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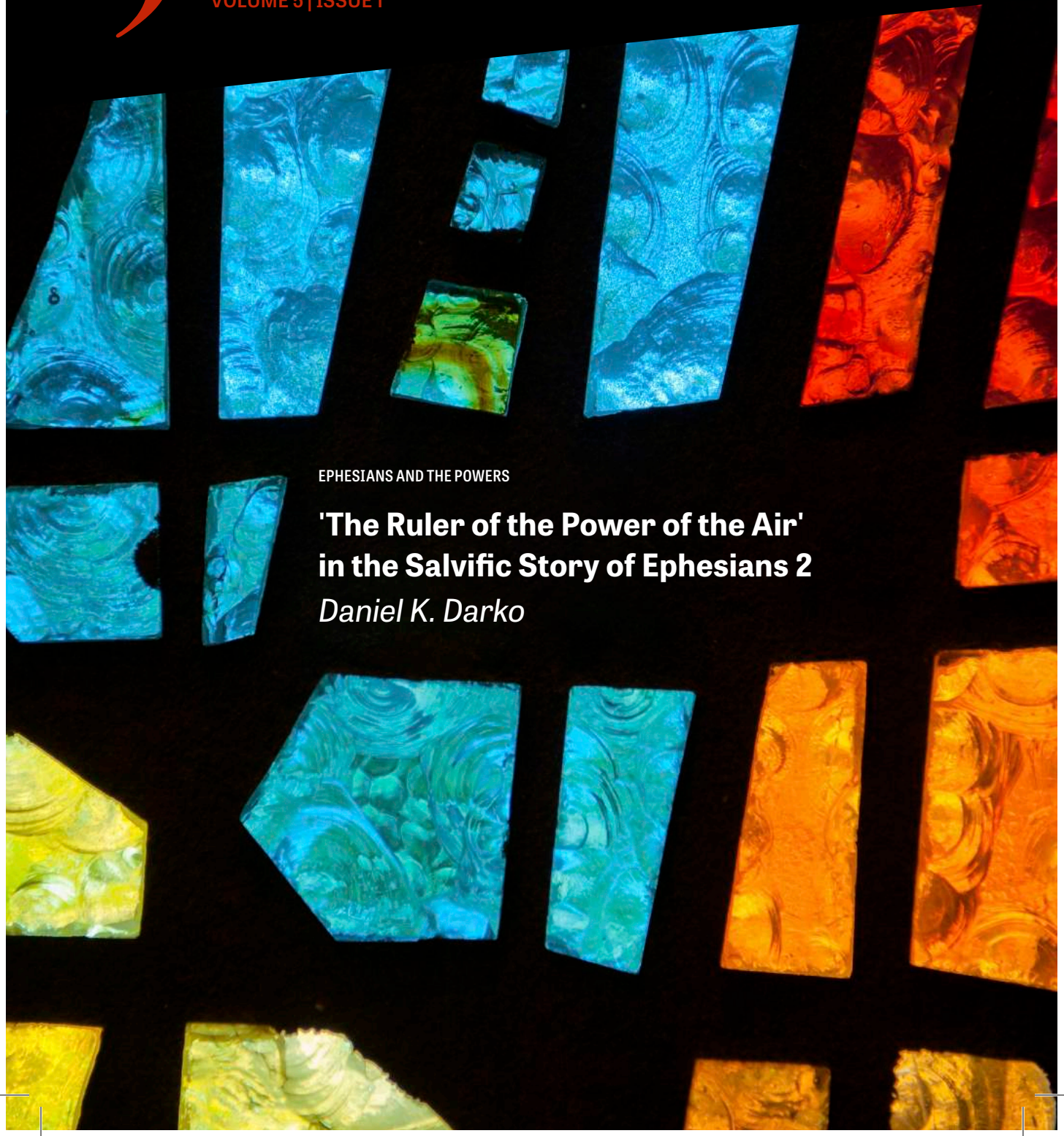
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'The Ruler of the Power of the Air' in the Salvific Story of Ephesians 2

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‘The Ruler of the Power of the Air’ in the Salvific Story of Ephesians 2

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Abstract: Post-enlightenment theological articulations of what salvation entail often ostracize Satan in the process and limit the experience to a transaction between God and humans. The idea of ‘salvation by grace’ is however borrowed from Ephesians 2 where pre-conversion life was purportedly lived under the domain of Satan. The human condition is engineered by diabolic influence. Thus, people are saved from satanic influence and its attendant consequences of sin, social breakdown, fleshly impulses etc. to belong to a people of God. Spiritual warfare is meant to curb pressures from evil powers to maintain faithful standing in God. Salvation would be incomplete, according to Ephesians 2, if it did not include deliverance from the control of ‘the ruler of the power of the air.’

