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## **Astral And Angelic Powers In Romans 8:38-39**

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ASTRAL AND ANGELIC POWERS IN ROMANS 8:38-39

A Guided Research Paper

Presented to Dr. Richard Oster

Harding School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment of  
the Degree of Master of Arts

By

Frederick Christian Wright

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## Section I: Introduction

Belief in unseen agents that influence the visible world is a widespread feature of both organized and popular religion, including Christianity. Theological studies of “unseen powers” ground their assertions about their existence and relevance to the Christian life in texts which allude to them in the New Testament, as well as contemporaneous works.<sup>1</sup> It should be noted, however, that the language used in these texts is subject to multiple interpretations.<sup>2</sup> For example, words used to describe political powers in one text may refer to supernatural powers in another.<sup>3</sup>

One text important to interpreting Paul’s thinking on these matters is Rom. 8:38-39: a list of forces that will not separate Christians from the love of Christ.<sup>4</sup> The study that follows tries to situate the list contained in Rom. 8:38-39 within a context of similar ideas that would have been accessible to Paul. Sections II through IV are devoted to examining how four words in the list (ἄρχων, δύναμις, and ὑψωμα/βάθος) are used in a selection of primary sources. Because commentators sometimes regard the words ὑψωμα and βάθος to be technical astrological terms in Romans,<sup>5</sup> a primary source review looking at the prominence of astral lore in Second Temple

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<sup>1</sup> For a conservative Evangelical perspective on “the Powers,” see Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul’s Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992). For a conservative Catholic perspective, see Heinrich Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1961). For a progressive Protestant perspective, see Walter Wink, *The Powers*, 3 volumes: *Naming the Powers* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), *Unmasking the Powers* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986) & *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 401.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 6

<sup>4</sup> Wink, 47-50.

<sup>5</sup> See definition of βάθος given in (hereafter cited as “BDAG”): Frederick W. Danker (reviser and editor), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 162 and references given there and for ὑψωμα in BDAG, 1046.

Judaism was also included (Section V). Section VI includes a summary of Paul's thinking about spiritual powers from his other letters and an exegesis of Rom. 8:31-39. The four terms from verses 38 and 39 are evaluated in light of verses 31 through 37 as well as parallels in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint. A conclusion follows which applies the Pauline message on spiritual powers to the situation of modern Christians.

This paper is not, strictly speaking, a word study. Broader ranges of meaning of the four terms were reviewed when it was helpful,<sup>6</sup> but greater attention and space were paid to uses which potentially had angelic, demonic, or astral significance. Moreover, non-Greek texts (which mention concepts similar to those expressed by the respective Greek word) were included in the review. Scholars who comment on works which are translations<sup>7</sup> have sometimes speculated on whether a specific word in the extant version is the "translation equivalent" of a word in the lost original.<sup>8</sup> When this concerned one of the four terms, it was commented on.

To qualify for inclusion, each primary source must have been composed (in whole or in part) in 200 BC - 200 AD.<sup>9</sup> This period was chosen because it appears to have been a time of flourishing for speculation about angelology and demonology in Second Temple Judaism.<sup>10</sup> Books which were produced in this period, such as those contained in 1 Enoch, greatly influenced the thinking of early Christians on heavenly powers (including some of the authors of

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<sup>6</sup> Especially for ἄνωμα and βάθος, where the question was whether Paul would have recognized and used these words as astrological terms.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. the Greek versions of the Old Testament and the Ethiopic version of 1 Enoch.

<sup>8</sup> For an example see George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch 2* (Fortress Press, 2012), 251.

<sup>9</sup> This date range is also one of the standard requirements for a work's classification as part of the Pseudepigrapha (though doubtlessly not every book considered such meets this requirement). See James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1983), 1:xxv.

<sup>10</sup> Carol A. Newsom, "Angels: Old Testament" in David Noel Freedman (ed), *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 1:249-253.

the NT).<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, many of the Jewish eschatological traditions which influenced Pauline thought were born in the late Hellenistic period.<sup>12</sup> Even later works which postdate Paul (both Jewish and Christian) may use vocabulary and concepts with which he was familiar.<sup>13</sup> Though they represent a later stage of evolution, the Apostolic Fathers and two apologists of the 2nd century<sup>14</sup> were judged to still be “conservative” enough in their reliance on older traditions to be compared with Paul.<sup>15</sup>

Another reason for extending the period of study to the 2nd century was the dating of the astrological handbooks cited in Sections IV & V.<sup>16</sup> Works which attribute astrological language to Paul cite these sources.<sup>17</sup> It did not seem prudent to exclude them when 1) ancient sources on the subject are already scarce,<sup>18</sup> and 2) there are major works of astrology that are relatively close to Paul’s time, even if they are later. Texts of sufficiently questionable date were excluded from the main text (though they do appear in footnotes).

Whether a text meets the date qualification cannot always be determined with certainty. Many of the Pseudepigrapha cited in the following pages are known from much later manuscripts,

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<sup>11</sup> E.g. the authors of Jude, 2 Peter, and possibly Paul in 1 Corinthians 11. See Section H of George W. E. Nickelsburg, “Enoch, First Book of” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 2:516.

<sup>12</sup> See Louis F. Hartman, “Eschatology” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2007) 6:489-500 (esp. “In the Intertestamental Literature,” 495-500).

<sup>13</sup> For a non-angelological example, see mortality for all people prescribed as a punishment for Adam’s sin in 4 Ezra 3:7 (cf. Rom. 5:12).

<sup>14</sup> The author of the *Epistle to Diognetus* and Justin Martyr.

<sup>15</sup> Assuming the characterization of them as faithful preservers of “apostolic tradition” is correct. But for discussion of their diversity and their innovations see William R. Schoedel, “Apostolic Fathers” in David Noel Freedman ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 1:313-316.

<sup>16</sup> The *Tetrabiblos* of Ptolemy and the *Anthologies* of Vettius Valens.

<sup>17</sup> Wilfred L. Knox, *St Paul and the Church of the Gentiles* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 106-07 (esp. note 3).

<sup>18</sup> “We know little about the partially pseudepigraphic Greek works of the Hellenistic period;” for quote see Wolfgang Hubner, “Astrology” in *Brill’s New Pauly* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2004), 2:198.

translated into different languages, and contain probable interpolations by later scribes.<sup>19</sup>

Evidence for their date comes from educated guesses based on internal evidence. In the interest of casting a wide net, the entry requirements were not strict: if at least two reputable scholars considered a work to be in the date range, it was included.

One major exception has been made: all Gnostic texts which potentially date from the period under study have been excluded. This decision has not been made because of ideological bias. Christian Gnostic texts have two traits which make them inappropriate for a study like this. The first is that the Gnostic systems characterize the world of matter as an obstacle to the soul's ascension to a world of pure spirit.<sup>20</sup> Because of this outlook, beings such as planetary spirits (thought to be overseers of the world of matter) are presented in a negative way.<sup>21</sup> It is therefore plausible that they might not have been in other belief systems. The second trait is Pauline influence on some of these works. There is evidence that many of the theological terms used by Christian Gnostics were Pauline terms given an esoteric interpretation.<sup>22</sup> This influence might easily have shaped the vocabulary used for spiritual powers as well (especially in the case of ἄρχων). Because the study depends heavily on how words were used by other authors, to use these sources might be to retroject a perspective onto Paul's text which he may not have held.

As regards Paul, this paper takes the "liberal" view of his authorship of the letters which bear his name in the NT. I am doubtful of the authenticity of Colossians and Ephesians and judge the

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<sup>19</sup> These are usually insertions of Christian doctrine into originally Jewish works. See James H. Charlesworth, "Pseudepigrapha, OT" in David Noel Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:537-538.

<sup>20</sup> Kai Ruffig, "Gnosis, Gnostics, Gnosticism," in *Brill's New Pauly* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2004) 5:893-901.

<sup>21</sup> Ruffig in *Brill's New Pauly*, 5:895.

<sup>22</sup> Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975), 162-64.

Pastorals to be pseudonymous, while regarding Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon, 1-2 Corinthians, Romans, and possibly 2 Thessalonians as authentic. Excluding 2 Thessalonians, this set is sometimes considered the “undisputed letters” and is referred to as such in this paper.<sup>23</sup> The question of authorship does have some bearing on the interpretation of the material in Rom. 8:38-39, particularly the references in Ephesians and Colossians to “rulers” (ἄρχαί).<sup>24</sup> Because significant doubt persists about the letters’ origin, they have been handled like other material in the NT. The letters are cited as another primary source from the period under study, but not in order to directly interpret Paul (as the “undisputed letters” are).

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<sup>23</sup> Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 280.

<sup>24</sup> Eph. 2:2, 6:12; Col. 2:15; cf. Col. 1:16. All English Bible references are from the NRSV (unless otherwise stated).

## Section II: ἄρχων/ἀρχή

### A. Heavenly Rulers in Greek-language texts<sup>25</sup>

One reference in the Septuagint which could conceivably be an early reference to the “heavenly *archons*”<sup>26</sup> is Lev 18:21. The Hebrew text prohibits the giving over of one’s “seed” (a child?) to either the god “Molech” or “the king” (depending on how the Hebrew מלך is vocalized). This passage is traditionally interpreted as the outlawing of child sacrifice. The Old Greek translator<sup>27</sup> rendered the verse “You shall not give any of your seed/offspring to serve/ worship a ruler.”<sup>28</sup> In Lev. 20:2 & 20:4-5, the hearer is warned against “giving seed to” or “whoring after” *archons*. This is obscure and open to several interpretations; does it point to the sacrifice or dedication of a child to a pagan god or gods?<sup>29</sup> Lust suggests that if “serve” (λατρεύειν) implies cultic service, it may be justified to take the *archons* to be minor gods.<sup>30</sup> If so, it would be an early use of the word ἄρχων to refer to a spiritual being without further qualification.<sup>31</sup> But political readings, with human authorities being the intended

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<sup>25</sup> The English transliteration *archon* (plural: *archons*) will be used instead of the different forms of the Greek ἄρχων.

<sup>26</sup> See David E. Aune, “Archon” in Karel van der Toorn (ed), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd ed, (Leiden: The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 1999) 83-85.

<sup>27</sup> The term “Old Greek” (OG) is used to refer to those portions of the Septuagint which were translated from the Hebrew Bible, excluding original Greek compositions (as well as later Hebrew-to-Greek translations such as Theodotion’s or Aquila’s). See Melvin K. H. Peters, “Septuagint” in David Noel Freedman (ed), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:1093.

<sup>28</sup> Lev. 18:21a LXX: “καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ σπέρματός σου οὐ δώσεις λατρεύειν ἄρχοντι.”

<sup>29</sup> Muraoka interprets this translation choice as a way to conceal the name of the god Molech. See “ἄρχων” in Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2009), 96.

<sup>30</sup> Lust, “Molek and APXΩN” in Lipinski, 207.

<sup>31</sup> J. Lust states that “the term ἄρχων, in both the Old and New Testaments and in the intertestamental texts, seems to have a demonic or angelic sense only when a qualifying clause is attached...[e.g.] ‘the ruler of demons or ‘the ruler of this world.’” This is not exactly true; as can be seen in the Greek versions of Daniel and the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (see below). For quote see J. Lust, “Molek and APXΩN” in E. Lipinski (ed.), *Studia Phoenicia XI: Phoenicia and the Bible* (Leuven: Peeters, 1991), 206.



reference, are also possible. For example, perhaps the *archon* in this passage is a king (such as one of the Ptolemies, given the probable Egyptian origin of the OG).<sup>32</sup> Elsewhere in the OG, the word ἄρχων can translate the Hebrew מלך when the referent is a human king.<sup>33</sup>

An early and explicit scriptural reference to angelic rulers occurs in the Hebrew and Greek versions of the book of Daniel. A power struggle with the angelic ruler of Persia leads to the delay of an angel who comes with a revelation for Daniel,<sup>34</sup> and the angel Michael is also designated as a ruler.<sup>35</sup> It should not escape our notice that there is a shift in vocabulary from the OG of Daniel (uncertain date) to Theodotion's version (mid-2nd century AD).<sup>36</sup> In Theodotion's text, Michael is consistently called an *archon* when the OG refers to him as an angel.<sup>37</sup> Michael

	<b>Hebrew (Masoretic)</b>	<b>Old Greek (original LXX)</b>	<b>Theodotion (canonical "LXX")</b>
<b>Prince of Persia (10:13)</b>	שַׁר (prince)	ὁ στρατηγός (the commander)	ὁ ἄρχων (the prince)
<b>Michael (10:13)</b>	הַשָּׂרִים הָרְאשֻׁנִים (of the chief princes)	Μ εἰς τῶν ἀρχόντων τῶν πρώτων (of the chief princes)	Μ εἰς τῶν ἀρχόντων τῶν πρώτων (of the chief princes)
<b>Michael (10:21)</b>	שָׂרְכָם (your prince)	ὁ ἄγγελος (the angel)	ὁ ἄρχων ὑμῶν (your prince)
<b>Michael (12:1)</b>	הַשָּׂר הַגָּדוֹל (the great prince)	ὁ ἄγγελος ὁ μέγας (the great angel)	ὁ ἄρχων ὁ μέγας (the great prince)

<sup>32</sup> Dirk Buchner, "You Shall Not Give of Your Seed to Serve an Archon" in *Translating a Translation: The LXX and its Modern Translations in the Context of Early Judaism* ed. Hans Ausloos et al (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2008), 192-93.

