy, made us alive *with Christ* (my italics) even when we were dead in transgression—it is by grace that you have been saved. And God raised us up *with Christ* and seated us with him in the heavenly realms *in Christ Jesus...*" (Eph 2:4-6). It may be that Paul uses this language to emphasize the corporate solidarity of believers with their risen and exalted Lord.[58] Somehow the event of Christ's death and resurrection has given the believer the ability to share in Christ's authority over all things on heaven and earth.

As I have stated several times, there are more references to the "authorities" and "powers" in Ephesians than in any other epistle. I believe it is clear that these "authorities" and "powers" are regarded as evil spiritual beings under the authority of the devil (Eph 6:12; 2:2). Believers are called to resist their influence by appropriating the power of God. The compelling influence of these evil powers has been broken by the mysterious event of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection. Believers are called know, through a spirit of wisdom and revelation, an immeasurable power according to the working of God's great power (Eph 1:19).[59] Jesus Christ has been raised up and all things have been placed under his feet (Eph 1:20-22). The believer is raised up with him, and seated along side him to share in his power.[60] An exhortation to live a life worthy of Christ is alsogiven.

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[57] Some of the early manuscripts do not include "To the saints in Ephesus" in the opening of the letter.
[58]DPHL 247.
[59] *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 538 also Arnold *Power and Magic* 53.
[60] An interesting passage from the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 467 on 'Principalities and Powers' in Colossians and 1 Corinthians- The powers are seen by Paul as a fundamental factor in the heretical teaching threatening the health of the Colossian church. Paul therefore stresses a cosmic Christology (Col 1:15-20) affirming the superior position of Christ in relation to the powers. Christ is also asserted as the ruling "head" over the principalities and powers (Col 2:10). The cross is seen as the point of decisive defeat: "on that cross he discarded [or, disarmed] the cosmic powers and authorities like a garment; he made a public

Because of the fear of magical spirits, gods and demons in and around Ephesus,

Paul emphasizes the exalted Christ and his present victory over all powers. He then

emphasizes the status of the believer as alongside Christ above all powers. Salvation not

only makes us righteous in the sense that wrongs are made right. Salvation in Christ

means God gives us the status of Christ above all else (powers, authorities, sin, flesh,

world). Before he closes, Paul returns to these themes, explaining that the believer must

find strength "in the Lord". There is a struggle against the dark powers, and defensive

armor the believer may put on are elements that elsewhere in the Pauline tradition are

associated with Christ. The letter ends with direction on where to find strength in the

'wrestling' with the 'powers'.

Let us look specifically at the passages in Ephesians to discern what they may

have meant to the author and to his audience.

1:3-14. Chapter 1 begins with Paul stating that the believer is blessed "in Christ

with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before

the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love," (Eph 1:3-4).

He immediately shows that the believer is set apart from others, chosen to be God's

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spectacle of them and led them as captives in his triumphal procession" (Col 2:15; NEB). The Colossian believers should therefore not submit themselves to the tenets of the heretical teaching, which were ultimately inspired by the "elemental spirits" (Col 2:8). In their solidarity with Christ's death, they should consider themselves immune to the influences of these evil spirits (Col 2:20).

Deeply aware of the influence of "the god of this age" (1 Cor 4:4), Paul sees demonic rulers (*archontes*) as ultimately responsible for the death of Christ (1 Cor 2:8; see Eph 2:2 for a similar use of *archon* as an evil spirit being). These powers did not understand the wisdom of God, who would use Christ's death for the actual defeat of the realm of evil and thereby procure salvation for his people. Divine deliverance was necessary since humanity was in bondage to the realm of Satan and his minions (Eph 2:2; Gal 4:3, 8). The resultant emergence of the Church, the body of Christ, testifies to the evil powers of the vast wisdom of God (1 Cor 2:6-7; Eph 3:10). Although defeated by the cross-resurrection event, the powers are still active (Eph 6:12; Gal 4:9). They are in the process of being abolished (1 Cor 2:6) and will finally be destroyed at the consummation (1 Cor 15:24). Because of the work of Christ and his superior

children (Eph 1:5) through Jesus Christ. The style of this section resembles the Psalms, Jewish hymns and Qumran writings. Recall from the Qumran writings the themes of an elect people chosen by God. What is important for Paul is that the believer is set apart *in Christ*. It is through the works of Jesus Christ that the believer is given spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. It is also in him that the believer is marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13). The language of "in Christ" and "with Christ" appears over and over.