Key Words: Ephesians, salvation, Satan principalities, Spirit

Introduction

The Christian concept of salvation has increasingly become nebulous in the ecclesial and mainstream theological reasoning of our time. What Christians mean when they suggest that the non-Christian needs to be saved varies from place to place. One recurrent feature of various articulations across the denominational spectrum is the notion of “salvation by grace.”¹ The post-sixteenth century Reformers and John Newton’s eighteenth-century composition of “Amazing Grace” have undoubtedly reinforced pedestrian theology in this regard. However, the condition from which people are saved by grace and the question of to what they are saved remains contested.

Existential theologians resist the idea of salvation as the transformation of the soul or as a metaphorical visa for eschatological bliss in heaven and argue for more pragmatic overtures. Rudolf Bultmann,² who championed this notion of salvation, argued for a disavowal of selfish ambitions, pursuit of material things, and a false

1. Modern trends in Pauline scholarship and interest in “justification by faith/faithfulness” is rather divorced from the theological concerns of mainstream Christian discourse.

2. See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Scribner, 1958), 39–45 and Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. H. Bartsch (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 9–38.

sense of security in order to place one's faith in God alone. In this frame, "faith means abandoning the quest for tangible realities and transitory objects . . . to the opening of our hearts to the grace of God, allowing him to release us from the past and bring us into his future."³ As Erickson puts it, it calls for the "fundamental alteration of our *Existenz*, our whole outlook and conduct of life."⁴ Liberation theology and various ideological theologies take it further, locating the human condition in the need of salvation from systemic injustice and inequities that engender oppression, bigotry, and despise human dignity. They argue that true salvation reorders society to be fair and just, thereby contending that salvation must alleviate human suffering caused by poverty, social inequalities, and injustice. These theologies argue that "[t]he salvation of all persons from oppression is the goal of God's work in history and must therefore be the task of those who believe in him."⁵ Conversely, traditional Roman Catholic soteriology takes a mystical bent in the way sin and the human condition is viewed. Salvation from the fallen condition of the human race is by grace, but grace may be accessed only by members of the church via the sacraments. In other words, "outside the [Roman Catholic] church there is no salvation."⁶ Recent amendments to this position, however, allow for some Christians who do not belong to the tradition—even some non-Christians—the possibility of being able to access God's grace.⁷

Protestant traditions⁸ emphasize sin as the cause of a broken relationship with God that may be remedied in salvation by the substitutionary atonement of Christ Jesus.⁹ Believers find salvation in what Jesus did on the cross to atone for their sins. All of these soteriological views focus on the individual person/soul or on a social issue; it is not about God's agenda. Moreover, apart from Ransom Theory, a view of atonement that is largely dismissed, the devil features scantily in the portrait of the human condition that necessitates God's intervention in salvation nowadays.¹⁰

3. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 911–912.

4. *Ibid.*, 912.

5. *Ibid.* 909.

6. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle* 73.21 as cited in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: DoubleDay, 2003), 224, CCC846.

7. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 917.

8. It is broad to refer to Protestant traditions but here I use the expression to characterize Protestant and non-denominational churches, some of whose members do not even know the core of their theological convictions.

9. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 918.

10. Carol Straw, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 155. The Ransom theory is no longer held by any mainstream Christian denomination. The main thesis of the theory is that the just God required justice for the sins of humanity. Appealing to Mark 10:45, proponents advocated that Christ died as a ransom paid to Satan in order to secure salvation. Early Christian figures like Justin Martyr, Origen, Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa were all proponents of versions of this view. In light of this work, it is important to note that this is the only view that placed Satan at the center of the condition of the unsaved. Today, Catholics lean towards the Satisfaction theory of atonement (after Anselm) while Protestants typically promote Substitutionary theories of atonement.