<sup>33</sup> 1 Sam 13:14 LXX.

<sup>34</sup> Dan. 10:13.

<sup>35</sup> Dan. 10:21, 12:1.

<sup>36</sup> This is the Greek version of Daniel which is present in most Christian copies of the LXX. For background and date see Leonard J. Greenspoon, "Theodotion, Theodotion's Version" in David Noel Freedman (ed), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 7:447-48.

<sup>37</sup> Dan. 10:21, 12:1.

is “εἷς τῶν ἀρχόντων τῶν πρώτων” (among the chief princes) in both versions; the angel who represents Persia is referred to by Theodotion as ἄρχων while the OG uses the military term στρατηγός.<sup>38</sup> One possible explanation for the difference is that by Theodotion’s time the concept of an angelic ruler was widely known and could be referred to by the shorthand of ἄρχων, and that this shift in vocabulary was a later development. Yet the OG, in making Michael one of “the chief princes,” would remain an early witness to a conception of angels or heavenly powers being called “princes/rulers” and having authority over the nations.

*The Prayer of Joseph*, a Jewish text preserved in fragments and possibly dating from the 1st century,<sup>39</sup> claims that the biblical Jacob was an angel incarnated as a human being. In the opening verses, the angelic Jacob (now called Israel) calls himself a πνεῦμα ἀρχικόν (ruling spirit). Based on the fact that the figure is named Israel, it has been proposed that he is one of the “angels of the nations”: spiritual rulers which represent people groups in heaven.<sup>40</sup>

The Gospel of John includes the idea that Satan (or whatever term is used of the chief evil power) is “the *archon* of the world.”<sup>41</sup> The Synoptic Gospels lack the phrases “ruler of the world” or “ruler of the age,” but allude to a similar conception. The temptation story in both Matthew and Luke has Satan displaying and offering Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, while in Luke it is explicitly said they are Satan's to give to whomever he wishes.<sup>42</sup> This is consistent

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<sup>38</sup> Dan. 10:13.

<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, “Prayer of Joseph” in Charlesworth et al, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:700. Contrast with Jub. 15:31-32, which states that God appointed angels and spirits over other nations to lead them astray, while Israel is his own possession.

<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Prayer of Joseph” in Jacob Neusner, *Religions in Antiquity*, 265.

<sup>41</sup> Jn. 12:31, 14:30, 16:11.

<sup>42</sup> Lk. 4:6-7, cf. Mt. 4:9.

with a picture of Satan as a being who has (or had) authority over the present world-order.<sup>43</sup> The Synoptics also refer to a Beelzebul who is the *archon* of demons.<sup>44</sup>

The letter to the Ephesians refers to Satan as both a spirit and “the ruler [ἄρχων] of the power of the air.”<sup>45</sup> This same letter uses the form ἀρχή<sup>46</sup> in a list of other authorities (ἐξουσίας and κοσμοκράτορας) which are explicitly said to be of “this present darkness” and located “in the heavenly places.”<sup>47</sup> The author insists that these, rather than human beings, are the true opponents of Christians. The meaning of the word ἀρχή overlaps with that of ἄρχων, in that it can refer generally to either a person or a supernatural being who has authority.<sup>48</sup> The word appears again, alongside ἐξουσία, in similar lists in Ephesians<sup>49</sup> and Colossians.<sup>50</sup> A list in 1 Peter which closely parallels the sequence and vocabulary of the list in Ephesians lists angels instead of ἀρχαί.<sup>51</sup> This indicates to some commentators that the author of 1 Peter was aware of a tradition which referred to spiritual powers with a set of words for authorities (which also occurs in the Deutero-Pauline letters).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> But see also Lk. 10:17ff, where Satan falls from heaven (presumably a position of authority in the cosmos).

<sup>44</sup> Mk. 3:22 and parallels.

<sup>45</sup> Eph. 2:2.

<sup>46</sup> See “Ἀρχή, no. 6” in *BDAG*, 138; see also David E. Aune, “Archai” in Karel van der Toorn (ed), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd ed, (Leiden: The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 1999), 77-80.

<sup>47</sup> Eph. 6:12.

<sup>48</sup> “When used [to designate an authority], *arche* belongs to the same semantic subdomain as *archon*...” see David E. Aune, “Archai” in Karel van der Toorn (ed), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 77.

<sup>49</sup> Eph. 1:21 (“πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος”).

<sup>50</sup> Col. 1:16 (“εἶτε θρόνοι εἶτε κυριότητες εἶτε ἀρχαὶ εἶτε ἐξουσίαι”).

<sup>51</sup> 1 Pet. 3:22 (“ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων”).

<sup>52</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 274; see also John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 686.

The *Testament of Job*, a work of uncertain date but which may be from the late Second Temple Period,<sup>53</sup> contains a story in which Job's daughters prophesy in heavenly languages.<sup>54</sup> Job bequeaths a radiant cord to each of his three daughters, which will cause them to be heavenly-minded.<sup>55</sup> Each woman is inspired to compose hymns and ecstatically speak a different language: one belonging to the angels, another the rulers/*archons*, and the last of the cherubim.<sup>56</sup> When speaking the language of *archons*, his daughter Kasia recites a hymnic account of how the heavens were made.<sup>57</sup> In this context the *archons* are simply another division of heavenly beings, contradicting the notion that the word *archon* was shorthand for planetary demons.<sup>58</sup>

Ignatius of Antioch, in a manner similar to John, refers to Satan as “the *archon* of this age.”<sup>59</sup> There are references to a plurality of spiritual *archons* in his letters as well. He mentions “the heavenly ones...the angels...visible and invisible rulers” and asserts that they will be judged if they do not trust in Christ's blood.<sup>60</sup> In what appears to be a development of Paul's statement that the “rulers of this age” (whether human or otherwise he does not say) crucified Jesus in ignorance,<sup>61</sup> Ignatius declares that the mystery of the Virgin Birth was kept a secret from the

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<sup>53</sup> Spittler suggests this work is a Christian modification of an earlier Jewish text, see his introduction in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:833-34.

<sup>54</sup> Compare 1 Cor. 13:1.

<sup>55</sup> *Test. of Job* 46-47.

<sup>56</sup> *Test. of Job* 48-50. That each of these languages were different is clarified in 52:7.

<sup>57</sup> “ἔδοξολόγησεν δὲ τοῦ ὑψηλοῦ τόπου τὸ ποίημα...τὸ ποίημα τῶν οὐρανῶν” (*Test. of Job* 49:2-3).

<sup>58</sup> David E. Aune, “Archon” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 83-85; cf. Rom 8:38 in the 1984 NIV which renders ἀρχαί as “demons.”

<sup>59</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 19:1.

<sup>60</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Smyrnaeans* 6:1, translation in J. B Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations of their Writings*, 2nd ed. Ed. and rev. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Co., 1992), 189.

<sup>61</sup> 1 Cor. 2:8.

“*archon* of this age.”<sup>62</sup> He also claims to have an understanding of “heavenly things”, including the “ranks of the angels” and “hierarchy of principalities [*archons*].”<sup>63</sup>

Philo describes the created order in a hierarchical way, saying the following:

“Moses held that the universe was created and is in a sense the greatest of commonwealths, having magistrates [*archons*] and subjects; for magistrates, all the heavenly bodies; for subjects, such beings as exists below the moon, in the air or on the earth.”<sup>64</sup>

This passage occurs in the midst of a summary of how stars affect the weather. It is a scriptural rationalization of the alleged power the heavenly bodies were said to have over beings and events in the sublunar sphere: God set them up to be rulers over other things in creation.<sup>65</sup>

### B. Heavenly Rulers in Non-Greek Texts

The *Book of the Heavenly Luminaries*, a section of 1 Enoch which presents itself as Enoch’s journey through the heavens,<sup>66</sup> includes a description of “the leaders of the chiefs of the thousands, which are appointed over the whole creation and upon all the stars...”<sup>67</sup> Of these leaders it is said that by their error the stars sometimes travel on the wrong path,<sup>68</sup> which is elsewhere described in 1 Enoch as a crime that the stars are punished for.<sup>69</sup> Here, heavenly

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<sup>62</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 19:1ff.

<sup>63</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Trallians* 5:2; translation in Lightfoot and Harmer, 163.

<sup>64</sup> Philo *de Spec. Leg* I, 13 in *Philo*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. F. H. Colson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), 7:107.

<sup>65</sup> Gen. 1:16.

<sup>66</sup> See Introduction in Nickelsberg and VanderKam, *1 Enoch* 2, 335ff.

<sup>67</sup> 1 En. 75:1.

<sup>68</sup> “Many of the chiefs of the stars shall make errors in respect to the orders given to them...” see 1 En. 80:6-7.

<sup>69</sup> 1 En. 18:12ff, 20:4.

beings currently in control may do wrong and later be punished by God.<sup>70</sup> 2 Enoch, a later text which possibly contains earlier tradition, also mentions “rulers” and angels who have authority over stars.<sup>71</sup>

The Dead Sea Scrolls contain numerous references to angelic leaders. One scroll refers to a “Prince (שר) of Light” who rules over the “sons of justice” and is the counterpart to an “Angel of Darkness” who rules the “sons of deceit.”<sup>72</sup> The parallelism makes it seem very probable that the prince is angelic, not merely human. In the War Scroll, this figure is said to be the leader of all “the spirits of truth,” and to have been chosen by God from long ago to aid the Essenes in their end-times battle against the forces of evil.<sup>73</sup> An identification of the Prince of Lights with Michael seems quite likely in view of the above references in Daniel.<sup>74</sup> In this community, his status as a heavenly prince is clear in what are 1st century works at the latest. He is the good counterpart to Belial “the angel of enmity,”<sup>75</sup> and later on in this text it is said God will overthrow the “prince of the dominion of evil” and rescue his chosen “by the power of the majestic angel for the dominion of Michael.”<sup>76</sup> The above description of Belial closely resembles the description of Mastema (i.e. a leader over evil spirits) in the book of Jubilees.<sup>77</sup> A fragment of

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<sup>70</sup> The wording of the previous quotation gives the impression that these beings will do wrong in the future (from the narrative’s point of view). These seem to be distinct from the Watchers, who are sometimes represented as wandering stars themselves who have already fallen (1 En. 86, 88).

<sup>71</sup> 2 En. 4:1-2 in Charlesworth ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 110-111.

<sup>72</sup> 1 QS 3:20, translation in Florentino Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, 2nd ed (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill & Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 6.

<sup>73</sup> 1 QM 13:10-13a.

<sup>74</sup> Dan. 12:1.

<sup>75</sup> 1QM 13:11; trans. in Martinez, 108.

<sup>76</sup> 1QM 17:6; trans. in Martinez, 112.

<sup>77</sup> Jub. 10:7.

the *Book of Noah* calls this figure “the Prince of Mastema,” and makes him a being in charge of spirits who afflict evildoers with physical diseases and pains.<sup>78</sup>

The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, an incomplete set of Hebrew liturgical works found at Qumran,<sup>79</sup> contain abundant (though obscure) references to different classes of angels, including “gods,” “priests,” “ministers,” “chiefs,” and “princes.”<sup>80</sup> Rather than the above-mentioned word which is rendered “prince (שר)” (a word which has a martial connotation, like the English word commander, elsewhere<sup>81</sup>) the text uses the word נְשִׂיאַ to refer to the ruling classes of heavenly beings who make sacred offerings in the heavenly temple.<sup>82</sup> They are ruled by seven “sovereign princes” (ראשי נשיאים or נשיאי רוש)<sup>83</sup> who bless “the exalted ones of knowledge...all destined for justice...who know the mysteries of purity...who hasten to do [God’s] will...all who acknowledge Him” using “seven wonderful words.”<sup>84</sup> There are other beings who have “many-colored [clothes]” and a radiant presence who are called chiefs (ראשי).<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov (ed.), *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 46.

<sup>79</sup> The date is likely close to the 1st century BC. For general introduction (includes note on date) see Carol A. Newsom, “Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice” in Lawrence H. Schiffmann and James C. VanderKam, *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2:887-889.

