

Who are the spiritual beings we struggle against in Ephesians 6.12?

The Interlinear Greek Text (my literal translation).

ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἡμῖν ἡ πάλη πρὸς αἷμα καὶ σάρκα ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὰς ἀρχάς, πρὸς τὰς
 For not is to us the struggle towards blood and flesh but towards the heads, towards the

ἐξουσίας, πρὸς τοὺς κοσμοκράτορας τοῦ σκότους τούτου, πρὸς τὰ πνευματικὰ τῆς
 authorities, towards the world-rulers of the darkness of this (age), towards the spirituals of the

πονηρίας ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις.
 evils in the heavenlies.

Modern Translations of Ephesians 6.12.

NRSV¹. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

KJV. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

NASB. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

NKJV. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Comparable Passages of the New Testament.

The following NT passages include similar general themes and specific words (**ἀρχῆ** – head / authority / ruler) and (**ἐξουσία** - authority) to Ephesians 6.12, and as such may be viewed as parallel passages.

NT Greek Text	NRSV Translation	Comments
Ephesians 1:21 ὑπεράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος καὶ παντὸς ὀνόματος ὀνομαζομένου, οὐ μόνον ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι.	Ephesians 1:21 “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion , and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.”	When seated at the right hand of God after His resurrection, Jesus Christ is far above all spiritual / angelic beings, fallen or un-fallen, in this age in the age to come.
Ephesians 3:10 ἵνα γνωρισθῆ νῦν ταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἡ πολυποίκιλος σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ,	Ephesians 3:10 “so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.”	God intends that the mystery of God, the plan of salvation, will be made known not only on earth, but among all spiritual / angelic beings.
1 Peter 3:22 ὃς ἔστιν ἐν δεξιᾷ [τοῦ] θεοῦ πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανὸν ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων.	1 Peter 3:22 “who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.”	At His ascension to heaven, all spiritual / angelic beings are subject to Jesus Christ. No spiritual / angelic being is beyond His authority.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references used will be taken from the New Revised Standard Version, NRSV.

<p>1 Corinthians 15:24 εἶτα τὸ τέλος, ὅταν παραδιδῶ τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ, ὅταν καταργήσῃ πᾶσαν ἀρχὴν καὶ πᾶσαν ἐξουσίαν καὶ δυνάμιν.</p>	<p>1 Corinthians 15:24 “Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.”</p>	<p>After His 2nd Coming, Jesus Christ will forever destroy all fallen angelic / spiritual beings or powers, and death will also be destroyed.</p>
<p>Colossians 1:16 ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τὰ ὄρατα καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα, εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι· τὰ πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἐκτίσται·</p>	<p>Colossians 1:16 “for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers-- all things have been created through him and for him.”</p>	<p>Jesus Christ, as the Creator, created all spiritual / angelic beings, including those who are now fallen and un-fallen.</p>
<p>Romans 8:38 πέπεισμαι γὰρ ὅτι οὔτε θάνατος οὔτε ζωὴ οὔτε ἄγγελοι οὔτε ἀρχαὶ οὔτε ἐνεστῶτα οὔτε μέλλοντα οὔτε δυνάμεις</p>	<p>Romans 8:38 “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers....”</p>	<p>Nothing can separate born-again Christians from the love of God, including un-fallen angels (where they even to try!) and fallen angelic beings.</p>

Contemporary Writing Within Judaism

The origin of 1 Enoch is hotly contested. Most modern scholars include 1 Enoch among the pseudepigraphia, writings allegedly written by individuals who used the names of heroes of faith to give credibility to their writings. For modern scholars, the pseudepigraphia are from the 1st Century BC – 2nd Century AD. Thus, 1 Enoch was not actually written by Enoch, 7th in line from Adam. In the NT however, Jude 14-15 quotes from 1 Enoch, and attributes the writing to Enoch, 7th in line from Adam. The SDA Church has no position on the authorship of 1 Enoch, nor on the rest of the pseudepigraphical writings.

For the purposes of this paper however, what is important to recognize is that the Son of Man motif, which only appears in the OT in Dan 7.13-14, is a major motif throughout 1 Enoch. This would have lent rich contextual background and understanding to the Jews in the time of Jesus Christ, who would have heard Jesus’ self-designation as the Son of Man with not only Daniel 7 but also 1 Enoch in their minds. In the writings of 1 Enoch, the Son of Man is a divine title. More importantly, 1 Enoch includes designations and hierarchies of angelic beings, as per the text below.

Enoch 61.10-11. “And He will summon all the host of the heavens, and all the holy ones above, and the host of God, the **Cherubic**, **Seraphin** and **Ophanin**, and all the **angels of power**, and all the **angels of principalities**, and **the Elect One**, and the **other powers on the earth (and) over the water**. On that day shall raise one voice, and bless and glorify and exalt in the spirit of faith, and in the spirit of wisdom, and in the spirit of patience, and in the spirit of mercy, and in the spirit of judgement and of peace, and in the spirit of goodness, and shall all say with one voice: "Blessed is He, and may the name of the Lord of Spirits be blessed for ever and ever."