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Theories of salvation have otherwise focused principally on the faithfulness of God, social welfare, and/or salvation in the form of a transaction between the individual and God *en voyage* to heaven.¹¹

As a letter, Ephesians features “principalities and powers” prominently both in its portrait of pre-conversion life and in the efforts of the powers to destabilize Christ followers in their current standing with God (Eph 4:27; 6:10–14). This study endeavors to show the role of “the ruler of the power of the air” in what salvation entails in the letter, especially in chapter 2. The work examines the ruler of the air’s role in the human condition that prompted and warranted the gracious act of God in salvation. I examine the Greek text closely against the backdrop of ancient spirit cosmology. Methodologically, the focus is on how the text portrays the role of the spiritual being in salvation. It highlights certain pitfalls in prevailing contemporary soteriological formulations and underlines the framework within which “salvation by grace” ought to be conceived. It will become apparent that humans are not the main actors in salvation; rather salvation occurs as God’s triumph over “the ruler of the power of the air” in a custody battle over the lives of human beings in God’s unfolding mystery. To ostracize Satan in the salvific framework, as if God is working for humans, would be to misconstrue what salvation entails in Ephesians 2.

The aphorism “salvation by grace”¹² is like a crutch for many in modern Christianity. The phrase appears only in Ephesians 2. Ironically, popular claims to being saved by grace have been insufficient to attract critical studies or biblical theological analysis. For example, recent works on New Testament theology do not provide adequate space to the exploration of salvation in Ephesians.¹³ The best effort surfaces in Matera’s brief mention of Ephesians 2 in his discussion on justification and reconciliation relative to Torah observance.¹⁴ Meanwhile, no other letter in the corpus of Paul puts χάρις (“grace”) and σώζω (“to save”) in close proximity to describe the matrix, means, or nature of salvation. Unlike Romans, Ephesians does not use δικαίωμα (“justification”) to describe salvation but χάρις. Ephesians frames what it means to be saved in a particular spirit cosmology to underscore the wretched conditions of the past and God’s gracious intervention.

11. J. M. Vorster, “A Case for a Transforming Christology in South Africa,” *JRT* 7 (2013): 310–326. Observations from theological discourse amidst the social ills of South Africa showed that misguided Christology and Soteriology—Reformed, Arminian, and Liberation theologies—gave an impetus and even a rationale for apartheid and subsequent violent reactions to it. Theology was employed to justify resistance to apartheid or fueled divisive socio-political causes with parties claiming to be advancing the kingdom of God.

12. The phrases “salvation by grace” and “justification by faith” are purported to encapsulate Pauline soteriology, to a large extent.

13. See Ben Witherington III, *New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 385–442; Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 392–407; Frank J. Matera, *God’s Saving Grace: A Pauline Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012) and I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 379–395.

14. Matera, *God’s Saving Grace*, 111–112.

The object of inquiry, “the ruler of the power of the air,” features only in the first sentence (2:1–7) of Ephesians 2. However, it is important that his role be located in the broader portrait of the salvific story. Here, I devote a substantial amount of space to examining the first sentence, and then proceed to show what the author seeks to convey about salvation in the rest of the chapter. I suggest that any artificial break at 2:10 and 2:11 is misleading in regard to what is being espoused (see below). The role of the “powers” in the rest of the letter makes sense only when one comes to terms with the function of the two main spiritual actors in salvation, namely God and the devil.

The State of ‘Spiritual’ Death in the Pre-Conversion Past

Ephesians 2 opens with an articulation of the human condition in need of salvation. The long sentence indicates that salvation is required because of humanity’s state of spiritual death marked by sin and trespasses (cf. Luke 15:24, 34) along with associated social, mental, and moral conditions. The absence of chapter divisions in the original manuscript shows the obvious continuum with the preceding discourse about the death and exaltation of Christ over the principalities and powers.¹⁵ Ephesians depicts a people in a hopeless condition—lacking any ability or vitality—that needed an external figure (God) to mitigate their plight. It will become apparent that salvation as spiritual resuscitation accords liberation from the diabolic domain unto a reconciled relationship with God.

Ephesians 2:1–7¹⁶ as one sentence has significant soteriological import. First, its portrait of the human condition—“dead in sins and trespasses”¹⁷ and the attendant verdict (by nature ... objects of wrath)—conveys crucial aspects of Christian salvation that would later become a debated matter in early Christianity.¹⁸ Second, the alternate use of ‘you’ (pl) and ‘we’ pronouns in the sentence has prompted questions in regard to the implied human subjects, that is to say, whether the Jewish author sought to differentiate between the conditions of Jews and Gentiles or not? In other words: Were Jews *also* dead in their “trespasses and sins” and thereby subject to the control of “the ruler of the power of the air” in the same way as the Gentiles?