<sup>80</sup> For these translations and their Hebrew equivalents see Carol Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition*, Harvard Semitic Studies 27 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985) 23-27.

<sup>81</sup> See the War Scroll: 1QM 3:3, 1QM 4:1-6.

<sup>82</sup> 4Q400 frag. 1, 1:12ff.

<sup>83</sup> 4Q403 1:23-27; translation in Martinez, 422.

<sup>84</sup> 4Q405 frag. 3 2:1-18 in Martinez, 426. It is not clear from the text if the sovereign princes are blessing humans or angels, see Carol Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, 196.

<sup>85</sup> 4Q405 frag. 23, 2 in Martinez, 430.

### Section III: δύναμις

#### A. Spiritual Powers in Greek Texts

The use of the word δύναμις for divine or unseen forces in our period (200 BC - 200 AD) is well-attested.<sup>86</sup> By this time, an educated pagan such as Plutarch could say that a single divine order (λόγος) directs the universe and that there are subsidiary powers (δυνάμεις) which are honored as the various gods of the world's nations.<sup>87</sup> He considers the gods to be the powers behind (or essences of) natural phenomena, rather than the material objects themselves or their mythical representations.<sup>88</sup> Diogenes Laertius, in summarizing the views of Stoics such as Posidonius, says that the singular all-encompassing God is referred to by “many names according to its various powers”, i.e. the many gods are particular aspects and powers of a single divine reality.<sup>89</sup> In popular imagination as well, gods were thought of as the powers behind the visible world whose ability to harm or help could be invoked or manipulated through magic.<sup>90</sup>

Throughout the LXX, the word δύναμις can have the meaning of a human army, a divine army, the heavenly bodies, or power generically.<sup>91</sup> For example, the Hebrew Bible commonly calls heavenly bodies the “host of heaven” (צְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם),<sup>92</sup> and they were thought of as warriors in

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<sup>86</sup> “δύναμις, 5” in *BDAG*, 263. For the following examples and more see Hans Dieter Betz, “Dynamis”, in Karel van der Toorn ed., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 267-70.

<sup>87</sup> Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 378.

<sup>88</sup> *De Iside et Osiride* 377.

<sup>89</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives, teachings, and sayings of famous philosophers* 7.147 trans. Hicks, Loeb Classical Library 2:251.

<sup>90</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, “Dynamis”, in Karel van der Toorn ed., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 269 and Clinton E. Arnold, “Power, NT Concept of” in David Noel Freedman ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:444.

<sup>91</sup> See “δύναμις” in Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 179.

<sup>92</sup> Deut. 4:19, 17:3.



Yahweh Sabaoth's army.<sup>93</sup> The LXX has variously translated this phrase: for example as “στρατιὰν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ”<sup>94</sup> or as “δυνάμει τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.”<sup>95</sup> In the latter phrase, the word δύναμις seems to carry the original meaning of “army (forces) of heaven.” The name Yahweh Sabaoth is sometimes rendered “Lord of the forces” (κυρίου τῶν δυνάμεων)<sup>96</sup> and may have retained the martial connotations of the Hebrew title.

Another way to interpret this phrase, which seizes on the ambiguity of the word (δυνάμεις), is to identify Yahweh with the God behind all of the world's powers described by pagan authors.<sup>97</sup> This sort of shift in meaning would require a re-identification of Yahweh's angelic army with powers presumed to exist behind creation. The idea that angels could become natural forces may be reflected in the Greek translation of Psalm 104:4 (103:4 LXX), where God makes angels into winds and his attendants into fire.<sup>98</sup> The LXX of Psalm 148:2 witnesses to angels and powers being linked when it mentions them in parallel.<sup>99</sup>

Another association of powers with angels comes from a Greek fragment of 1 Enoch, in a section which lists the chief angels (e.g. Uriel, Michael, Gabriel) and the various parts of the cosmos they are in charge of. Where the Ethiopic text preserves the likely original reading “the

<sup>93</sup> Judg. 5:20; compare Josh. 10:13-14. For more on this aspect of Yahweh, see C. L. Seow, “Hosts, Lord of” in Freedman ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 3:304-307.

<sup>94</sup> Jer. 8:2, 19:13 LXX cf. Acts 7:42.

<sup>95</sup> 2 Kings (4 Kdm.) 17:16, 21:3 LXX. See also Dan. 8:10 in Theodotion.

<sup>96</sup> Ps. 47:8 LXX (48:8 in Heb). cf. Isa 42:13 LXX: “κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῶν δυνάμεων (Lord God of the Forces).”

<sup>97</sup> “Thus, Hellenistic Judaism of the LXX reinterprets the old warrior god in terms of a cosmic deity in control of all natural and supernatural forces.” For quote see Hans Dieter Betz, “Dynamis” in Karel van der Toorn ed., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 268.

<sup>98</sup> “ὁ ποιῶν τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ πνεύματα καὶ τοὺς λειτουργοὺς αὐτοῦ πῦρ φλέγον.”

<sup>99</sup> “αἰνεῖτε αὐτόν πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ  
αἰνεῖτε αὐτόν πᾶσαι αἱ δυνάμεις αὐτοῦ”  
The underlying Hebrew for δυνάμεις is *tseva'avn* (צְבָאוֹת).

holy angels who watch,”<sup>100</sup> the extant Greek text reads “angels of the powers.”<sup>101</sup> These powers, however, are not associated with natural forces: they have spiritual and eschatological functions (e.g. authority over people’s spirits and realms such as Paradise and Tartarus). In the A recension of the *Testament of Abraham*, which is sometimes dated to the 1st or 2nd century AD,<sup>102</sup> the angel Michael is referred to as the “commander-in chief (ἀρχιστράτηγος) of the powers above.” This title is similar to one given to the angel in the LXX of Joshua 5:14: commander-in-chief of the Lord’s forces (“ἀρχιστράτηγος δυνάμεως κυρίου”).<sup>103</sup>

Philo speaks about a multitude of “powers” as the means by which God’s presence may be known throughout the world, while his essence may be considered pure and beyond created existence.<sup>104</sup> Philo appears to say that these powers are extensions of God which give rise to the forces and properties of nature.<sup>105</sup> They are “numberless” and “assist and protect created being.”<sup>106</sup> They encompass the whole universe including “earth and water, air and heaven.”<sup>107</sup> God has bound creation in its ordered forms with these powers, which are called “chains that

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<sup>100</sup> 1 En. 20:1, translation in James H. Charlesworth ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:23.

<sup>101</sup> For Greek text see Henry Barclay Swete, *The Old Testament in Greek According to the Septuagint*, 2nd ed (Cambridge, 1899) 3:803. See also notes in George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1* (Fortress Press, 2001) 294.

<sup>102</sup> For a discussion of the differing versions and dating of this work, see the introduction by E. P. Sanders in Charlesworth ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:871-80. For bibliography see also James H. Charlesworth, *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research with a Supplement* (Ann Arbor, MI: Scholars Press, 1981) 70-72.

<sup>103</sup> *Testament of Abraham* 14:12, translation by E. P. Sanders in Charlesworth ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:891. For discussion on title’s origin see note 1c in *ibid*, 1:882. Cf. Dan. 8:11 in Theodotion’s version, where the Hebrew שַׁר-הַצְּבָאוֹת is translated ἀρχιστράτηγος. The title is also used of a human military leader in the LXX of Gen. 26:26.

<sup>104</sup> Philo, *De conf.* 137; cf. *De migr.* 182. That Philo believed God could only be apprehended via intermediary powers is a common, but not universal interpretation. For more see Scott D. Mackie. “Seeing God in Philo of Alexandria: the Logos, the Powers, or the Existent One?” *The Studio Philonica Annual* 21 (2009): 25-47

<sup>105</sup> *De conf.* 135-36. For more on the textual problems and conjectural readings see notes in Philo, Loeb Classical Library, trans. Colson and Whitaker, 4:87.

<sup>106</sup> *De conf.* 171.

<sup>107</sup> *De conf.* 136.

cannot be broken,”<sup>108</sup> “adamantine chains,”<sup>109</sup> and “invisible bonds.”<sup>110</sup> Philo says that they make up the nonphysical world of ideal forms, which give the visible bodily forms their shape.<sup>111</sup>

Philo regarded the two cherubim stationed outside Paradise<sup>112</sup> as symbols for powers, either as representing the structure of the heavens or the highest Divine Powers of “Goodness and Sovereignty” which are the two counterbalanced forces that God uses to govern everything in creation.<sup>113</sup> The two angels who accompany the appearance to Abraham<sup>114</sup> also represent these two forces, and together with God himself these reveal the divine mysteries of the universe to the human soul.<sup>115</sup>

Philo also uses the word “power” to refer to heavenly bodies such as the sun, moon, and stars.<sup>116</sup> He saw these as living creatures of pure mind<sup>117</sup> which exemplify the best of the ideal and visible worlds, thus “pagans have felt no shame in calling them gods.”<sup>118</sup> These are served by angels or daemons, which are defined as bodiless souls that exist in the air.<sup>119</sup> Philo also describes these souls as “powers,” the purest of which are near the heavens and serve as go-

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<sup>108</sup> *De migr.* 181.

<sup>109</sup> *De conf.* 166.

<sup>110</sup> *De conf.* 136.

<sup>111</sup> Philo, *De conf.* 172, *De cher.* 51-52. For a review of the cosmology upon which Philo’s speculation is based, see Matthias Baltes, “Middle Platonism” in *Brill’s New Pauly* 8:858-64.

<sup>112</sup> Gen. 3:24; he takes the two cherubim on the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:19) to be the same cherubim, see *De cherubim* 25.

<sup>113</sup> *De cher.* 20-28.

<sup>114</sup> Gen. 18.

<sup>115</sup> *De sacr.* 59-60; compare *De cherub.* 28 where the Logos is the third, supreme principle.

<sup>116</sup> *De spec. leg.* 2.45.

<sup>117</sup> *De opif.* 74, *De gig.* 8.

<sup>118</sup> *De conf.* 173. See also Section V below.

<sup>119</sup> *De conf.* 174, *De gig.* 6ff.

betweens for God and his people.<sup>120</sup> They may be employed to carry out God’s wrath or correction<sup>121</sup> and are of a lower rank than those powers associated with God’s divine qualities, which must be kept unsullied by this work.<sup>122</sup>

The NT often uses δύναμις in the sense of might or capability (especially that endowed by God or the Spirit), or as the word for miracles worked by Jesus and the apostles (i.e. “deeds of power”).<sup>123</sup> Similarly, the Samaritan wonder-worker Simon Magus is named by his admirers: “Power (Δύναμις) of God, which is called Great (Μεγάλη)”.<sup>124</sup> Yet the word is also used in the Synoptic Gospels of “the powers in the heavens” which “will be shaken” in the End Times.<sup>125</sup> What these powers are is left unexplained, but it is in parallel with a reference to the stars falling from heaven. In a similarly apocalyptic context, Paul refers to Jesus destroying “every ruler...authority and power...” before handing over his kingdom to God the Father at the End.<sup>126</sup> The first letter of Peter states that all “angels, authorities, and powers” were made subject to Christ after his enthronement in heaven,<sup>127</sup> and the Ephesian letter speaks of Christ being above every power both in the present time and in the *eschaton*.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Some of the less pure become the souls incarnate in human bodies. See *De plant.* 14. See also the reference to “bodiless” powers that are a means for God to bless people in *De mut. nom.* 59.

<sup>121</sup> *De conf.* 171, 182.

<sup>122</sup> *De conf.* 182.

<sup>123</sup> “δύναμις, 1, 4” in *BDAG*. See also Clinton E. Arnold. “Power, NT Concept of” in Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 5:444-46.

<sup>124</sup> Acts 8:10; translation mine.

<sup>125</sup> Mark 13:25; parallels in Matt. 24:29, Luke 21:26.

<sup>126</sup> 1 Cor. 15:24.

<sup>127</sup> 1 Pet. 3:22. The mention of angels in the list gives the impression that the powers here may be spiritual beings like them. See Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 274

<sup>128</sup> Eph. 1:21.

Early Christian use of the word often refers to spiritual beings and natural forces.<sup>129</sup> The mid-2nd century *Shepherd of Hermas* evokes the God of the powers while describing him as the creator of the universe,<sup>130</sup> and the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* portrays its main character as blessing the “God of angels, powers, and all creation.”<sup>131</sup>

In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin Martyr tries to prove the LXX scriptural title – “Lord of hosts [forces]” – belongs to Christ. He accomplishes this by interpreting Psalm 24 (23 LXX) as a prophesy of Christ’s ascension to heaven.<sup>132</sup> The last verse of the psalm gives the referent the title “κύριος τῶν δυνάμεων,”<sup>133</sup> and Justin argues this is appropriate for Jesus by pointing to his mastery over demons. His understanding of what was meant by “hosts/forces/powers” therefore included demons, but his other comments indicate heavenly beings are intended as well.<sup>134</sup> Later in the *Dialogue* he refers to “that power which is called the serpent and Satan”<sup>135</sup> and Ignatius of Antioch assures his hearers that the powers of Satan are counteracted when they meet often and take the Eucharist.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> For many examples from the patristic writings, see “δύναμις” in G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 391.

