

107 PRINCE OF THE POWER OF THE AIR

Introduction: It is commonly believed that the “prince of the power of the air” in Ephesians 2 is a reference to Satan, an assumed superhuman enemy of God. We will seek to show that the prince Paul was referencing was the ruler of the Jerusalem temple, the High Priest. He, along with his subordinates, exercised immense power over first century Jews and other congregants throughout the Roman Empire via the temple and synagogue system. We will look closely at the cultic structures in which the people lived and the meaning of some key words in the Ephesian text.

1. Passage under consideration—Berean Literal Bible translation

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and sins—in which once you walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler [often translated “prince”] of the authority of the air, the spirit now working in the sons of disobedience...” Eph 2:1-2

2. Besides discussing human sin, Paul is addressing cultic bondage. Generally speaking, cults have at least three over-arching characteristics:

- A. The leader/leaders of the cult, tells the people what to think, feel and do resulting in intellectual certainty and stability for cult members at the price of individual thought and freedom.
- B. Even though kept in servitude to the leader/leaders, members of the cult are made to feel superior to those outside the cult.
- C. This arrangement supplies a sense of protection and tribal belonging to cult members, but elevates leaders to god-like power, resulting in abuse.

Exiting a cult is extremely difficult and painful. Overwhelming mental/emotional discord and desire for truth are motivational.

3. The authoritarian temple rulers had the power of disenfranchisement and destruction of the people’s way of life.

“The Jews [rulers] had already agreed that if any man would confess Him as Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue.” Jn 9:22

Comment: Being “put out of the synagogue” was traumatic. One’s entire way of life was threatened—work, family, friends, religious life, etc.

4. Cults concentrate on outward display. The temple cult promoted a materialistic world view while presenting it as spiritual.

- A. **Temple rulers burdened the people with practices and kept them subservient:** *“For they (rulers) bind heavy burdens that are grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves will not lift a finger to help them.”* Mt 23:4
- B. **Leaders made a show of being special and superior:** *“But they do all their works to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the fringes of their garments, and love the place of honor at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called ‘Rabbi, Rabbi’ by men.”* Mt 23:5-7
- C. **We can discern what temple rulers demanded by Jesus’ warning of his disciples what not to do. Rulers apparently required they be called teacher, father and master, usurping God’s rightful place:** *“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi’, for one is your teacher, the Christ, and all of you are brothers. Call no man on the earth your father, for one is your Father, he who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for one is your master, the Christ.”* Mt 23:8-11
- D. **Temple rulers exploited the people but put on an act of holiness:** *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and as a pretense you make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.”* Mt 23:13
- E. **Temple leaders did not value truth and prevented others from obtaining it:** *“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men; for you don’t enter in yourselves, neither do you allow those who are entering in to enter.”* Mt 23:14
- F. **Converts were made wicked, suited only for judgment:** *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees... For you travel around by sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of Gehenna as yourselves.”* Mt 23:15
- G. **Leaders propagated superstition and twisted logic:** See Mt 23:16-22
- H. **Temple leaders did not care for the welfare of the people:** *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites...[you] have left undone the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith.”* Mt 23:23

5. The people were afraid of temple leaders.

- A. **Couldn’t mention Jesus:** *“No one spoke openly of him [Jesus] for fear of the Jews.”* Jn 7:13
- B. **Believed but didn’t confess:** *“Even many of the rulers believed in him [Jesus], but because of the Pharisees they didn’t confess it, so that they wouldn’t be put out of the synagogue.”* Jn 12:42
- C. **Joseph kept a secret:** *“Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked of Pilate that he might take away Jesus’ body.”* Jn 19:38
- D. **Disciples locked the doors:** *“The doors were locked where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews.”* Jn 20:19

6. However, the leaders became fearful of the widespread honor and esteem of Jesus among the people.

- A. *“They [leaders] feared the multitudes, because they considered him [Jesus] to be a prophet.”* Mt 21:46
- B. *“The chief priests and the scribes...sought how they might destroy him [Jesus]. For they feared him, because all the multitude was astonished at his teaching.”* Mk 11:18
- C. *“Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.”* Mk 12:12 NIV
- D. *“The chief priests and the scribes sought to lay hands on him [Jesus]... but they feared the people.”* Lk 20:19.

KEY WORDS AND ANALYSIS OF PASSAGE:

1. The word “spirit” is used in a wide variety of ways in modern speech and literature.

When we say someone has a good spirit, it may be a reference to their courage, fortitude, or determination. We speak of someone being mean-spirited, in high spirits, having team spirit, someone being spirited away or a spirited conversation. Alcohol is called “spirits.” Those who have committed heinous crimes are said to have an evil spirit.