15. I use “principalities and powers” in this essay as a technical term comprising all evil spiritual powers.

16. The NA28 keeps Ephesians 2:1–7 as one long sentence as also Westcott and Hort, Tischendorf and Holmes. The Textus Receptus (TR) however has a longer sentence from 2:1–9. Tyndale makes significant departure from the rest in breaking the sentence into three, namely 2:1–3 as one sentence, 2:4–5 and 2:6–7. I follow the NA28 for my analysis and literary observations in this essay.

17. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical translations in this chapter are the author’s own.

18. Early Christian thinkers debated issues such as the nature of the sin. They asked: Is it original (inherited) or moral (committed) sin? If inherited, then when was it inherited? At birth, during pregnancy etc.?

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The first issue belongs to and is addressed in the field of systematic theology whereas the second is currently heading in the direction of a general consensus. Most recent biblical scholars argue that 'you' (pl.) and 'we' here do not suggest a differentiation between Jews and Gentiles but rather display a stylistic feature being employed for rhetorical effect. To limit the "desires of the flesh" and living according to "the ruler of the power of the air" to Gentiles would be a misreading of the sentence.¹⁹

The opening *καί* ("and") functions syntactically as continuative particle connecting the present verses to the previous pericope (Eph 1:15–23). It indicates a conceptual linkage to God's activity to resuscitate the "dead" and place them in an exalted position with Christ. The death–resurrection–exaltation pattern for Christ followers and Christ is instructive in the salvific story. Apparently, God's power was made manifest when he raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him above the principalities and powers. Ephesians 2:1 sets the stage for how God dramatically rescues humans under the devastating predicament of sin and elevates them to share in the privileges of Christ. The divine agent (God) is the one who brings life and exalts/raises those who were hitherto dead. To be "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1) is akin to being spiritually irresponsible and morally bankrupt.²⁰ They were incapable of exercising control over their own lives and affairs.²¹ The two words, "trespasses" and "sins," may be taken as hendiadys²² or as referents to moral and spiritual violations of sorts. The word "trespass" denotes the violation of moral boundaries or legal codes. Literally and metaphorically, it is "slipping off track" or defaulting in debt payments in classical Greek.²³ Moreover, sin denotes "missing the mark or failing to meet a purpose"²⁴ in the sense of depriving other humans or deities of their due. Sin is a breach of sacred and social boundaries. Muddiman indicates that in Paul, "trespasses mean acts of disobedience to known commandments, while 'sins' are intrinsically evil acts which can be committed even in the absence of law (Rom 5:13)."²⁵ The portrait of sin as a condition of "spiritual death" in religious parlance is also found

19. Best, *Ephesians*, 208.

20. BDAG, 667 [*A Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*. Third edition. Revised and edited by Frederick William Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1979)] and Bultmann, *TDNT* 4.893 [Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. TDNT. 10 Vol (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974)]. See Ezekiel 18:20; 4 Ezra 3:25; Baruch 54:15 and the New Testament use of the metaphor in Matthew 8:22 and Luke 9:60.

21. Best, *Ephesians*, 198.

22. Frank Thielman, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 120–122. Thielman indicates that the import of the word "trespass" is usually transgressing God's law whereas sinning refers to activity that occurs directly against God himself. Thielman, however, characterizes the use of the two words here as hendiadys.

23. H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon with Revised Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 1322.

24. Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 77.

25. J. Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Continuum, 2001), 102.

in Stoic philosophy.²⁶ These terms have both social and spiritual implications. They connote a violation of the norms of the social order with attendant consequences—all of which are in breach of the *order* put in place by the divine *order-er*. Sin mars our relationship with God and consequently affects humanity’s ability to deal kindly with fellow bearers of the image of God. The two terms feature here, perhaps, to indicate the undesirable spiritual and moral conditions experienced prior to conversion.²⁷

The Social, Moral, and Mental Condition of the Spiritually “Dead”