<sup>130</sup> *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 1, 3:4.

<sup>131</sup> *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 14:1

<sup>132</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 85:8ff, cf. 29:1.

<sup>133</sup> Present in the LXX, not the Hebrew.

<sup>134</sup> His mention of angels and powers in heaven; see *Dialogue with Trypho* 85:42.

<sup>135</sup> *Dialogue with Trypho* 125. Translation in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 1:262.

<sup>136</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 13.

### B. Spiritual Powers in Non-Greek Texts

The book of Jubilees describes God’s angels as beings who have authority over the spirits of natural phenomena: he makes these forces of fire, wind, storms, seasons, and living creatures on the first day of creation, before the phenomena exist themselves.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, *The Book of Parables* in 1 Enoch (a section of the work which is commonly dated to the late 1st century)<sup>138</sup> refers to the “forces of the heavens,” “the forces of the Lord” (which includes ranks of angels such as cherubim and seraphim), and “the other forces on the earth [and] over the water” all assembling on the last day to praise God as “the Lord of Spirits.”<sup>139</sup> Both of these texts paint a picture which is consistent with the view held by Philo and both the pagan and Christian authors cited above: God is head over a multitude of forces “behind” the world.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Jub. 2:2. That these forces are created prior to their material counterparts might reveal a similar understanding to the Hellenistic conception of powers being the potentialities of physical things.

<sup>138</sup> For discussion on the date of this section of the book see George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch 2* (Fortress Press, 2012), 59-69. For a general introduction to the Book of Parables see George W. E. Nickelsburg, “Enoch, First Book of” in Freedman ed. *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 2:512.

<sup>139</sup> 1 En. 61:10ff in Charlesworth ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:42.

<sup>140</sup> Nickelsburg and VanderKam speculate that the Ethiopic word translated “forces” by E. Isaac in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* was δύναιμις in the Greek (which they translate “host”). See Nickelsburg and Vanderkam, *1 Enoch 2*, 251.

#### Section IV: ὕψωμα/βάθος

In the *Tetrabiblos* (a 2nd century astrological manual),<sup>141</sup> the mathematician Ptolemy explains the astrological concept of “exaltation” (ὕψωμα) and “depression” (ταπείνωμα). When a luminary is the most empowered and exerts the most influence, it is experiencing exaltation (ὕψωμα): e.g. when the sun is in the sign of Aries “the length of the day and the heating power...begin to increase.”<sup>142</sup> Yet when the star is at its weakest point, it is in depression (ταπείνωμα). These are distinct from when the bodies are at higher and lower points in the sky; while these may be connected, they are not identical.<sup>143</sup> For instance Ptolemy notes that the moon is in ὕψωμα when it is in the sign of Taurus, because its light and height start to increase.<sup>144</sup>

Vettius Valens (another 2nd century astrologer)<sup>145</sup> pairs the terms ὕψος and βάθος when referring to the highest and lowest points of the moon.<sup>146</sup> The words are describing the body’s relative position in space. Elsewhere, he uses ὕψωμα (translated “exaltation” by Riley) when speaking of the point when a heavenly body such as the sun has the most influence.<sup>147</sup> This is consistent with Ptolemy’s vocabulary, as Vettius also uses the verb ταπεινῶω to refer to the

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<sup>141</sup> *Tetrabiblos* = *Apotelesmatica* (its designation in the references given by *BDAG*). For background see G. J. Toomer and Alexander Jones, “Ptolemy (4)” in Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, Esther Eidinow, eds., *Oxford Classical Dictionary* 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1236-37.

<sup>142</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* 1.19, trans. Robbins, Loeb Classical Library, 1:89.

<sup>143</sup> Robbins, 89 note 1.

<sup>144</sup> *Tetrabiblos* 1.45-47.

<sup>145</sup> Antony Spawforth, “Vettius Valens” in Simon Hornblower et al (ed.), *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 1547.

<sup>146</sup> Vettii Valentinus, *Anthologiarum libri*, ed. Guilelmus Kroll (Berlin: Weidman, 1908), 241.

<sup>147</sup> Vettius Valens, *Anthologies*, trans. Mark T. Riley (unpublished, 1996?), 35, accessed 11 October 2019, <http://www.csus.edu/indiv/r/rileymt/Vettius%20Valens%20entire.pdf> Compare to Greek text in Kroll, 81.

lowering of a star's power.<sup>148</sup> The 2nd century Platonist mathematician Theon of Smyrna<sup>149</sup> uses the words ὕψος and βάθος to refer to the spatial positions of stars (here to the place of constellations in the sky), rather than the relative strength and weakness of planets.<sup>150</sup>

This same terminology is also utilized by non-astrologers commenting on the subject. The late-2nd century skeptic Sextus Empiricus, in his anti-astrological treatise “Against the Professors” (*Adversus Mathematicos*),<sup>151</sup> attests to both the words ὑψωμα and ταπείνωμα being used as technical terms for when the five planets (excluding the sun and the moon) are at their maximum and minimum influence.<sup>152</sup> Plutarch also uses these words when referring to the astral lore of the Egyptians. The stars receive exaltations and depressions on their paths through the sky and “[grow] better or worse than they were before.”<sup>153</sup>

Philo only uses the word ὑψωμα once, and it is not in the astrological sense. Alluding to the theophany on Mt. Sinai, he says the Decalogue was spoken by a voice that originated from a high point (ὑψωμα) in the air.<sup>154</sup> Elsewhere he uses the related word ὕψος either in the geometric sense (describing an object's dimensions) or in a figurative sense. Figuratively, he will often refer to the mind attaining great heights (and thus nearing heaven) through the practice of virtue or

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<sup>148</sup> Riley, 52; Kroll, 119.

<sup>149</sup> John Dillon, “Theon (2)” in Simon Hornblower et al, ed., *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 1460.

<sup>150</sup> Theonis Smyrnae, *Philosophi Platonici: Expositio rerum mathematicarum ad Legendum Platonem utilium*, ed. Eduardus Hiller (Leipzig: Teubner, 1878), 179.

<sup>151</sup> Gisela Striker, “Sextus Empiricus” in Simon Hornblower et al eds., *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1358-59.

<sup>152</sup> Sextus Empiricus, “Against the Astrologers” in *Adversus Mathematicos* 5.33,35; see translation in Bury, 336-37.

<sup>153</sup> *Septem sapientium convivium*, 149 in Babbitt, *Plutarch: Moralia II*, 363. Babbitt's translation, “gain or lose altitude in their courses,” is imprecise. In Ptolemy a star is said to be at its exaltation when it begins to increase its height (see above).

<sup>154</sup> Philo, *De praemiis et poenis* 2.



contemplation.<sup>155</sup> The word ὕψος is linked to astral matters where he envisions Abraham asking the Chaldean astrologers to come down from on high, where they are examining the heavenly bodies, in order to examine themselves.<sup>156</sup> In a negative sense, he also refers to pride illegitimately carrying one up to a height.<sup>157</sup> Yet the word generally has positive connotations with him, being associated with the superior heavenly realms as opposed to the earth and the things below it.<sup>158</sup> Philo's use of the word βάθος mostly lacks cosmic implications. He either means the geometric property of depth<sup>159</sup> or the figurative sense of profundity, as when the mind penetrates something's "depths."<sup>160</sup>

Josephus never uses the word ὑψωμα and his use of the related word ὕψος typically applies to the spatial dimensions of buildings or objects.<sup>161</sup> Rarely, he will apply the concept to a person's exaltation: for instance, that of King Solomon and King Agrippa.<sup>162</sup> He uses the word βάθος almost exclusively for geometry (in the sense of depth or thickness),<sup>163</sup> though once he employs it as a synonym for the ocean.<sup>164</sup>

The LXX's use of the word ὑψωμα is in the sense of high status, for example: wishing for the

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<sup>155</sup> Philo, *De fuga et inventione*, 194; *De posteritate Caini*, 136; *De sobrietate*, 64.

<sup>156</sup> *De migratione de Abrahami*, 184.

<sup>157</sup> *De specialibus legibus*, 293.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Philo, *De Vita Mosis*, 1.217.

<sup>159</sup> E.g. in *De Somniis* 1.21, where he considers whether the outermost sphere of the heavens is a plane or an object with depth.

<sup>160</sup> *De virtutibus*, 12.

<sup>161</sup> See nearly all of the examples given in Karl Heinrich Rengstorff (ed.), *A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1973) 4:273-274.

<sup>162</sup> Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8.126 and 19.296.

<sup>163</sup> See the examples in Karl Rengstorff, *A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus*, 1:287.

<sup>164</sup> Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2009) 709.

exaltation of Jerusalem.<sup>165</sup> The standard text of the LXX only includes the word four times, three of these are in the book of Judith (10:8, 13:4, 15:9) and a fourth is in Job.<sup>166</sup> Later Greek Old Testament translations use the word more often in other books with a broader meaning: e.g. Aquila (a 2nd century Jewish translator)<sup>167</sup> uses the word to render the Hebrew for “high place.”<sup>168</sup> Again, the word ὕψος is more widely utilized in the LXX to refer to literal heights, height as a dimension, or metaphorical heights of pride or power.<sup>169</sup> βάθος in the LXX has both the literal and metaphorical aspect (as in poetry where “depths” frequently signify dire straits for a person).<sup>170</sup> Whether used figuratively or literally, the word is sometimes linked to the “lowest” regions of the cosmos (such as the depths of the ocean or earth).<sup>171</sup> Ben Sira (in a thanksgiving psalm) describes being delivered out of the deep, from the belly of Hades (“ἐκ βάθους κοιλίας ἄδου”).<sup>172</sup> His poem on Wisdom portrays her both traveling the orbit of the heavenly bodies and walking through the depths of abysses (“ἐν βάθει ἀβύσσων”).<sup>173</sup> The closest parallel in the LXX to Rom. 8:39 is found in Isaiah, where Yahweh through the prophet instructs King Ahaz to ask

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<sup>165</sup> Jud. 10:8.

<sup>166</sup> E.g. Job 24:24; see Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint and the Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Co., 1998), 1422.

<sup>167</sup> Leonard J. Greenspoon, “Aquila’s Version” in Freedman ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 1:320-21.

<sup>168</sup> Examples in Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint and the Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament*, 1422; e.g. Ezekiel 6:6.

<sup>169</sup> Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 708-09.

<sup>170</sup> Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 111.

<sup>171</sup> Amos 9:3 LXX, Ezek. 26:20 LXX.

<sup>172</sup> Sir. 51:5 LXX.

<sup>173</sup> Sir. 24:4-5 LXX.

him for a sign either in depth or height (“εις βάθος ἢ εἰς ὕψος”): i.e. anything at all up to the limits of the world.<sup>174</sup>

The NT uses the word ὕψωμα only twice: once in Romans and once in 2 Corinthians. In the latter, Paul uses it to describe a proud thought or idea (in a negative sense).<sup>175</sup> The letter of James contrasts ὕψος and ταπεινός to describe high and low social status.<sup>176</sup> ὕψος and βάθος have a similar range of meaning in the NT as in the LXX.<sup>177</sup> The closest NT parallel to Rom. 8:39, Eph. 3:18, uses the word pair ὕψος-βάθος to portray the extent of Christ’s love, encompassing every spatial dimension.

The *Letter to Diognetus*, a Christian apology from the late 2nd century,<sup>178</sup> lists all of the created beings that were made by God through Christ and refers to “things in the heights and things in the depths (τὰ ἐν ὕψει, τὰ ἐν βάθει).”<sup>179</sup> The allusion is apparently to either creatures or forces in these outer regions, though it is not elaborated on.

The *Book of Biblical Antiquities*<sup>180</sup> contains a psalm for an exorcism which associates an “unjust spirit” with the depths of the cosmos. The spirit is reminded that it is a “secondary

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<sup>174</sup> Isa. 7:11 LXX.

<sup>175</sup> 2 Cor. 10:5 cf. the citation of the *Testament of Job* 41:4 in *BDAG*, 1046.

<sup>176</sup> James 1:9.

<sup>177</sup> For ὕψος: figurative height or exaltation (Luke 1:78) or the height of a structure (Rev. 21:16). For βάθος: deep waters (Luke 5:4), depth of soil (Mark 4:5), or “deep things” (1 Cor. 2:10, Rev. 2:24). See examples in *BDAG* 162, 1046.