2. Similarly, the word “spirit” is used in many ways in the Bible.

A. Poor in spirit: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Mt 5:3

B. Mute spirit: “Teacher, I brought to you my son, who has a mute spirit.” Mk 9:17

C. Spirit of infirmity: “There was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years.” Lk 13:10

D. Spirit of a man: “Who among men knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man.” I Cor 2:11

E. The mind’s spirit: “...that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind...” Eph 4:23

F. Unclean spirit: “...bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits...” Acts 5:16

G. Spirit of divination: “A certain girl having a spirit of divination met us...” Acts 16:6

H. Spirit of slavery: “You didn’t receive the spirit of bondage...” Rom 8:15

I. Spirit of adoption: “You received the spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” Rom 8:15

J. Spirit of stupor: “According as it is written, ‘God gave them a spirit of stupor.’” Rom 11:8

K. Spirit of the world: “We received not the spirit of the world...” I Cor 2:12

L. Discerning of spirits: “...and to another...discerning of spirits,” I Cor 12:8-10

M. Spirit of wisdom: “...may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him...” Eph 1:17

N. Spirit of antichrist: “Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ... is the spirit of antichrist...” I Jn 4:3

Comment: We ought not assume a supernatural being when we see the word “spirit” in Biblical texts.

3. “Age of this world” refers to the Old Covenant.

Before AD 70, first century New Testament Jews were living in the Old Covenant Age. See P.P. #100.

4. Use of the phrase “this world” vs “the world:”

Distinction needs to be made between “this world” and “the world.” “This world” pertains to the first century Old Covenant world that was still present during the New Testament. “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Hasn’t God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” I Cor 1:20. Contrast: “God so loved the world...” Jn 3:16.

5. The prince or ruler of “this world” was the High Priest. He was ruler of the Old Covenant world.

The word “ruler” is “archon” in the Greek and is sometimes translated “prince.” It is used routinely for the High Priest.

A. “Now is the judgment of this world. Now the prince [ruler=archon] of this world will be cast out.” Jn 12:31

B. “I will no more speak much with you, for the prince [ruler=archon] of this world comes, and he has nothing in me.” Jn 14:30

C. “...the prince [ruler=archon] of this world has been judged.” Jn 16:11

D. See Preterist Paper #66 “The Ruler of this World.”

6. Other rulers [archon] were subordinate to the High Priest.

Nicodemus was an “archon” (Jn 3:1). Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, was an “archon” (Lk 12:58). The rich young ruler was an “archon.” (Lk 18:18). See also: Mt 9:18, Mt 9:23, Lk 12:58, Lk 14:1, Jn 7:48, Jn 12:42, Acts 4:5, Acts 4:8, Acts 4:26 etc.

7. Use of the word “air.”

The High Priest and his subordinates controlled the milieu, the spirit of the age, the “air-waves” in which the Jewish people lived. He was the ultimate authority and the supposed intermediary between God and man.

8. We might rephrase Paul’s words to the Ephesian believers this way:

You were spiritually dead as violators of God’s laws. You were guided by the spirit of the Old Covenant age, according to the authority of the High Priest, following the spirit of the Old Covenant cultic beliefs and practices that continue to control first century Jews who are disobedient to the Messiah’s call. (The temple cult was adversarial to Jesus, who gives true reconciliation and freedom. He is “the way, the truth and the life” Jn 14:6.)

Closing thoughts: The addition of a Satan god to the sacred text through the mistranslation of the common noun “adversary”, is in error. The attribution of the rulership of the world to Satan, steals God’s authority in the hearts and minds of those who believe it. Yahweh said, “*I myself am He. There is no god with me. I kill and I make alive. I wound and I heal. There is no one who can deliver out of My hand*” (Dt 32:39). There is simply no “room” for Satan in God’s world. In addition, when we imagine a “Satan” deity and blame him for sin, we are blind to our own nature and need for grace. It is the human heart that is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer 17:9). Those who persist in believing in a spiritual entity named “Satan,” must come to terms with the fact that they are more wicked than “Satan” since the human heart is evil “above all things.” (Jer 17:9)

Note: Satan simply mean “adversary,” a common noun. See P.P. #60 and #61.

Recommended: “The Real Devil” by Duncan Heaster. Available online, not in print: <http://www.realdevil.info/5-23.htm>