Ephesians 2:2 derives its main point from the preceding articulation of the condition and sphere within which the “dead” conducted themselves. The description does not suggest three categories or locales of human existence but underscores the social and spatial dimensions of human existence. Ancient cosmologies²⁸ interfaced the material and spatial dimensions of the cosmos as inseparable aspects of universe. The three prepositional phrases in Ephesians 2:2 are particularly crucial in the quest to understand the condition from which people are saved and the role of the devil therein. First, Christ followers are characterized as a people who hitherto conducted themselves ethically²⁹ and socially *κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου* (“according to the age of this world,” Eph 2:2). Whether *αἰών* (“age”) refers, in this phrase, to a personal spiritual power or to a temporal idea, is a debated matter. Some have argued that the consecutive *κατὰ* (“according to”) phrases in Ephesians 2:2 ought to be read as a rhetorical redundancy meant to accentuate the role of the evil spirit. For example, Robinson suggests that it should be taken as an allusion to the early Christian belief that the world has been subject to the control of evil forces since the Fall (Gen 3). Consequently, all evil spiritual forces under the auspices of the devil/Satan have exerted control in the world in rebellion against God.³⁰ The “Aion of Aions” who is also known as the “Master of all” in the *Greek Magical Papyri* (PGM) is appealed to in support of the reading that *αἰών* here refers to an evil spiritual power.³¹ For Best, “the devil had many names in contemporary Judaism and early Christianity

26. Epictetus, *Dis.*, 1.3.3; 9.19; 2.19.27; 3.23.28.

27. See Ernest Best, “Dead in Trespasses and Sins,” *JSNT* 12 (1981): 19–20.

28. Cf. Epictetus, *Ench.* 31.1. Ancient philosophers were religious and held beliefs in the activities of the gods or spirits in human affairs. Epictetus represents the traditional Stoic view when he indicates that, “true philosophy and piety are one and the same thing.” Gods and spirits were able to bless or bring judgment upon people. In the words of Seneca, “God is near you, he is with you, he is within you. This is what I mean, Lucilius: a holy spirit indwells within us, one who marks our good and bad deeds, and is our guardian. As we treat this spirit, so are we treated by it. Indeed, no man can be good without the help of God” (Seneca, *Ep.* 41.273).

29. *Περιπατέω* (“to walk”) features in Ephesians consistently with this ethical connotation.

30. J. A. Robinson, *Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1922), 49.

31. *PGM* IV. 2190.

Daniel K. Darko: *'The Ruler of the Power of the Air' in the Salvific Story of Ephesians 2* and the adoption of the name of a pagan god or evil power would not be unexpected, especially since 'this aeon' already possessed an evil connotation."³² Αἰών is thus the supreme evil spiritual power otherwise referred to as the devil. Scholars supporting this reading include the likes of Best, Schnackenburg, Lindemann, and Conzelmann.³³ According to Markus Barth, the phrase indicates that there is diabolic activity in the inhabited world of unbelievers. Αἰών is thus translated as "World-age" to capture its holistic import. Accordingly, the αἰών is viewed as the spiritual "antagonist of God's good creation and of God himself."³⁴

The second view of αἰών emerges from its ordinary usage in the New Testament and in Ephesians in particular. The same word appears in the second half of the sentence (Eph 2:7) with a temporal connotation. Moreover, it is never used elsewhere in the New Testament to denote a personal spiritual agent. The appearances of αἰών outside of the biblical texts in reference to a personal spiritual being suggests that either the early Christians did not know about the personal usage or sought to avoid its use in preference to overt terms that point unambiguously to the devil. As Lincoln puts it, "in Ephesians 2:2 good sense can be made of αἰών with a temporal force without having to resort to a reference to the god Aion."³⁵ The temporal use is the most common use of the term among early Christians, as we find in *Shepherd of Hermas*.³⁶ However, the temporal usage does not preclude spiritual activity in the cosmological framework. "The age of this world" would be perceived as a sphere in which divine activity in human affairs is still a reality. If we accept the consistent usage of the term in the NT and Ephesians then αἰών plausibly refers to the "human society and culture insofar as they oppose God in the present period before his kingdom comes in fullness."³⁷ To conduct oneself according to "the αἰών of this world" would be tantamount to following modes of conduct apart from God. As Arnold puts it, "the age of the world" is "organized evil in the form of peer pressure, ideologies, systems, and structures that provide us with a script of living life totally apart from God and his purposes."³⁸

Furthermore, κόσμος ("world") appears three times in Ephesians (1:4, 2:2, 2:12), two of which are in our passage of inquiry as the sphere of unbelievers outside

32. Best, *Ephesians*, 204.

33. Best, *Ephesians*, 204 and Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Epistle to the Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 90–92. Best provides a good summary of this particular view.

34. Markus Barth, *Ephesians* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 214. Cf. Thielman, *Ephesians*, 122–125, 128–130.

35. Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*. Word Biblical Commentary 42 (Waco, TX: Word, 1990), 95.

36. *Shepherd of Hermas* 66.2 and 77.3. It features here in the phrase ἐπιθυμίας τοῦ αἰῶνος ("desires of the age").

37. Peter S. Williamson, *Ephesians*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 57.

38. Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2010), 143.

the realm of Christ. Generally, κόσμος is perceived to have physical, spatial³⁹ and social⁴⁰ dimensions. The physical world is the ordered world or the earth, which is created by a divine agent (e.g. Zeus).⁴¹ According to Kahn, “Κόσμος in the social sphere may denote an arrangement of some particular kind, rather than good order in general. It is contrasted not only with anarchy and disorder, but with a constitution in which things are disposed otherwise.”⁴² The spatial dimension, often referred to as heaven(s), is the habitat of spirit beings such as angels, demons, spiritual powers, and the sphere from which they influence human affairs in the material world.⁴³ In this sphere, “[t]he universe and all individual creatures, the invisible and the visible, nature and history, humanity and the spirit world, are all brought under the single term κόσμος.”⁴⁴ The word is used earlier in Ephesians 1:4 to establish the *timing* or *timeline* of God’s salvific plan. God chose the readers/hearers not as an afterthought, but he preplanned their selection even before the foundation of the cosmos. However, the two additional senses of κόσμος have a negative connotation, referring to the sphere of life for unbelievers. Elsewhere, I have described this area of the semantic domain as follows: “It is the world in which [believers] once lived and the current domain of unbelievers (2:2). Spatially, it is dominated by the evil spiritual forces (2:1–3) and morally corrupted by disobedience and ungodly passions. It is also the arena of spiritual deprivation, alienation and hostility in 2:11–15.”⁴⁵

The phrase κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου denotes physical and social conditions within which humans conducted (περιπατέω, “to walk”) themselves prior to conversion. It refers to a world that is now subject to the κοσμοκράτωρ (“cosmic power,” Eph 6:12).⁴⁶ It was a common belief in the ancient world that “the *kosmos* is made up of the combination of raw, inert matter, and primal forces or potentials, which were often personified, at work within that matter.”⁴⁷ It is noteworthy that the portrait of the social, spiritual, and moral conditions of the age/world serves as an important backdrop to the essence of salvation. Here, there is no suggestion that

39. Sasse, “κοσμέω etc.,” *TDNT* III. 871–878.

40. C. H. Kahn, *Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 219–230. The word was also used for ‘adornment’ or ‘order.’

41. G. Johnson, “ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΗ and ΚΟΣΜΟΣ in the New Testament,” *NTS* 10 (1963/64): 352–355.

42. Kahn, *Anaximander*, 221.

43. Cf. Kahn, *Anaximander*, 227.

44. Sasse, κοσμέω etc. *TDNT* III.893.

45. D. K. Darko, “Spirit-Cosmology in the Identity and Community Construction of Ephesians 1–3,” *Pleroma* 15.1 (2013): 67.

46. The word κοσμοκράτωρ is a *hapax legomena* in the NT. The word features in the *PGM* in reference to spiritual beings (*PGM* III.35, IV.1599; XIII.620–640).

47. Chris Forbes, “Paul’s Demonology and/or Cosmology? Principalities, Powers and the Elements of the World in their Hellenistic Context,” *JSNT* 85 (2002): 55. Forbes indicates that the language for principalities and powers in Ephesians are found with similar connotations elsewhere in Philo, Plutarch, and other Greek literature (p. 71). Cf. Philo, *Pos Cain*, 20; *Gig*, 16–17; *Spec. Leg.* 1.66; *Plant.* 14; *Conf. Ling.* 171–175.

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unbelievers are experiencing cognitive dissonance or lacking the ability to choose (or not to choose) their salvation; rather they lived according to powerful social, moral, and mental conditions superintended by a spiritual force in the cosmos.

