

## Thinking About the Bible

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July 16, 2020

# The Ephesians Hypothesis

*“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”*

Ephesians 6:12

Rocket science must be complicated because I’m constantly reminded of things that *aren’t* rocket science. It’s complicated because there are so many variables that could potentially affect a rocket’s flight. What if a rocket scientist forgot to take into account an important variable such as gravity? That would be disastrous.

Even a surface reading of Scripture shows that the unseen realm is a significant variable in earthly events. We are biased toward the physical realm, though. It’s what slaps us in the face every morning and dominates our thoughts until our eyes close at night. The physical is *here and now*, the spiritual seems *somewhere and sometime*. But the Bible paints a spiritual realm that is just as real (if not *more* real) than the physical. When enemy troops were attacking and hope was running low, Elisha could see a reality that was invisible to his servant...

He said, “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:16-17).

Suddenly, the servant could see the vast supernatural army that was standing by, ready to intervene in the earthly battle. In the New Testament, Paul speaks of the same reality. At the end of a list of very practical, “earthly” teachings, he adds another item...

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:10-12).

Paul doesn't switch thoughts here. In the apostle's mind, a typical day involves visible, earthly activities intertwined with the invisible supernatural. He indicates that God expects us to view the physical world in the context of the larger spiritual realm. The terms “armor,” “schemes,” and “wrestle” imply serious business. A battle rages whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. Moreover, the unseen is actually of greater concern since the true struggle is *not* with the “flesh and blood” of this world. Observable, physical events sometimes come from “darkness,” “cosmic powers,” and “spiritual forces of evil.”

Is this too disturbing? I was confronted by a good Christian lady once who told me “The Christian life is supposed to be peaceful and joyous. From what you're saying, I would be scared to get out of bed every morning!”

It's unfortunately true that the idea of demonic spirits sneaking around, spreading mischief in the physical realm is ridiculed by liberal theology. Many would prefer to leave these images on the ceiling of some medieval cathedral. There's no doubt that the popular message from most pulpits is strictly one of peace and joy. I don't deny that these are the ultimate fruits of the Spirit's work in believers' lives. Yet the Bible demands that an understanding of reality *must* include an understanding of the realm beyond our earthly perceptions. The formula must address all the variables. Our worldview is incomplete when data are limited to the material world, and the unseen enemy has free rein to engage us.

*Let me be very clear before going further.* I do NOT believe there is a demon behind every bush (although there is very likely a bush in front of every demon). I have no intention of sensationalizing the “dark side” in a paranoid witch-hunt. Even though the struggle is real, the outcome is already decided. The command to “be strong in the Lord” assumes that we *can* win. *If* we “put

on the full armor of God,” we *will* “stand against the devil’s schemes.” Paul’s words are as much encouragement as they are warning.

### **Living with the Unseen**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Louis Pasteur had the idea that some diseases might be caused by particles too small to see. Many questioned this bizarre concept and refused to accept an unseen world. Pasteur reasoned that there should be a way to test this *hypothesis*. *If* these particles did exist, and *if* they did cause disease, and *if* they could be passed to others, he should be able to predict certain scenarios. For example, a person who had kissed a sick person would get the disease, but a person who stayed far away wouldn’t.

A dictionary definition of *hypothesis* is “a tentative assumption made in order to draw out and test its logical consequences.”<sup>1</sup> I think of a hypothesis as an educated-guess-starting-point for investigating a question or idea. A researcher usually looks at a collection of available information and proposes a possible scenario that could explain it. *Testing* (validating) the hypothesis requires comparing real-world observations to the proposed scenario.

The set of propositions Paul presents in Ephesians 6 forms a very useful hypothesis for examining phenomena that may be connected to paranormal or supernatural beings. Consider the specific truths he offers...

- There is an unseen realm beyond the one in which we live.
- Spirits from that unseen realm are able to interact with our world.
- Our primary struggle is with fallen spirits from this unseen realm.
- Fallen spirits are evil, scheming, and set on doing us harm.
- We can and should be prepared to recognize and withstand these fallen spirits.