1:17-23. Paul desires and prays for the believer to increase in knowledge of God.[61] The believer's knowledge increases through a "spirit of wisdom and revelation". This is reminiscent to the prophesy in Isaiah to how the Spirit would work in the Messiah: "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord" (Isa. 11:2).

Paul has three requests for his audience: that they would know the hope to which they are called, that they would know their inheritance in the saints, and that they would know the immeasurable greatness of his power for those who believe. The Ephesian would have had a background in a non-Christian religion largely devoid of future hope.

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power, Paul can comfort the Church by assuring its members that no evil angelic power can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus the Lord (Rom 8:38).

[61] Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 52. In formulating his prayer extolling the superiority of Christ over his enemies, the author quite fittingly alludes to Ps 110:1; the OT passage most frequently cited by early Christian writers. This Psalm was used to support God's vindication of the crucified and resurrected Christ through the exaltation to the right hand of God, where Jesus is the in a continuing session with God. It was also used by the early Christians, who identified "enemies" of the Psalm with the invisible "powers," to assert the subjugation of the "powers" to Christ. The subjugation of the "powers" was a typical aspect of the early Christian hymns and integral to the meaning of the Christological title "Lord." In his interpretation of the Psalm, the writer of Ephesians gives a substantial list of the "enemies" subjected to Christ.

Their present hope was based on beliefs of astral fate. It is important for Paul to show them they have true hope now and forever in Christ.

The Ephesians had been worshipping fickle, self-serving gods and goddesses in which they knew no inheritance. They were accustomed to seeking spiritual power through magical practices. Paul explains that the believer has an inheritance of incomparably great power; the same power that raised Christ from the dead and raised him up to the heavenlies. He states that Christ, through whom the believer receives this power, is above (far above even) all other powers, authorities, and names (magicians could use the names of spiritual beings to call upon powers) now and forever. All things have been placed under his feet. This symbolism clearly shows the superiority of Christ.

2:1-2:10. The believer, no longer living as the unbeliever, is "dead to sin" (2:1). The familiar apocalyptic theme, as also found in Qumran writings, of the non-elect being under the influence of an evil spiritual power is introduced. "Those who are disobedient" (2:2) may also be translated as "sons of disobedience"[62]. They follow the ways "of the ruler [or prince] of the kingdom of the air" (2:2). Recall in the Qumran writings the "sons of darkness", human beings "in the hand of the Angel of Darkness" (1QS 3:20-21). But, Paul explains, the believer is set apart from those in the darkness, raised up with Christ and seated with him in the heavenly places. Christ's superiority has already been established in chapter 1. Now Paul shows that the believer is placed alongside him to share in his superiority (5:6). Through grace and in Christ (2:7-10), the believer is also above every power.

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[62] *New Interpreter's Bible* 389.

3:1-13. In chapter 3 Paul again writes of a "mystery" of God. Recall that the

Essenes credited their leader, the "Teacher of Righteousness", as having a divine

inspiration to revelation. This understanding of divine revelation is crucial for the

Essenes and their perceived status as an elect community. Arnold notes that the mystery

Paul writes of is "God's plan for the ages that cannot be known apart from revelation.

God has revealed his plan of salvation to Paul, the heart and essence of which is Christ,

the Messiah. Because Christ is *the* mystery, the definitive revelation of the one true God,

the readers can forsake all of the pseudomysteries—the rituals of the gods and goddesses

they have worshipped all of their lives."[63]

The mystery is "that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel,

members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus," (3:6).

Salvation in Christ, the vital piece of God's plan, has been made available to all peoples.

And, according to the *New Interpreter's Bible*, Paul "considers the church as the

culmination of God's plan for the entire universe. Therefore, anyone who does not

respond to the gospel and become one with Christ has no hope of salvation."[64] The

church is a heavenly establishment and its very presence is a continual proof of God's

wisdom to the evil "rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (3:10). The *NIB* makes

an interesting point, "But it is important to note the perspective from with Ephesians

makes such claims—a position of sociopolitical powerlessness. Christian communities

emerged at the margins of Jewish communities, which were themselves minorities in the

urban centers of Asia Minor."

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[63] ZIBBC 320.
[64] *New Interpreters Bible* 411.

3:14-21. Paul again returns to his prayer, in which themes of 'power' arise once more. In chapter one he prayed that the believer would come to know Christ more. He establishes Christ's own power and superiority over all other 'powers'. Now he prays that the believer would come to know and experience Christ's fullest love and power in life (16-19). He ends again with the focus on the church and on Christ. The Ephesian believer, who probably had been experiencing power through magical practices, may now "approach God with freedom and confidence" (3:12) and experience his power "to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (3:20).