<sup>178</sup> Robert M. Grant, “Diognetus, Epistle to” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 2:201.

<sup>179</sup> *Epistle to Diognetus* 7:2.

<sup>180</sup> Also known as *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* or Pseudo-Philo. See Frederick J. Murphy, “Biblical Antiquities (Pseudo-Philo)” in John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow eds., *Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 440-42.

creation,”<sup>181</sup> that Tartarus is its natural home, and that it came from “an echo in the abyss.”<sup>182</sup> This tradition is distinct in stating that at least some malevolent spirits were generated by the abyss itself, rather than being fallen angels (who were imprisoned in these regions) or their offspring.<sup>183</sup>

Manilius, a 1st century poet who composed five books in Latin about astrology,<sup>184</sup> briefly refers to cosmic extremities as he argues for the divine origin of the discipline. He declares that no one besides the gods could have given people the ability “to reveal paths on high and paths beneath the bottom of the earth (*sublimis aperire vias imumque sub orbem*).”<sup>185</sup> Of note is how he conceives of the heavenly bodies moving on tracks through both the so-called highest and lowest parts of the universe. He might have imagined that the stars were residents of both the “depths” and the “heights.”

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<sup>181</sup> The text is unclear, but it seems to mean a by-product of God’s intended creation.

<sup>182</sup> “Exorcistic Psalms of David and Solomon” in Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov (eds.), *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, 296. Also *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 60:2.

<sup>183</sup> Compare 1 En. 15:8-12, where the giant offspring of fallen angels (Watchers) and human women die and become evil spirits restricted to the earth. Compare also 1 En. 83:1-3, where the Watchers are thrown into a dark abyss as punishment.

<sup>184</sup> Anna M. Wilson and Katharina Volk, “Manilius, Marcus” in Simon Hornblower et al eds., *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 892.

<sup>185</sup> Manilius, *Astronomica* 1.32; trans. G. P. Goold in Loeb Classical Library, 6-7.

## **Section V: Astrology and “Astral Powers” in Jewish Thought (200 BC-200 AD)**

This section will survey Jewish attitudes towards contemporary conceptions of the heavenly bodies, particularly the notion that they were powers which could influence events in the world and people’s lives. One way to assess this is to look at what Jews wrote about the practice of astrology, together with what they thought of the sun, moon and stars themselves. In the period under discussion, the word astrology subsumed both what is now called astronomy (the measurement and scientific study of these bodies) and astrological lore; the distinction between the two is mostly a modern one.<sup>186</sup> Non-Jewish sources referring to Jewish figures or practices have been included in this section. While some rabbinic traditions are attributed to figures from this period, they are too late to provide a reliable contemporary witness. Visual evidence of astrological interest (such as synagogue mosaics) also postdates this period and will not be treated here.<sup>187</sup>

One tradition attested to in various Greco-Jewish sources is the association of Abraham with astrology. This link seems to be an interpretation of his originating from “Ur of the Chaldeans,” when in the Hellenistic period the word Chaldean had become synonymous with a school of astrologers and sorcerers rather than an ethnic label.<sup>188</sup> Depending on the theological angle of who is recounting the legend, it contains either a positive or negative evaluation of astrology.

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<sup>186</sup> See Fritz Krafft, “Astronomy (A. Extent, Definition, and Term)” in Hubert Cancik and Hubert Schneider eds., *Brill’s New Pauly*, 2:199 and Mladen Popovic, “Astronomy and Astrology,” in John J. Collins and Daniel Hartrow, eds., *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 400.

<sup>187</sup> For a review which includes both the Talmudic and synagogue evidence see James H. Charlesworth, “Jewish Astrology in the Talmud, Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Early Palestinian Synagogues,” *Harvard Theological Review* 70 no. 3/4 (July-October 1977), 183-200.

<sup>188</sup> Stefan Maul, “Chaldaei” in *Brill’s New Pauly*, 3:183.

One pre-1st century BC fragment, attributed to Eupolemus,<sup>189</sup> describes Abraham as someone who pursued astrology in Chaldea. He is said to have traveled to Phoenicia and to have taught the people about the motions of the sun and moon, and when he sojourned in Egypt to have taught them astrology as well.<sup>190</sup> This same fragment claims that Enoch was the first to have learned astrology, and that he received this knowledge from the angels.<sup>191</sup> The text seeks to exalt biblical figures by attributing other peoples' astral knowledge to them, and may implicitly endorse some of the associated beliefs.<sup>192</sup> Yet there is no mention of syncretistic practices (such as astral worship); the only specifics given about the astrology taught refer to solar and lunar cycles.

Artapanus, a Hellenistic Jewish author writing in the 3rd or 2nd century BC,<sup>193</sup> relates that Abraham taught the Egyptians astrology<sup>194</sup> and his work has clear syncretistic tendencies.<sup>195</sup> The Babylonian historiographer Berossus<sup>196</sup> also referred to a tradition of Abraham being educated in astrology.<sup>197</sup> In his handbook, the 2nd century astrologer Vettius Valens refers to an Abraham who used an astrological technique to make birth charts for people born during travel.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Though scholars consider this attribution to be erroneous. For discussion on dating and authorship see the introduction to "Pseudo-Eupolemus" in Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments from Jewish Hellenistic Authors* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 1:157-60.

<sup>190</sup> Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 9.17.3-4 and 9.17.8.

<sup>191</sup> Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 9.17.8-9.

<sup>192</sup> E.g. the effects of the stars and planets on human destiny. See comments below on Philo.

<sup>193</sup> Holladay, 1:205.

<sup>194</sup> Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*, 9.18.1.

<sup>195</sup> *Praeparatio evangelica* 9.27.4 See also OTP, 893

<sup>196</sup> See Beate Pongratz-Leisten, "Berossus," in *Brill's New Pauly* 2:609.

<sup>197</sup> Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 1:158.

<sup>198</sup> Vettii Valentinus, *Anthologiarum libri*, ed. Kroll, 96.

Josephus, in his retelling of the Abraham story, presents the character as refuting the astral lore of the Chaldeans rather than being an astrological expert. He is said to have reasoned that because the heavenly bodies are irregular in motion, they must not have the power to order their own courses. Instead, they depend on a supreme power to order them, whose providential care is evidenced by the fact that these entities benefit human beings.<sup>199</sup> Further on, he presents Abraham as instructing the Egyptians in astronomy (ἄστρονομίαν)<sup>200</sup> and mathematics (which he brought to them from Chaldea).<sup>201</sup> While the account endorses the study of heavenly bodies,<sup>202</sup> it implicitly discredits the idea that they act on human affairs with their own power by subordinating them to God's will for human beings.

Philo also discusses astrology in relation to Abraham. According to him, Abraham was brought up in the belief-system of the Chaldeans: that the stars' motion causes events in the rest of the cosmos through an interconnectedness (συμπάθεια) which is God.<sup>203</sup> He had immersed himself in this worldview as an "astrologer and a meteorologist,"<sup>204</sup> yet he has an epiphany that there is a sovereign being who created and controls the world, and so abandons astrology.<sup>205</sup> Abraham's move from Ur of the Chaldeans to Harran is interpreted as encouraging the reader to

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<sup>199</sup> *Jewish Antiquities*, 1.155-56.

<sup>200</sup> Though Philo refers to the Chaldean study of the stars as ἄστρονομίαν, the word does not necessarily exclude what is now called astrology.

<sup>201</sup> Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 1.167-68

<sup>202</sup> Josephus elsewhere refers to astral symbolism: e.g. the seven lamps of the Mosaic tabernacle are said to represent seven sections of the sky, one assigned to each planet (*Jewish Antiquities*, 3.182), and the twelve stones of the high priest's breastplate are potentially the signs of the zodiac (3.186). Yet *every* part of the creation is said to be represented in the sanctuary (3.180ff), without particular attention being paid to the heavenly bodies. Philo gives a similar explanation of the cult objects; see *Quis rerum divinarum heres* 221ff.

<sup>203</sup> Philo, *De Abrahamo* 69; *De migratione Abrahami* 178-79.

<sup>204</sup> *De Abrahamo* 77, 82.

<sup>205</sup> *De Abrahamo* 70-71, 77-80; *De praemis et poenis* 58.

move away from the “Chaldean” worldview.<sup>206</sup>

Philo maintained a belief in a world-soul, the interconnectedness (συμπάθεια) of the world’s parts,<sup>207</sup> but denies both 1) that the world-soul is God and 2) that the stars determine what happens to human beings.<sup>208</sup> Elsewhere he grants that they have predictive power in forecasting natural phenomena, such as extreme weather events and earthquakes,<sup>209</sup> and affirms that the seven planets and certain constellations cause seasonal changes.<sup>210</sup> He explains that, while heavenly bodies exercise power over other created things, they are ultimately subject to God (and not gods themselves nor the first causes of events).<sup>211</sup> However, his attitude towards the heavenly bodies is reverent, as he calls both their forms<sup>212</sup> and portion in life<sup>213</sup> “divine” and even refers to them as “manifest and visible gods” in passing.<sup>214</sup>

The book of Jubilees<sup>215</sup> contains a theologically-driven polemic against the belief that the position of the sun, moon, and stars control the weather (which Philo appeared to accept). It contains a story of Abraham gazing at the night sky to try to predict how much it will rain that

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<sup>206</sup> *De migratione Abrahami* 184.

<sup>207</sup> The συμπάθεια was a conception of the whole cosmos being linked together like the parts of a living being. In Stoicism this underlying force was God itself (i.e. the Logos) pervading all matter. See entry in F. E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon* (New York: New York University, 1967), 186-88.

<sup>208</sup> *De migratione Abrahami* 180-81, *De opificio mundi* 117.

<sup>209</sup> *De opificio mundi* 58.

<sup>210</sup> *De opificio mundi* 113.

<sup>211</sup> *De specialibus legibus* 1.13-20.

<sup>212</sup> *De Abrahamo* 159.

<sup>213</sup> *De migratione Abrahami* 184.

<sup>214</sup> *De opificio mundi* 27; See translation in Whitaker, *Philo*, Loeb Classical Library, 1:23. Van der Horst asserts that Philo’s reference here is simply an appropriation of a “Platonic term” and does not deviate from monotheism; see his introduction to “Pseudo-Phocylides” in James Charlesworth ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:570.

<sup>215</sup> Commonly dated to the 2nd century BC. See James C. VanderKam, “Jubilees, Book of” in David Noel Freedman (ed), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 3:1030.



year.<sup>216</sup> He then realizes (as in Philo's account) that Yahweh has power over all the heavenly bodies, and whether or not it rains is determined by his sovereign will; therefore looking for signs is pointless. He attributes astrology to evil spirits who wish to lead people astray from the true God.<sup>217</sup> In this text, these spirits are likely not the stars or planets but fallen angels (the Watchers) who taught the ancestors "to observe the omens of the sun and moon and stars..."<sup>218</sup> In the *Book of Biblical Antiquities*<sup>219</sup> there is a similar disapproval of astrology: evil spirits are not mentioned, but the practice is listed along with child sacrifice as a way in which human beings go astray after the Flood.<sup>220</sup>

The early 2nd century AD Roman historian Tacitus<sup>221</sup> recounts an origin story for the Jews that attributes their historical fortunes to the position of the planet Saturn. This tale claims that the Jewish people were originally Cretans, but were exiled and immigrated to Libya in tandem with the eclipse of Saturn by Jupiter.<sup>222</sup> The link between Jews and Saturn seems to be a consequence of both the Sabbath day and the "day of Saturn" being the seventh day of the week, and pagan authors sometimes refer to the Sabbath as Saturn's day when describing Jewish history or customs.<sup>223</sup> Any peculiar reverence for the planet Saturn among Second Temple Jews

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<sup>216</sup> Jub. 12:16-20.

<sup>217</sup> Jub. 12:20.

<sup>218</sup> Jub. 8:4; for translation see Charlesworth ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:71.

<sup>219</sup> A rewriting, likely 1st or 2nd century, of the Old Testament history similar to Jubilees but preserved in late Latin manuscripts. See Daniel J. Harrington, "Philo, Pseudo-" in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:345.

<sup>220</sup> *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* ("Pseudo-Philo") 5:6.

<sup>221</sup> Thomas Franke, "Tacitus" in Hubert Cancik and Hubert Schneider (eds.), *Brill's New Pauly*, 14:106.

<sup>222</sup> Tacitus, *Historiae* 5.2.1.