The second κατά phrase names the spiritual actor in the world of unbelievers. According to Ephesians, the pre-conversion life was conducted κατά τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος (“according to the ruler of the power of the air,” 2:2).⁴⁸ The ordinary meaning of ἄρχων (“ruler”) equates with a ruler or leader in English. It is sometimes used to refer to the devil as the head of all evil spirits, which is the sense it conveys here and elsewhere in the NT.⁴⁹ The general consensus is that “the ruler of the power of the air” refers to the devil or Satan.⁵⁰ This figure is also called “the ruler of demons”⁵¹ and “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31) elsewhere.⁵² Jesus Christ, the one exalted above all powers, is the instrument God used to liberate fallen humanity from the world controlled by the devil. The devil has not yet been eschatologically defeated at this point in salvation history, and neither has he been incapacitated and rendered powerless. Conversely, the devil remains active in power but has lost control over those who have experienced God’s salvation in Christ Jesus. The devil’s role in the life of human beings prior to and after becoming Christ followers must not, however, be underrated.⁵³

Post-enlightenment ostracizing of the devil in theological discourse departs from an early Christian cosmological framework. Human beings are not the center

48. Best, *Ephesians*, 202.

49. Williamson, *Ephesians*, 57. The NT also depicts this sphere as a place of darkness from which believers are saved (Matt 12:26; Acts 26:18; Col 1:13).

50. Timothy G. Gombis, “Ephesians 2 as a Narrative of Divine Warfare,” *JSNT* 26.4 (2004):410; R. H. Riensche, “Exegesis of Ephesians 2:1–7,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 2.1 (1950), 72; Paul D. Simmons, “The Grace of God and the Life of the Church—Ephesians 2,” *Review and Expositor* 76 (1976): 476.

51. Matt 9:34; 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15.

52. The preferred translation of ἄρχων consistently in these verses undermines the notion that this is the highest spiritual authority of all evil spirits. It must be translated with the usual meaning of ἄρχων as “ruler” or “leader.” Michael W. Holmes, ed., *Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007). Both Holmes and Lightfoot translate the word in Ignatius’ reference to τοῦ ἄρχοντος τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου as “Prince” (*Eph.* 17:1; 19:2; *Mag* 1:3). The prince is subordinate to the ruler (King, Queen etc.). Satan is the head, or the “most high” of evil spiritual powers, subordinate to none.

53. Best, *Ephesians*, 207. The notion that the devil exists and is capable of influencing human behavior has been unsettling for some scholars. This explains why evil or the devil is often demythologized and characterized in terms of social problems or socio-political woes. For example, Ernest Best could not resist such explanation when he opined that, “he (author of Ephesians) appears to be claiming that the life of pagan society is dominated not only by a personal will towards sin but also by supernatural forces driving it to evil. Such forces still exist, though we may not term them supernatural. They are the pressures of society, which if not wholly evil are not wholly good: poverty, upbringing and environment, genetic constitution, physical disability, economic decisions taken at a distance. These are wider than the spiritual atmosphere of a culture and they exercise a compulsion on those who are subject to them so that the end result may seem the same as for those who believe they are trapped by supernatural forces. Only those who wear the armor of God (6.12ff) can resist them,” 207.

of attention in God's salvific story. God is reclaiming the custody of his creatures, thereby empowering believers to mitigate the influence of malevolent forces and terminally frustrating their quest to sabotage human flourishing. A good standing with God involves a departure from living according to "the ruler of the power of the air." God's central role in salvation (Eph 2:4) is thus crucial to comprehending the conditions from which salvation ensues and the privileges it accords to be part of God's household vis-à-vis person-centered⁵⁴ soteriology. The author of Ephesians insists in later passages that Christ followers need to put on the full armor of God in the battle against evil spiritual powers that seek to undermine their ability to stand firm with God (Eph 6:11–14).⁵⁵ Ephesians goes as far as indicating that prolonged anger could provide a gateway (τόπος, "place") for diabolic influence (4:26–27). Members are therefore admonished to adhere to the praxis commensurate to their new identity and status with God.

The conception that the devil operates from the air, that is, the atmosphere, was commonplace in antiquity.⁵⁶ The ἀήρ ("air") is the unseen world from which the devil exercises dominion over human affairs.⁵⁷ For Philo, the air is the realm of the soul, demons, and other spiritual entities.⁵⁸ The spatial habitat of the devil in "the air" does not suggest that he has ceased to be active in the material world. On the contrary, the devil exercises dominion and influences human conduct at all levels (Eph 2:2). According to Ephesians, this is the spirit currently "at work in the sons of disobedience." Some scholars read this phrase as a further elaboration of the activity of "the ruler of the power of the air" and take "spirit" to be referring to the devil. Others posit that "spirit" in Ephesians 2:2 refers to the human spirit, which is the immaterial part of the person. It is important to note that neither of these readings negate the instrumentality of the devil. As Hoehner explains, "if 'spirit' refers to [the] immaterial or inward part of a person, then Paul is saying that the devil rules over [the] inward person, a function he now performs in the sons and daughters of disobedience."⁵⁹ I opine that the natural rendering is one that takes it as

54. Here I mean an emphasis on human ability to respond or not to respond, and the portrayal of salvation as a protocol that merely ushers individuals into a social network along with the benefit of a lifetime "visa" to heaven.

