



# Cherreguine Bible Doctrine Ministries

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## THE OBSERVERS OF HUMAN HISTORY

The apostle Paul appears to have taken the expression "powers and principalities" from late Jewish apocalyptic thought, where it was applied to intermediate beings lower than God and higher than man. Apart from passages where the reference is unmistakably to human authorities (Rom. 13:1-3; Titus 3:1), principalities (αρχηαι) and authorities (εξουσια) or powers (δυναμεις) refer to cosmic intelligences, occasionally angelic, but usually demonic (Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:1).

Other similar spirit powers are dominions (κυριότητες, Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16), thrones (θρονουι, Col. 1:16), and the rulers (αρχηοντες) of this age (1 Cor. 2:6). It is not possible on the basis of NT evidence to rank these spirit powers or to attribute distinctive meanings to each. Six acts in the drama of the principalities and powers may be delineated:

1. CREATION: In the creation plan these powers were designed as good spirits. They were created by Christ and subjected to His lordship (Colossians 1:16).

2. THE FALL OF ANGELS: For reasons undisclosed in the NT some spirit powers separated from Christ (Jude 6) in a rupture of cosmic proportions (II Pet. 2:4), necessitating atonement (Col. 1:20).

3. DEFEATED BY CHRIST: In His ministry Jesus resisted satanic temptation (Luke 4:1-13) and conquered evil spirits (Luke 4:35), delegating this power to His disciples (Mark 3:15). In His death he disarmed the forces of evil (Col. 2:14-15). In His resurrection and exaltation He subjected them to his lordship (Eph. 1:20-22; 4:8; 1 Pet. 3:22). Christians are enthroned with Christ and share this victory and ought to live accordingly (Col. 2:20-3:4).

4. LEARNING: The spirit powers, who are not omniscient, learn the manifold wisdom of God, by witnessing the historic experience of the Church (Eph. 3:10).

5. CONTINUING WARFARE: Although defeated and under instruction, the spirit powers have not yet surrendered. The vestiges of their power continue to corrupt the disobedient (Eph. 2:2). The Christian's most powerful and deceitful enemies are still demonic (Eph. 6:12), but God's power is stronger (Eph. 6:10-11) and no evil power will separate the Christian from the love of God (Rom. 8:38-39).

6. TOTAL DEFEAT: The days of this warfare are numbered and the outcome certain. With the consummation of the kingdom of God the evil powers will be robbed of all malignant efficacy (1 Cor. 15:24). On His 33 years on earth and up to the cross Jesus Christ, who in His life was not the slave of any power, law, custom, community, institution, value, or theory, destroyed the powers' pretensions to sovereignty, thus making authentic living possible.

Principalities and powers are eternal and supernatural beings, because they are confronted by Christ "in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:20; 3:10; 6:12) and also because the Christian's warfare is specially said to be "not with flesh and blood but with principalities and powers" (Eph. 6:12).

To identify the principalities and powers with human or abstract, impersonal forces is probably the result of cultural presuppositions determining exegesis. It is possible, however, that Paul intended his reference to thrones, dominions, principalities, and authorities in Col. 1:16 to embrace earthly as well as heavenly powers. The matter invites further research. But for the present time, while allowing that all human systems are wide open to corruption from demonic forces, it is safest to avoid identifying principalities and powers with sociopolitical structures.