<sup>223</sup> See Roman authors quoted in Menahem Stern (ed.), *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* 1:510, 2:350.

is unattested by extant sources.<sup>224</sup> Yet the book of Acts, quoting the LXX of Amos 5:26-27, contains a charge that the Israelites worshipped a star-deity, Raiphan, in the wilderness.<sup>225</sup> Which god or star this is meant to be is unknown. Some commentators have speculated that it is meant to be Saturn on the basis of an Egyptian parallel (*Repa*), but this is inconclusive.<sup>226</sup>

Greco-Jewish writings will sometimes make reference to the stars as if they were living beings. One of the Pseudo-Sibylline books, perhaps dating from the early 2nd century and Jewish in origin,<sup>227</sup> describes the stars and constellations fighting with one another in an apocalyptic battle that eliminates all of them together.<sup>228</sup> A Jewish writing attributed to the Greek sage Phocylides<sup>229</sup> refers to the stars as the “blessed ones” who do difficult work like humans do,<sup>230</sup> and are not jealous of one another’s station.<sup>231</sup>

There is a variety of material on stars in 1 Enoch, some of which also portrays them as sentient beings. In one passage, Enoch exhorts the hearer to observe how all the stars make their appointments in the heaven;<sup>232</sup> a later section describes a place where seven stars are kept in a

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<sup>224</sup> The planets are not even named in surviving Jewish material from this period. See Mladen Popovic, “Astronomy and Astrology,” in John J. Collins and Daniel Hartrow (eds.), *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, 401. See also Alexander Toepel, “Planetary Demons in Early Jewish Literature,” *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha* 14.3 (2005), 232 footnote 2.

<sup>225</sup> Acts 7:43.

<sup>226</sup> See Craig Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 2:1410 (esp. footnotes 1118 and 1119).

<sup>227</sup> See introduction by J.J. Collins, “The Sibylline Oracles, Book 5” in Charlesworth ed., 1:390-92.

<sup>228</sup> *Sibylline Oracles* 5:512-531.

<sup>229</sup> Van der Horst refers to a “growing consensus” dating the work (*Pseudo-Phocylides*) to the period covered by this review: “between 200 BC and 200 AD.” See Charlesworth, 2:567.

<sup>230</sup> *Pseudo-Phocylides* 162.

<sup>231</sup> *Pseudo-Phocylides* 71, though this statement is poetic and other natural forces such as rivers and oceans are personified (*Ps. Phoc* 74).

<sup>232</sup> 1 En. 2:1-2.

fiery prison for not reporting on time to the stations where God commanded them to be.<sup>233</sup> In the book, the sun and moon have personal names.<sup>234</sup> They are said to keep their courses by adhering to a pact they have with one another and to give grateful praise to God.<sup>235</sup> The stars are also associated with angels: in a vision Enoch sees the fall of the Watchers represented as a set of stars falling from the sky and turning into bulls that mate with other cattle.<sup>236</sup> Yet while Enoch receives information about the workings of the heavenly bodies (including the means to construct an astronomical calendar),<sup>237</sup> astrology is traced back to the fallen Watchers.<sup>238</sup>

In the War Scroll from Qumran<sup>239</sup> there is one line describing the stars in the sky as a heavenly army.<sup>240</sup> That the study of heavenly bodies was an interest at Qumran is evidenced by the occurrence there of the astronomical chapters of the book of Enoch,<sup>241</sup> along with elaborate calendars.<sup>242</sup> But more confusing, considering the negative valuation of astrology in other Jewish

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<sup>233</sup> 1 En. 18:13-16, see also 1 En. 21:1-7 where they are punished for sins for 10 million years.

<sup>234</sup> 1 En. 78:1-2.

<sup>235</sup> 1 En. 41:5-7.

<sup>236</sup> 1 En. 86:1-6; see also Rev. 12:4,7 where stars are equated with angels. But cf. Dan. 8:10, where Jews who adopt Gentile customs are represented by fallen stars.

<sup>237</sup> 1 En. 72-79.

<sup>238</sup> 1 En. 6:7, 8:3.

<sup>239</sup> Philip R. Davies, "War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness," in Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. Vanderkam eds., *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2:965-68.

<sup>240</sup> 1QM X 11; for a scriptural parallel see Judges 5:20.

<sup>241</sup> Though Popovic refers to this as "a nonobservational, schematic astronomy" and questions whether the people of Qumran had the technology or expertise to measure the stars. See Mladen Popovic, "Astronomy and Astrology," in John J. Collins and Daniel Hartrow (eds.), *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, 401.

<sup>242</sup> 4Q320-321, 4Q327; See Mladen Popovic, "Astronomy and Astrology," in John J. Collins and Daniel Hartrow eds., *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, 400-01.

sources, is the presence of a *brontologion*.<sup>243</sup> This is a horoscope which predicts the destiny of neighboring peoples based on the zodiac sign under which thunder is heard.<sup>244</sup> Also present are fragments of horoscopes which give physiognomies:<sup>245</sup> descriptions linking a person's physical features with their spiritual character based upon the zodiac sign they were born under.<sup>246</sup> The texts are too fragmentary to draw firm conclusions,<sup>247</sup> and one can only speculate on how astrology fit into the worldview of the Qumran sect. That they believed an individual's character could be predicted (or determined?) by the stars might evidence a kind of fatalism.<sup>248</sup>

Another early Jewish horoscope, the *Treatise of Shem* (which some date to the 1st century BC<sup>249</sup>), has survived. It gives predictions of which events will take place in a year based upon the house of the zodiac that year starts in.<sup>250</sup> These include natural occurrences such as grain harvests, plagues, and rain as well as conflicts between human nations.<sup>251</sup> The destinies of

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<sup>243</sup> For discussion of the Qumran text including a brief overview of *brontologia*, see Jonas C. Greenfield and Michael Sokoloff, "An Astrological Text From Qumran (4Q318) and Reflections on Some Zodiacal Names" in Shalom M. Paul, Michael E. Stone, and Avital Pinnick eds., *Al Kanfei Yonah: Collected Studies of Jonas C. Greenfield on Semitic Philology* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2001) 1:554-564. Cf. Rev. 10:3-4 for a parallel (but minus the astrological element).

<sup>244</sup> 4Q318 fr. 2, col ii, 6-9.

<sup>245</sup> For background see Alain Touwaide, "Physiognomy" in *BNP* 11:225-27.

<sup>246</sup> 4Q561, 4Q534, 4Q186 (see esp. 4Q186 fr. 1 col 3).

<sup>247</sup> One incomplete text, dubbed 4QFour Kingdoms (see Martinez 138-39), has been interpreted astrologically by Toepel. There are four trees in the text who reign over four world-powers, and he links these to the Babylonian "four planets" (rather than the classical "seven planets") on the basis of how planets are represented as trees in Mithraic iconography. See Alexander Toepel, "Planetary Demons in Early Jewish Literature," *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha* 14.3 (2005).

<sup>248</sup> For the fatalism of the Essenes see Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 13.172. Cf. *De migratione Abrahami* 179, where Philo charges the Chaldeans with deifying Fate.

<sup>249</sup> Based upon the historical references contained within, though the only surviving copy is from a 15th century manuscript. See introduction in Charlesworth ed., 2:473-75.

<sup>250</sup> For details, see note c in Charlesworth ed., 2:481.

<sup>251</sup> Throughout *Treatise of Shem*.

individuals are also allotted according to the letters of their names.<sup>252</sup> The author still affirms the sovereignty of God through a brief remark stating that God will bring rain to those who petition him during a predicted severe drought.<sup>253</sup> The sort of astrology which predicts weather trends and harvests was considered legitimate by Philo,<sup>254</sup> so long as God was still acknowledged as sovereign and the first cause of events. Whether the author of *The Treatise of Shem* would have agreed with this “orthodox” view or have attributed the described events to astral powers themselves is impossible to determine.

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<sup>252</sup> E.g. *Treatise of Shem* 3:2, 6:1a.

<sup>253</sup> *Treatise of Shem* 8:3; for discussion of this theme see also Charlesworth ed., 477.

<sup>254</sup> *De opificio mundi* 113f.

## **Section VI: Interpreting Paul's View of Angelic and Astral Powers in Romans 8**

The preceding sections attempted to summarize what 1st century AD Jews and early Christians were likely to have believed about heavenly hierarchies and astral powers, the beings Paul allegedly refers to in Rom. 8:38-39.<sup>255</sup> It has been shown that the belief in these concepts was current among several different authors. While the details vary from author to author, some common elements stand out: 1) angels and other heavenly beings were imagined to be organized in levels of power and authority; 2) such beings were seen as spiritual forces behind earthly phenomena (both natural events and human actions); 3) the sun, moon, and stars were also seen as powers which influenced the course of events and are sometimes either associated with angels or perceived as sentient beings themselves; 4) evil spiritual beings were imagined in similar ways, i.e. as being arranged in hierarchies, associated with astrology, or behind events in nature and human history; and 5) the extremities of the cosmos (the highest and lowest parts) are sometimes considered the dwelling places of spiritual and astral powers.

Some caution should be advised. Any attempt to make a coherent system out of the many disparate sources (which come from different times and places) will result in projecting a modern construct on ancient authors. The above summary is only to sketch the general contours of ideas which were “in the air.” Moreover, there appears to be an evolution. For example, while the concept of an angel who ruled over other angels (or a particular nation, natural force, etc) is present throughout our period, it is in the later works surveyed that this concept becomes more frequently connected with the word *archon*.

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<sup>255</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary Volume 38a (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 507-08.

Furthermore, it should not be assumed that all Jews of the time accepted these ideas. At least one major sect, the Sadducees, may have rejected the notion that angels and spirits existed at all.<sup>256</sup> There is reason to suspect that belief in demons was not universal either.<sup>257</sup> Jewish attitudes about astrology varied from dismissal and demonization (Jubilees) to selective integration (Philo, Qumran) to full-on syncretism (“Pseudo-Eupolemus”). In light of this diversity, the first step for interpreting Paul would be to look at what he himself says in his undisputed letters, and to compare these with what is stated in the works surveyed above.

### Paul’s Views on Otherworldly Powers

The basics may be easily laid out. Paul claimed to be a Pharisee,<sup>258</sup> a sect which affirmed the existence of angels and spirits.<sup>259</sup> In the undisputed letters he refers to angels; for instance, as the bearers of heavenly revelation<sup>260</sup> or as major players during the *eschaton*.<sup>261</sup> He also mentions prototypical evil entities such as Beliar<sup>262</sup> and Satan<sup>263</sup> and alludes to evil angels that work for these beings.<sup>264</sup> With the possible exception of Rom. 8:38-39, Paul makes no reference to astrological concepts. He makes a single reference to the stars in describing his vision of the

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<sup>256</sup> Acts 23:8.

<sup>257</sup> Isa. 65:3 LXX.

<sup>258</sup> Phil. 3:5.

<sup>259</sup> Cf. Acts 23:6-9.

<sup>260</sup> Gal. 1:8, 3:19.

<sup>261</sup> 1 Thess. 4:16.

<sup>262</sup> 2 Cor. 6:15, 11:14.

<sup>263</sup> 1 Cor. 5:5.

<sup>264</sup> 2 Cor. 12:7.

resurrection body vis-a-vis the present human body (i.e. comparing it to how heavenly bodies are different from earthly ones, and that they differ in glory from one another).<sup>265</sup> He assumed a world-picture that included multiple heavens in describing a vision where he is caught up to the third heaven.<sup>266</sup> These kinds of Pharisaic views are all consistent with angelology and cosmology in other known works from the Second Temple period. But they do not add much to the interpretation of our text, except to suggest that Paul literally believed in spiritual beings. Determining exactly what is meant in Rom. 8:38-39 requires an examination of the context.

This next section will first examine the meaning of the text in light of the themes expressed earlier in Rom. 8. At this point, Paul has made his case from Rom. 1-7 that God has justified those who put their faith in Jesus Christ. In Rom. 8, God's ultimate triumph over sin and death is worked out through the Holy Spirit. Though the forces of sin and death oppress the body and turn the fleshly mind against God, the Spirit is life to those whom it dwells in now and will give life to the faithful's corruptible bodies in the future through resurrection.<sup>267</sup> It is Christ's Spirit who sets the believer on the right path, empowering him or her to fulfill the will of God.<sup>268</sup> It is the Spirit who, by conforming believers' to Christ's image, makes them children of God.<sup>269</sup> And lastly, the Spirit makes intercession for those in whom he dwells: pleading with God on their behalf "with sighs too deep for words."<sup>270</sup>

A repeated theme in this chapter is the contrast between a deficient present and a glorious

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<sup>265</sup> 1 Cor. 15:40-41.

<sup>266</sup> 2 Cor. 12:2; cf. 2 En. 8.

<sup>267</sup> Rom. 8:1-14.

<sup>268</sup> Rom. 8:4-9a, 12-14, 29.

<sup>269</sup> Rom. 8:14-17, 29.