4:1-16. Paul now gives an exhortation to "live a life worthy of the calling" (4:1). The virtues of the believer are humility, gentleness and patience, all held together in love (4:2). These virtues, specifically humility and patience, would be unique to the believer in the Greco-Roman world. Ancient moral teachers and philosophers sometimes spoke of the worth of gentleness, though they rarely, if ever, celebrated humility and patience as virtues.[65] The **NIB** states "'Humility' does not appear outside Jewish and Christian lists. To the non-Jew, 'humility' suggests demeaning lowliness.[66] For the Essenes, virtues are what separated the community from the rest of the world as "sons of light" versus the "sons of darkness". Interestingly, Paul brings his message to the grace given to the believer in Christ after speaking of virtues (4:7).

4:17-5:21. The exhortation continues and we find obvious similarities in language to the Qumran writings. The Gentile believers are called to turn away from the past Hellenistic way of life. Those living in that way are "darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God" (4:18). Ephesians 5:8-11 reads, "For

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[65] ZIBBC p. 323

you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for fruit of light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)… Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them." The dualism clearly parallels Essene writings, which warned the community not to be deceived by the "angel of darkness". "In the hand of the Prince of Light is dominion over all the sons of justice; they walk on paths of light. And in the hand of the Angel of Darkness is total dominion over the sons of deceit."[67] In Ephesians, in contrast to the Essene writings, Paul does not seem to imply that there is a specific false teacher leading people astray. Deception seems to come from anywhere outside the circle of believers. The believer must focus on the will of the Lord (5:17) "because the days are evil" (5:16).

6:10-20. As Ephesians comes to a close the letter revisits once more the theme of divine power. Christ reigns supreme over all powers. His victory and exaltation may be shared with the believer (the believer is raised up with Christ above the powers). The believer has been given an exhortation on how to walk with Christ. Now the believer is given instruction on how to take part in the spiritual struggle.

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power," (6:10). Rather than finding strength in God, the Ephesian believer previously would have found strength through the use of the Ephesian Grammatta, helper spirits, incantations, rituals, gods and goddesses, etc.[68] Paul calls for the believer to "Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes," (6:11).

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[66] *New Interpreters Bible* 420.
[67] 1QS 3:20-22, as cited in *New Interpreters Bible* 436.
[68] ZIBBC 336-337.

"For our struggle (*palē*) is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the (cosmic) powers of this dark world (*kosmokratoras*) and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm," (6:12). The metaphor of warfare is shifted to that of a "struggle" (*palē*), or a wrestling match. *Palē* is the Greek term for wrestling. Wrestling was a popular event in the games held throughout Asia Minor, and the illustration of wrestling imparts an image of direct one-on-one struggle.

The imagery jumps back to warfare as Paul presses for the believer to "Put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand," (6:13). This language, citing a "day of evil", brings to mind apocalypticism. Apocalyptic Judaism spoke often about the last days being evil.[69] It seems, though, that throughout Ephesians Paul uses apocalyptic language to describe present realities (see 1:21; 2:3, 7; 1:14, 18; 4:30; 5:5).[70] He tells the believer "the days are evil" (5:16). The "wrestling" is a current struggle. Spiritual attacks by evil forces are present for Paul in the current day.[71]

The literary form symbolizing virtues as battle armor is not new to Ephesians. Throughout Isaiah and the Psalms we find instances in which a virtue is symbolized with an image of weaponry or armor (Isa 11:5, belt; Isa 21:5, Ps 35:2, shield; Isa 49:2, sword; Isa 52:7, feet fitted; Isa 59:17, helmet, salvation). In the apocryphal *Wisdom of Solomon*, there is a passage that is reminiscent to Ephesians 6:14-17, with imagery of the Lord putting on armor. "The Lord will take his zeal as his whole armor, and will arm all creation to repel his enemies; he will put on righteousness as a breastplate, and wear

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[69] ZIBBC 338.

[70] *New Interpreters Bible* 461.

[71] See Acts 19.

impartial justice as a helmet; he will take holiness as an invincible shield, and sharpen stern wrath for a sword, and creation will join with him to fight against his frenzied foes," (*Wisdom of Solomon* 5:17-20).

In Ephesians, the believer is appealed to stand against evil forces with truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, and salvation as a defensive armor. Interestingly, and importantly, the only weapon against the evil forces is the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," (Eph 6:17). The believer is set above the authorities in Christ, and is to allow the Spirit to do the work in fighting the struggle against the "spiritual forces of evil".