In the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, different teachers, such as in Colosse, taught on the differentiated hierarchies and structures within the angelic world. Some of these angelic beings were promoted as being intercessors between God and humanity. It was partly against this heresy that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Colossians to emphasize the supremacy of Jesus Christ as the only mediator between humanity and God.

What then can we learn about the angelic beings of Ephesians 6.12?

1) Jewish angelology included hierarchies of angels (e.g. Enoch 61.10-11, and the false teachers of Colosse against whom Paul wrote the Epistle to the Colossians) were teaching worship of these alternate intercessors.

Hence Paul affirmed in Col. 1.15-20 the truth of Christ's supremacy over all angelic hierarchies and beings, fallen and un-fallen.

2) To the Colossians, beset by teachers of mystery religions and struggling with esoteric teachings about alternate angelic intercessors, Paul affirms that the mystery of God, i.e. the plan of salvation, centers on Jesus Christ alone, "I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:25-27). The "mystery of God" brings hope and not fear to the human heart through the indwelling of Jesus Christ in the believer's heart.

3) Satan and his fallen angels are real and are not figments of primitive imagination. In any warfare, it is fatal to underestimate the enemy. Nothing delights Satan and his fallen minions more than for Christians to deny his personal, literal existence. He is, in the words of the Lord's Prayer, "the evil one" (Matt. 6.13). Jesus referred to him as the ruler of this world (John 12.31; 14.30). The Apostle Paul called him "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4.4), and also "the prince of the power of the air, ... the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" in Eph 2.2.

4) While we war against our own flesh / carnal nature (Romans 7.14-25), we also war against fallen angelic beings led by Satan. These angelic beings are so powerful that they cannot be overcome through human means, so we must take our stand in the armor of God (Eph. 6.13-17). Without God's provision of such armor, we would be overwhelmed.

5) These angelic beings we war against are intrinsically deceptive. Their master, Satan, is the "father of lies" (John 8.44). Satan's angels are also deceivers, often acting through witting or unwitting human agents. "As the truth of Christ is in me, this boast of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! And what I do I will also continue to do, in order to deny an opportunity to those who want an opportunity to be recognized as our equals in what they boast about. For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. Their end will match their deeds" (2 Cor. 11.10-15).

6) These angelic beings are deadly if not restrained by God's mercy and power. In Job 1-2, we see that Satan and his fallen angels are capable of causing tornadoes to arise, deadly fire to fall from the skies, of causing the most terrible sores in a human body, and if God did not set limits on their evil, kill human beings.

7) These angelic beings are highly ordered. The fallen angels speaking through the demoniac referred to themselves as "My name is Legion" (Mk. 5.9). The military organization and hierarchy of the fallen angels matches the military formations of the un-fallen angels (2 Kings. 6.17; Matt. 26.53; Rev. 19.14).

8) Our struggle against these fallen spiritual beings is unremitting. The three-fold repetition of the preposition "πρὸς" indicates the totality of this struggle, without an inch to be given to any of these fallen spiritual powers.

9) We all face attacks from these fallen spiritual beings on what the Apostle Paul calls "that evil day" (Eph. 6.13). Nobody is immune to these attacks. Evil in the form of personal, literal, fallen angelic beings does reach into the lives of Jesus' disciples and seeks to "steal, kill and destroy" (John 10.10). We know not when "that evil day" may come, so we are to stay alert at all times, never knowing when the attacks of Satan and his fallen angelic beings will come. The Apostle Peter spoke of this as follows, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all

grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 5.6-11).

10) The Apostle Paul counsels us to put on the armor of God ahead of “that evil day” precisely so that we can withstand “on that evil day” when it comes. “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm” (Eph. 6.13). According to this verse, it **IS** possible to stand under attack from these fallen angelic beings. Spiritual preparation before, and faith during, the “evil day” are therefore the key to surviving these spiritual battles.

11) Jesus Christ is the Creator of all angelic beings, and since His ascension to heaven has absolute authority over every spiritual / angelic being, regardless of whether they are fallen or un-fallen (Col. 1.16; Eph. 1.21; 1 Peter 3.22). No angelic being, fallen or un-fallen, can withstand the authority and Person of Jesus Christ!

12) After His 2nd Coming, Jesus Christ will forever destroy all fallen angelic beings, including Satan and the final enemy, death itself (1 Cor. 15.24). The sure knowledge of their final destruction is known among the fallen angelic beings and authorities! The demons asked Jesus about this in Matt. “Suddenly they shouted, “What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?” (Matt. 8.29).

13) Victory in the battle was possible in NT times! The Apostle Paul could say at the end of his ministry, during which he was in constant conflict with satanic agencies, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

14) Victory in the battle is possible for us today but not in our own strength! James, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gave the following counsel: “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4.7). The Apostle John affirms ultimate victory for God’s saints: “Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming, “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death” (Rev. 12.10-11).