<sup>270</sup> Rom. 8:26.



future which is fervently hoped for.<sup>271</sup> While the temptations and hardships of the time bear down on believers, the indwelling presence of God and Christ provides assurance of their divine adoption, vindication, and resurrection.<sup>272</sup> Even the happenings of the current age can be turned to good for those who love God.<sup>273</sup>

### Exegesis of Romans 8:31-39

#### **Verses 31-32**

Paul begins this section by drawing a conclusion from what has come before: God is on the side of believers. And if God is on their side, no one can truly prevail against them.<sup>274</sup> The unfathomable benevolence of God is demonstrated by him willingly giving up his own Son for their sake.<sup>275</sup> The notion that God will give his chosen “τὰ πάντα” (“the all” or “everything”) could be taken in an eschatological sense: i.e. Christians will be given the whole cosmos in the End of Days, along with Christ.<sup>276</sup> The sense is possible given the mention of the creation earlier in the chapter.<sup>277</sup> Yet Christians also receive blessings now in their everyday experience,<sup>278</sup> and nothing is explicitly said here of believers reigning over the world. The emphasis could instead be on God’s shocking graciousness.

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<sup>271</sup> Rom. 8:18-19.

<sup>272</sup> Rom. 8:16-17, 21-23.

<sup>273</sup> Rom. 8:28.

<sup>274</sup> Rom. 8:32,37.

<sup>275</sup> Rom. 8:32.

<sup>276</sup> Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 538-39.

<sup>277</sup> Rom. 8:19ff, Cf. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 502.

<sup>278</sup> Comments on *χαρίζεται* in Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, 539.

### Verses 33-34

Many commentators have envisioned a courtroom scene as the image in the background of the rhetorical questions in v. 33 through 34; the judge is God and the setting could be taken as the last judgment.<sup>279</sup> This idea looms over the earlier argument in Romans as a matter of prime concern for both the righteous and unrighteous.<sup>280</sup> The future form of the verb ἐγκαλέσει in v. 33 might also suggest a future setting.<sup>281</sup> But Käsemann questions whether a last judgment scene is intended here, stating that “the trial to which the juridical language points has been closed by the salvation event” (therefore acquittal is the logical conclusion of what has happened, not a future event).<sup>282</sup>

Depending on how one punctuates the text, it is possible to take the sentences which follow, “God, who justifies” and “Christ...for us,” as questions.<sup>283</sup> That is, “Will God, the one who justifies, bring a charge against his elect?” and “Will Christ, who died was raised and intercedes, condemn?” Paul would consider the idea that God or Christ could condemn the elect to be absurd, because of his preceding argument. However, Cranfield rejects this punctuation because

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<sup>279</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed, Anchor Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 529-531; James Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 502-03; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. & ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 246; cf. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 541-42.

<sup>280</sup> Rom. 2:5-10.

<sup>281</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 1:438.

<sup>282</sup> Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 248.

<sup>283</sup> Some manuscripts punctuate every clause as a question. See Fitzmyer, 530, 533; Barrett translates this the same way but misses the possible irony in the questions, and insists that Satan would be intended if the question “Who shall bring a charge?” had a “positive answer.” See C. K. Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 172-73; Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, 540-41.

of a possible parallel with Is 50:8a LXX.<sup>284</sup> If this is correct, a better rendering would be “God is the one justifying, who will condemn?” That is, no one can condemn the one whom God has justified.

One ancient interpretation, dating back to Origen, answers the question “Who can bring any accusation against ...[God’s] chosen?” with Satan.<sup>285</sup> A precedent exists for this in the familiar Jewish motif of Satan (as heavenly prosecutor) accusing righteous people before God’s throne of sins in order to bring judgment down on them.<sup>286</sup> In these stories,<sup>287</sup> the accuser is rebuffed by God himself or by an angelic intercessor who affirms that God has chosen the one accused. Other commentators dispute that Satan is implied on the grounds that Paul is only making negative assertions; the intended answer is that “no one” will bring a charge.<sup>288</sup> Thus it is unnecessary to make Satan, or other angels and powers, agents who might potentially impeach the elect in this passage.

### Verses 35-37

The list of hardships is likely not what Paul thought the Roman Christians were currently

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<sup>284</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:437-38. (ὅτι ἐγγίζει ὁ δικαιώσας με τίς ὁ κρινόμενός μου).

<sup>285</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* 4:108-12 quoted in Gerald Bray ed., *Romans*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 239; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1957), 173; James Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 510-11; Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 542; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 529.

<sup>286</sup> Job 1:6ff, Zech. 3:1ff, Jude 9; compare *Apocalypse of Abraham* 13:1-14:14.

<sup>287</sup> With the exception of Job, who is vindicated but not in the divine courtroom (though see Job 19:25ff).

<sup>288</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Paul’s Epistles* 293-295 quoted in Gerald Bray ed., *Romans*, 239; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 248; Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 533; cf. Douglas Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 542.

experiencing but a projection of his experience<sup>289</sup> (and that of others whom he knew)<sup>290</sup> onto the general idea of a Christian life under opposition.<sup>291</sup> Though one could think this is an allusion to the riots in Rome “instigated by Chrestus” that happened years before,<sup>292</sup> the idea that Christians everywhere might experience hardships like those described is so common that a specific reference is not necessary.<sup>293</sup>

What does Paul mean by these hardships not separating believers from the love of Christ? Jewett makes the case that unsympathetic outsiders would have seen the persecutions and hardships of the early church as signs of divine disfavor.<sup>294</sup> According to him, Paul cites Psalm 44(43 LXX):23 (“for *your* sake we are being put to death...”) to demonstrate that believers will suffer for God, and this misfortune does not disqualify them from having God’s favor (which would presumably come with good fortune and power).<sup>295</sup> Yet Paul does not argue about theodicy. His eschatology frames these setbacks as being insignificant compared to what will take place.<sup>296</sup> That Paul expected this end to come quickly is clear enough elsewhere,<sup>297</sup> but this nearness is not emphasized in this chapter. Rather, the promised hope assists the Christian in

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<sup>289</sup> 2 Cor. 11:23ff.

<sup>290</sup> Acts 8:1-3, 18:17, etc.

<sup>291</sup> Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 249; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 504-05.

<sup>292</sup> Barrett, 173; Suetonius relates that in Claudius’ reign, Jews were rioting because of a “Chrestus,” and subsequently expelled. See Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars* 5.25.4.

<sup>293</sup> Matt. 5:11, Heb. 11:38, 2 Tim. 3:12, etc. cf. Barrett 173.

<sup>294</sup> Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, 543ff.

<sup>295</sup> Jewett, 548.

<sup>296</sup> Dunn, 504-505; Käsemann, 249.

<sup>297</sup> Rom. 13:11.

withstanding whatever forces may stand against him or her in this age.<sup>298</sup>

Both the aim of persecutions and the possible outcome of hard times is the loss of faith on the part of the believer. But Paul seeks to impress upon the mind a breathtaking and encouraging picture of God's love through Christ. Through the promised resurrection (which Christians share in because of Christ) God will make them "hypervictors":<sup>299</sup> God's raising up of Christ will result in total victory over every enemy power. That believers will share in this is confirmed in the present by their union with Christ through the Spirit.<sup>300</sup>

### Verses 38-39

If the afflictions mentioned in verse 35 are understood as the death-rattle of a perishing order, it seems plausible that the entities listed in 8:38ff could be the agents carrying them out.<sup>301</sup> Yet interpreting all of the names listed here only as the evil leaders of an evil world is at odds with the data which has been presented in the previous sections. The primary sources which have been reviewed express a range of ways to characterize spiritual powers. Moreover, it is not clear that Paul is only referring to spiritual entities; ὑψωμα and βάθος are ambiguous and both ἀρχαί and δυνάμεις could refer to human forces as well as supra-normal ones. His list also contains "death," "life," "things present," "things to come," and "any other creature." The point of the rhetoric appears to be "no power in all creation, whatever it is, can separate us from Christ."

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<sup>298</sup> Rom. 8:25. See comments in Richard N. Longenecker, *Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016) 729-30.

<sup>299</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>300</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul: the Apostle's Life, Letters, and Thought* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 665; Käsemann sees this as implicit in the passage (as it is the natural conclusion of this union in light of the *eschaton*) though mention of the Spirit drops out. See Käsemann, *A Commentary on Romans*, 246.

<sup>301</sup> Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 250-251.

### “Neither angels nor rulers”

Does the pairing of angels and rulers help us identify whether the latter are human beings or spirits?<sup>302</sup> One parallel from Qumran may help to answer the question. A section of the War Scroll, where the assembly of the righteous sings a hymn to God before the end-times battle with the armies of darkness, contains the line “What angel or prince is like you [God] for aid?”<sup>303</sup> The word translated “prince” here is שר; it is the word used earlier in the War Scroll for human commanders,<sup>304</sup> but is also used in the same hymn for the “Prince of Lights”<sup>305</sup> who is likely an angelic being.<sup>306</sup> This word is also translated *archon* in Dan. 10:13 (in both the OG and Theodotion), where the referent is an angel.<sup>307</sup> While these parallels do not definitely prove the ἀρχαί here are spirits, the closeness in wording to the line in the War Scroll might hint at a shared tradition.

What then was Paul’s view of these rulers? Wink tentatively says the ἀρχαί are likely evil because Paul appears to be listing opposites (i.e. good angels are to evil *archons* as life is to death).<sup>308</sup> Carr assumed that when Paul says these rulers may try to separate people from the love of Christ, he is using a “hyperbolic paradox;” they are good and “important members of the

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<sup>302</sup> Schreiner asserts that spirits are meant on the basis of the pairing; see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd ed, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 456.

<sup>303</sup> 1QM 13:14; translation in Florentino Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, 2nd ed (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill & Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 108.

<sup>304</sup> 1QM 3:3, 5:1.

<sup>305</sup> 1QM 13:10.

<sup>306</sup> Likely the archangel Michael; see Section II of this paper and comments in Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 85.

<sup>307</sup> Note Dan. 12:1 in Hebrew, where Michael is referred to as שר. Cf. Dan. 8:11 where the “prince of the forces” (שר-העֶזְרָא) is likely Yahweh.

<sup>308</sup> Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers* (Philadelphia, PN: Fortress Press, 1984), 49.

heavenly host.”<sup>309</sup> Neither of these exclusive views are necessary; Paul may have spoken about evil angels,<sup>310</sup> and so might also have seen the *archons* as potentially good or bad. In this respect, he would be closest to the ambivalence of the book of Enoch, with its angels and rulers who may potentially remain faithful to God or work at cross-purposes with him.

### “Nor powers”

Does Paul intend spiritual powers by this word, or all powers generally? As the upshot of the passage is the ultimate supremacy of Christ’s love (and by extension God’s) above everything in creation, it may call to mind the LXX phrase “Lord/God of the powers (κύριος/θεὸς τῶν δυνάμεων),” a title which Paul could conceivably have come across in his reading of the Jewish scriptures. Yet the examples of this title being interpreted as God (or Christ) having mastery over all powers in the universe post-date the LXX.<sup>311</sup>

While the word was used for miracles, human armies, or abstract power, “powers” could be thought of as unseen forces which formed parts of nature.<sup>312</sup> Paul likely did not intend a specific reference to the cosmology of someone like Philo, but he may have held the generic belief of powers pervading the world’s phenomena. That he meant astral “powers of heaven” might be a stronger possibility if he showed any interest in the stars elsewhere in his letters. At least some powers in creation could be considered demonic in origin (such as Paul’s “thorn in the flesh,”

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<sup>309</sup> Wesley Carr, *Angels and Principalities* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 113.

<sup>310</sup> 1 Cor. 6:3, 2 Cor. 11:14, possibly 2 Cor. 12:7.

<sup>311</sup> E.g. Justin Martyr, see Section III.

<sup>312</sup> See examples in Section III.

whatever it was),<sup>313</sup> and Ignatius of Antioch used the phrase “powers of Satan” to describe evil forces.<sup>314</sup> One could tentatively say that Paul is making a sweeping reference to any power that may oppose God in the cosmos.

### “Neither height nor depth”

Knox reads the text as suggesting the believer in Christ is not subject to the destiny decreed for him by the stars’ power. He sees it as juxtaposing Fate and the Elements against the ultimate will of God, on the basis of Paul supposedly using five technical terms.<sup>315</sup> Yet the least likely interpretation of all, in my view, is one which presumes Paul had precise knowledge of astrological vocabulary. It is not impossible that he could have had some acquaintance with it, but the text itself weighs against the idea. First, if Paul had been well-versed in astral lore, and wanted to refer to the exaltation (ὑψωμα) of a planet, why would he not use the word-pair ὑψωμα-ταπείνωμα?<sup>316</sup> We have seen that βάθος could have referred to a star’s imagined low point in space, but it was not the technical term for a star’s “depression.” Secondly, outside of astrological jargon (e.g. in the Greek translations of the OT) the word ὑψωμα simply meant either a high point or elevated status, and the fact that Paul does not mention stars anywhere else in the passage makes it unlikely that his audience would interpret the word in this way.