Immediately following the famous passage of the armor of God is a serious plea to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and keep on praying for all the saints," (6:18). It seems that prayer for the saints is as vital in the struggle as putting on the "armor of God". Note that Paul wrote that he prayed for the audience of the letter in both chapters 1 and 3, and he requests prayer in 6:19-20.

Paul creates in Ephesians an understanding for the believer that Christ is "far above" all spiritual powers that may oppose him (1:21-22). The believer is "raised up with Christ and seated in the heavenly realms" (2:6), also above the every spiritual power. In Christ, the believer may access God with confidence (3:12) and the believer may realize power in Christ (3:16-21). The believer is called to live a virtuous life as "children of light" (5:8). Finally, the believer is reminded that the "struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms," (6:12). To

take a "stand against the devil's schemes" (6:11), the believer is to "put on the full armor of God" (6:11) and to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions" (6:18).

I believe the evidence suggests that Paul knew well the people of Ephesus needed to hear the message of Christ's superiority over all spiritual forces. A real fear of spiritual forces was keeping many believers from fully turning away from living "as the Gentiles do". Acts 19:17-20 substantiates this suspicion. "...they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly," (Acts 19:17-20). Paul comforts the Ephesian believer by stressing the immense power of Christ and the positions of the believer as with Christ.

Conclusion.

The notion of spiritual warfare and the Christian arming him/herself in Christ against evil spiritual forces is slowly creeping into mainstream Christianity. The spiritual warfare sections in Christian bookstores have grown immensely in the past 20 years. In light of this trend, I believe it is important for Christians today to have an understanding of the biblical perspective of the struggle against spiritual forces. Ephesians, with its high quantity of language regarding "power" and "powers", is an important place to look into a biblical perspective.

Over the last 130 years, scholars have made many arguments as to what the "powers" language in Ephesians refers to (either spiritual forces, sociopolitical forces, or both). Recently, Clint Arnold has been a primary scholar in this area of study, editing or cited in several commentaries, Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias on the topics of Ephesians, Ephesus, Principalities and Powers, and so on. He takes an important step in looking to understand the cultural situation of the audience of the letter. In Arnold's works that I have been able to study, I find that he does not sufficiently examine the connections between the Qumran community writings and Ephesians.

The Qumran writings show us that community believed in an existence of a dualistic framework and the conceptions of cosmic forces influencing humankind. Many themes similar to those found in the Qumran writings are also found in Ephesians. Spiritual beings affecting humanity were real to the Qumran community, and it may stand to reason that they were real for the author of Ephesians as well.

"Powers" related terminology and lists in Ephesians can be found in Jewish and Greek religious or magical writings of the era. The terms had sociopolitical meanings in everyday use, but we find that in many religious contexts they imply spiritual (usually angelic or demonic) forces. It becomes probable that the terms in Ephesians imply spiritual forces as well.

As the largest city in the region, Ephesus was an economic center, a religious center, and a center for magical practices in Asia Minor. The people of Ephesus experienced, and were afraid of, the power of spiritual beings over their lives. The assurance that Christ is above these powers would be greatly significant to the believer at Ephesus.

The epistle to the Ephesians establishes Christ's superiority over evil spiritual forces. It establishes that the believer is raised up with Christ; the believer shares in Christ's authority over the evil forces. And finally it gives instruction for wrestling with the spiritual forces. The language and themes used in Ephesians matches that of "spiritual warfare" language in other religious texts of the era that refer to spiritual beings. Ephesians shows that there is a dualistic struggle going on between God, Christ, and believers and spiritual forces of evil. It is a one-sided struggle if the believer will realize the superior power of Christ.

In *Mere* Christianity, C.S. Lewis writes:

> ...Christianity goes much nearer to Dualism than people think. One of the things that surprised me when I first read the New Testament seriously was that it talked so much about a Dark Power in the universe—a mighty evil spirit who was held to be the Power behind death and disease, and sin. The difference is that Christianity thinks this Dark Power was created by God, and was good when he was created, and went wrong. Christianity agrees with Dualism that this universe is at war. But it does not think this is a war between independent powers. It

thinks it is a civil war, a rebellion, and that we are living in a part of the universe occupied by the rebel—Enemy occupied territory—that is what this world is.

Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage...[72]

This "war" that Lewis writes of was plainly existent for the author of Ephesians, and is

the central theme throughout the epistle.

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[72] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone. 1996) 51.

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