Assuming these propositions are true, we would expect this *Ephesians Hypothesis* to be testable in our physical world. In other words, we should be able to make predictions about how the unseen interacts with the seen—how the supernatural reacts with the natural. And, if the Ephesians Hypothesis is

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<sup>1</sup> merriam-webster.com

correct, we would expect it to have explanatory power with some phenomena, especially those that appear to have causes beyond the physical universe.

Again, this isn't to say that every unusual or hard-to-explain phenomenon is supernatural. However, I do believe that *there is only one supernatural reality, as described in Scripture*. Therefore, if a supernatural cause is indicated, *it will necessarily be of the type described in Ephesians 6*—not some contrived reality, made to fit a particular phenomenon. Below are the full implications of the Ephesians Hypothesis. We'll refer to these often. In the following chapter, let's take a closer look at what Scripture reveals about this unseen realm.

### **Expanded Ephesians Hypothesis**

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12).

Presupposition: If a supernatural cause is indicated, it will necessarily be of the type described in Ephesians 6 and nothing else.

#### ***Ephesians 6 Principles***

1. There is an unseen realm beyond the one in which we live.
2. Spirits from that unseen realm are able to interact with our world.
3. Our primary struggle is with fallen spirits from the unseen realm.
4. Fallen spirits are evil, scheming, and set on doing us harm.
5. We can and should be prepared to recognize and withstand these fallen spirits.

#### ***Other Scriptural Truths Supporting the Ephesians Hypothesis***

- a) There is only one supernatural reality—the unseen spirit realm described in Scripture. If the supernatural is indicated, it will be of this type, and this type only. (John 14:6)
- b) Paranormal events will never be neutral. They are designed to lead the observer. (1 Peter 5:8)

- c) The inhabitants of the unseen spirit realm include the eternal, self-existent, triune God and the spirit beings he created. (Job 1:6)
- d) Biblical spirit beings can interact with the physical world. (Colossians 2:8, 1 Corinthians 10:20, 1 Timothy 4:1, Daniel 10:13, 2 Corinthians 4:4, 1 Thessalonians 2:8, 2 Corinthians 2:11)
- e) Some of these spirits, including one of great power, rebelled against God. (Ezekiel 28:11-19, Isaiah 14:12-19)
- f) Fallen spirits are able to “lead” the thoughts of humans, as allowed by God. (2 Corinthians 2:10-11, Ephesians 4:26-27, 1 Timothy 3:6, 1 Corinthians 7:10, Acts 5:3, 1 Peter 5:6-10)
- g) Not all evil is directly caused by fallen spirits. Its source can be our own fleshly nature and the evil of the world system. (Ephesians 2:1-3)
- h) Rebellious, fallen spirits are able to possess and control non-believers, as well as animals. (Matthew 8)
- i) Satan, the leader of fallen spirits, has the goal of opposing God in any way possible. (2 Corinthians 2:8, 1 Corinthians 10:20, Zechariah 3:1, John 8:44, Matthew 4:3)
- j) Satan’s chief strategies are lies and deception. (John 8:44, 2 Corinthians 11:3)
- k) Satan and fallen spirits will use any means possible to deceive humans and lead them away from God and truth. In most cases, it’s in Satan’s interest to not reveal his true identity. Demons will manifest themselves to some, but maybe not others. (2 Corinthians 2:11, 1 Peter 5:8)
- l) Satan can appear as an “angel of light.” (2 Corinthians 11:14)
- m) Fallen spirits have some ability to manipulate matter and energy. (Revelation 9, Job 1, Mark 4:39)
- n) Although Satan and fallen spirits have great power, the ultimate power is God. (1 John 4:4, Revelation 10:20)
- o) God in his love and omniscience often allows a temporary *lesser evil* in order to gain an eternal *greater good*. For example, in revealing sin, leading to repentance, or sanctifying believers. (Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 4:17, Book of Job)