The Hebrew Bible and Apocrypha provide a more likely source for Paul’s verbiage than astrological handbooks. Isaiah’s reference to “the depth and the height” and Ben Sira’s poetic

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<sup>313</sup> 2 Cor. 12:7-9.

<sup>314</sup> Ignatius, *To the Ephesians* 13.

<sup>315</sup> Wilfred L. Knox, *St Paul and the Church of the Gentiles* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 106-07 (esp. note 3).

<sup>316</sup> See Jewett, *Romans*, 553-54.



description of Wisdom traveling these regions provide a plausible source for the phrase;<sup>317</sup> it was shorthand for the imagined limits of the universe. The use of this antique phrase continued for many centuries after these writings and Paul, being found in rabbinic and Aramaic magical texts in late antiquity.<sup>318</sup>

Yet in what way could a “height” or a “depth” separate Christians from the love of Christ? Taken at face value this reading would be difficult. There are two likely options that could explain this: 1) Paul is speaking hyperbolically, and in naming all of these extreme contraries (death/life, present/future, etc.) he means to say “nothing at all in the whole cosmos”; or 2) he is using a metonym and alluding to beings which may exist in height and depth. These readings are not mutually exclusive.

We have seen that both the heavens and the abyss were imagined to have been populated by powerful beings with sway over natural events and human lives. A simple way to understand height and depth in this context might be a generic reference to any entity associated with that space. By way of analogy, a reference to a nation includes a people, its leadership, its army, and its land. Similarly, invoking heights and depths also invokes angels, spirits, rulers, stars, and any other thing that may be found there. If Paul alludes to astral forces at all, it may have been in this sweeping reference to the *denizens* of height and depth (rather than a specific reference to astrological concepts).

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<sup>317</sup> See the references given in Section IV.

<sup>318</sup> For examples see Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar Ilhan University Press, 2002), 1065.

### Summary

Paul has made his case that Christians are justified in God's sight, and that God and Christ are present with them through the Holy Spirit. God has made them his adopted children through union with Christ and will reveal this in the *eschaton*. Though the forces of this evil age cause suffering to Christians, they experience both the love of Christ in the present and can hope for the promised future with endurance. If the God of the cosmos is on their side, then no force which is behind their persecutions or setbacks can dislodge them. Not even angelic rulers, evil powers, or unimagined things in the far reaches of creation can separate them from the love of this God, which has been made known in the work of Christ.

## **Section VII: Application for Ministry and Conclusion**

The cultural impact of angelology and demonology is still felt in many modern Christian communities today. Within the United States, examples of literal belief in unseen agents abound in Evangelical and Pentecostal communities.<sup>319</sup> Oftentimes spiritual warfare is tied to claims of occult phenomena,<sup>320</sup> but struggles against political or religious opponents (i.e. using intercessory prayer to undermine them) can also be framed as “spiritual warfare.”<sup>321</sup> This is not exclusive to “low church” Protestant sects, nor the “uneducated.” The Roman Catholic Church continues to practice exorcism and regards demonic possession as a real, though very uncommon, phenomenon.<sup>322</sup> One tradition existing in some Afro-American communities is that of the Black Spiritualist Churches, which blend Christian elements (Catholic and Pentecostal) with traditional magical practices such as spiritualism and the use of healing plants.<sup>323</sup> Animistic beliefs also persist in the Global South. For example, Caribbean systems such as Voodoo and Santeria have a conception of spirits strikingly similar to that of the Greco-Roman world: elaborate pantheons of these beings maintain the workings of nature and heavenly bodies, or are associated with nations and peoples. Possession by such spirits is often a goal of these religions’

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<sup>319</sup> Robert Mapes Anderson, “Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity” in Lindsay Jones et al (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed. Macmillan Reference USA (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 11:229-35.

<sup>320</sup> See Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities & Powers in Paul’s Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 205-06, 208.

<sup>321</sup> Sara Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right*, (Portland, OR: Black Rose Books, 1990) 141.

<sup>322</sup> Nancy Caciola, “Exorcism” in Lindsay Jones et al (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed, Macmillan Reference USA, 2931. It is interesting to note that (thanks to popular books and movies) the archetypal exorcist in American pop culture is a Catholic priest, not a Pentecostal minister.

<sup>323</sup> Claude F. Jacobs, “Black Spiritual Churches” in Stephen D. Glazier (ed.), *Encyclopedia of African and African-American Religions* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 59-62.

communal worship.<sup>324</sup>

Biblical scholars and theologians have given their attention to the subject and provided a diverse range of answers. Rudolf Bultmann's declaration that "We cannot use electric lights and radios...avail ourselves of modern [medicine]...and at the same time believe in the spirit and wonder-world of the New Testament" exemplifies the skeptical attitude of some liberal theology.<sup>325</sup> Conversely the Evangelical scholar Clinton E. Arnold, whose past work includes in-depth reviews on the cultural background touched on in this paper, believes in the literal existence of spiritual powers and has written popular-level books on the subject.<sup>326</sup> In another category, the NT scholar Dale C. Allison maintains both a rigorous criticism of biblical material and a kind of hopeful agnosticism towards paranormal and spiritual experiences (including his own).<sup>327</sup>

There is not adequate space here to survey all the possible interpretations of the Pauline belief in "principalities and powers." What this study has hopefully illuminated, however, is that these beliefs were tied to an ancient worldview. Paul shared similar cosmological beliefs to other Jews and pagans. Like the visible Roman world which was organized by hierarchies of power, he and his co-religionists envisioned angelic/daemonic "chains of command" going all the way up to God. He may have had an understanding of the heavens which assumed the existence of imaginary objects such as celestial spheres. If he thought like Philo and other Hellenized Jews,

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<sup>324</sup> Leslie G. Desmangles, "Caribbean, African-Derived Religion in" in Stephen D. Glazier (ed.), *Encyclopedia of African and African-American Religions*, 77-81.

<sup>325</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, trans. Schubert M. Ogden (Fortress Press, 1984), 4.

<sup>326</sup> See his *Powers of Darkness: Principalities & Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

<sup>327</sup> Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and its Interpreters* (T&T Clark, 2005), 266-299. See esp. his claim to have experienced dead loved ones at 275ff.

he may have believed that natural events were caused by unseen “powers,” that angels and stars could affect things from “the heights,” or that destruction could be caused by evil beings in “the depths.” His worldview placed otherworldly beings in parts of the universe that in his time were not explored or understood.

There are some who would seek to form their understanding of spiritual powers by taking mythological traditions alluded to in the Bible at face value.<sup>328</sup> Taken to its furthest conclusion, this reasoning would have a reader of the Bible affirming the literal truth of mythological schemes that contradict what we now know from modern science. The *Book of Noah* and Jubilees attribute physical illness to the work of Mastema and his demons,<sup>329</sup> when we now know these are caused by microbes and inflammation. The speculations of 1 Enoch, with its sentient stars that move in and out of the firmament, have been thoroughly disconfirmed by astronomy. This approach is not an option for a faith that desires dialogue with science and takes investigation of the natural world seriously.

This does not, however, make any conception of “spiritual powers” impossible in a scientific age. While rejecting more overtly mythological interpretations, Walter Wink has developed an intriguing explanation of the powers as a “withinness” of entities such as organizations, nations, mobs, and even natural objects.<sup>330</sup> He does not mean this metaphorically; instead, the mythological images of various belief systems (including those alluded to in the NT) are representations of a kind of consciousness that these things may have. Such an exotic and

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<sup>328</sup> For an example of this see Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015).

<sup>329</sup> Jub. 10:11-13. For *Book of Noah* see Richard Bauckham et al eds., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, 46.

<sup>330</sup> Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 104, 107, 119.

unproven claim must be regarded with caution, but it is at least a new way of looking at the possibility of unseen forces that does not contradict what we know scientifically.<sup>331</sup>

I have sorted the range of practical responses of a belief in “principalities and powers” into three categories: 1) fear, 2) fascination, and 3) confidence. The first two are possible consequences of any approach to Christian life that maintains a strong focus on unseen forces. In fear, the believer may demonize whatever distressing events and people they encounter and feel that they are under siege, continually praying to be strengthened against constant bombardment by invisible enemies. Or perhaps such a person may seek out ways to gain leverage over spirits by adopting Christian “magic” (e.g. saying certain prayers, using scriptures as charms, consulting “spiritual experts,” etc).

In fascination, the believer gravitates towards esoteric speculation, or the construction of systems explaining “the unseen world.” Such an activity may be an attempt to gain control through knowledge or the outgrowth of curiosity. The abundance of extra-biblical lore and speculative books can provide ample material for an obsessed person to construct their own personal mythology of invisible powers. Without any known way to falsify such a *schema*, it remains an idiosyncratic belief-system at best and a self-isolating dream-world at worst.

A confident outlook on spiritual powers – if they exist in the way that they are commonly imagined – does not give them any more attention than that paid to other potential hazards of life (disease, accidents, weather, or other people). It is grounded first and foremost on the belief that Christ has already been exalted above every angel, ruler, and power;<sup>332</sup> that the follower of Jesus

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<sup>331</sup> Such speculation makes more sense with a panpsychist worldview: that mind/experience is at least potentially a property of all matter. For a critical review see Paul Edwards, “Panpsychism” in Donald M. Borchert (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 7:82-94.

<sup>332</sup> 1 Pet. 3:22.

has been made one with him in spirit;<sup>333</sup> and that no external opposition can change that.<sup>334</sup> If one's spiritual worldview is founded on this conviction, most of the fear that attends belief in principalities and powers is nullified already. The need for esoteric "knowledge" about the angelic and daemonic is rendered moot; it becomes an unnecessary curiosity which may be critically analyzed, not uncritically believed.

To debate whether believers must accept Paul's listing of cosmic entities as a detailed description of unseen forces is to miss the mark. The point of the passage is reassurance that Christ's love transcends any and all attempts to undermine it. For communities that are preoccupied with beliefs in things such as witchcraft, spirits, and vengeful gods this passage could serve as a way to dispel superstitious fear, not to legitimize it. For individuals who believe they are troubled by hauntings or spirits, the passage can be an affirmation that the presence of Christ is the ground of their security (rather than Christianized rituals performed by "spiritual experts").

If anyone desires examples for confidence (though without the skeptical attitude of modern thinking), they need look no further than the NT. In the story of Paul's mission at Philippi, where he is followed by an enslaved girl who is possessed by a spirit of Python,<sup>335</sup> the apostle feels neither fear nor awe. He is merely irritated by the person's yelling.<sup>336</sup> The Samaritan sorcerer, Simon, is not dehumanized or demonized but is instead seen as someone to be converted.<sup>337</sup> He

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<sup>333</sup> 1 Cor. 6:17.

<sup>334</sup> Rom. 8:38-39.

<sup>335</sup> See Robert F. O'Toole, "Slave Girl at Philippi" in Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:57-58.

<sup>336</sup> Acts 16:16-18.

<sup>337</sup> Acts 8:13.

is somewhat of a pathetic figure who, after trying to buy spiritual power, is rebuked and stands in need of divine mercy.<sup>338</sup> While portrayals of sorcery and the daemonic are always negative in the NT, it is important to remember that these phenomena (literally real or not) were *normal*: a part of everyday life in that time. Some of the power that these matters have in our culture comes from their novelty and their association with horror fiction.

The portraits of Simon and the spirit-possessed girl in Acts are recognizably *human*; they are a long way from our culture's stories of witches or demon-possession. As a last word, one should also not ignore the potential use of fear of "the unseen" for scapegoating vulnerable or marginalized people. Unfortunately, the examples are not only historical. A distressing modern example is the physical and psychological abuse of children suspected of sorcery or demonic influence by Nigerian pastors, whose beliefs have been influenced by American Christianity.<sup>339</sup> In their eagerness to reject Enlightenment rationalism, Christians should remain mindful of the great pain and injustice that has sometimes been committed by so-called experts of the spirit world. It was not for nothing that Philo said "the fear of demons or superstition" was "the most grievous burden."<sup>340</sup> But perfect love casts out fear.

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<sup>338</sup> Acts 8:22-23.

<sup>339</sup> "These pastors are not representative of an exotic African religious tradition; on the contrary, they employ a theology largely imported from their American godfathers." See Steve Snow, "Explaining Abuse of 'Child Witches' in Africa: Powerful Witchbusters in Weak States," *Journal of Religion & Society* 19 (2017): 2.

<sup>340</sup> Philo, *De gig.* 16. Trans. Colson and Whitaker in *Loeb Classical Library* edition, 2:453.



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