

Powerful Spiritual Beings

The cosmic dimension of Christ's victory over powerful spiritual beings is emphasized in Ephesians (see 1:20–21; 3:10) and also in Colossians (see 1:13; 2:10, 15). We read about:

- rulers (Eph. 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15; cf. Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24)
- authorities (Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:13, 16; 2:10, 15; cf. 1 Cor. 15:24)
- powers (Eph. 1:21; cf. Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24)
- cosmic powers (Eph. 6:12)
- dominions (Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16)
- thrones (Col. 1:16)

Six different designations are used in Greek, though English Bibles do not translate the words consistently; the phrase “elemental spirits of the universe” (Col. 2:8, 20) seems generic.

Who or what are these spiritual beings? The author and original readers of Ephesians would have believed that they were living creatures, not biological entities “of blood and flesh” (Eph. 6:12), but just as real as humans or animals. Angels and demons may be the best-known examples of such beings, along with the devil, who is called “the ruler of the power of the air” (2:2) and elsewhere in the New Testament is referred to as “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4). Jews and Christians often identified the gods of other religions as powerful spiritual beings as well, not denying their existence but rather identifying them as inferior rivals to the one true God.

In Ephesians these powerful spiritual beings are presented as evil forces intent on dominating people's lives and influencing world affairs. They are the true enemies of believers (6:12). Ephesians says that Christ has been elevated to a position of dominance over them (1:20–21), that the church shares in this exaltation (1:22–23; 2:6; 3:10), and that God equips believers for the ongoing struggle against such spiritual forces of evil in “this present darkness” (6:12).