55. Paul T. Eckel, "Ephesians 6:10–20," *Interpretation* 45 (1991): 288–293; David Seale, "Ephesians 6:12: Struggling Against the Rulers, Against the Authorities," *Evangel* 14 (1996): 68–71 and Raymond Hobbs, "The Language of Warfare in the New Testament," in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social Scientific Studies of the New Testament in Its Context*, ed. Philip F. Essler (London: Routledge, 1995), 259–273. Eckel and Hobbs acknowledge the worldview in which spiritual forces existed and exerted influence in human affairs. Hobbs, however, casts doubt on the reality of evil spirits, questioning whether they existed in the imagination of ancient societies or if in fact they actually existed in reality.

56. Robinson, *Ephesians*, 49.

57. Cf. Plutarch, *Mor.* 274b and Diogenes Laertius *Vit. phil.* 8.32.

58. Philo, *On Dreams*, 1.134–135, 141.

59. Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 315.

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a qualifier or elaboration of the preceding clause. Clinton Arnold notes: “The devil is thus depicted as the ‘arch-power’ among a host of ‘powers’ sufficiently equipped to lead and keep individuals in a life of disobedience.”⁶⁰ “Sons of disobedience” is a Semitic expression denoting a people living in, or characterized by, woeful defiance or disobedience in their relationship with God.

Moreover, the phrase τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντος ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας (“the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,” Eph 2:2) implies that those who are spiritually “dead” live in a different sphere where they conduct themselves by the agency of an evil spirit. “Death,” then, denotes life that has ceased to be empowered by or rooted in relationship with God. The devil currently works in unbelievers as he once did in the lives of Christ followers. This statement explains the force behind the fleshly impulses, moral bankruptcy, and corrupt mindset associated with the pre-conversion past (Eph 2:3). In other words, a spiritual agent is partly responsible for engineering and energizing unbelievers in acts of rebellion against God. The idea that spirits could influence human conduct was commonplace in Greek, Roman, and Jewish antiquity. In this letter, vulgarity may aggrieve the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:29–30) whereas prolonged anger could engender exposure to diabolic influence (Eph 4:26–27). The Jewish author makes the inclusive assertion that this was the predicament of all human beings, including Jews.

The state from which people are saved by grace is not one that places the onus on individual ability or inability to respond to the Gospel (contra Augustine or Pelagius). The human condition is one that was subject to the “age of this world” and the control of the devil. Essentially, the “ruler of the power of the air” exercises dominion and works in unbelievers in a world where mental, physical (flesh/body), and moral sensibilities contradict the wishes of God. Thus, the verdict is that “they were by nature children of wrath” (Eph 2:3).

God’s Dramatic Intervention

The second half of the first sentence (Eph 2:1–7) provides an account of God’s gracious intervention instead of punitive retaliation. God counteracts the work of the devil and saves the readers both from the devil’s control and God’s own wrathful judgement (Eph 2:3). God assumes central stage as the main actor in the salvific story from here on. His initiative, motivation, and character are presented as a radical reversal of the conditions of the age and the causes being advanced by the devil, manifesting the riches of his mercy in redeeming love and grace. The imagery here is that of a supreme spiritual actor (God) overpowering a subordinate spiritual agent (the devil) in order to rescue enslaved subjects from unsavory conditions. Salvation ensues, more or less, as a custody battle over human lives among these two spiritual

60. Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 62.

agents. God demonstrates his power when he reaches out to save humans. Salvation, then, ushers in a new *modus vivendi* in the form of a loving relationship with God. Consequently, any deviation from life with God makes members susceptible to diabolic influence. For they are saved/called to a new identity and to the unity of the Spirit (Eph 4:1–3). Christian living is spiritual warfare that requires the full armor of God to mitigate the stratagems of the devil (Eph 6:10–17). Believers are not the center of attention in this story and neither could they have obtained salvation by any merit on their own. As Lincoln points out: “Just as humans contributed nothing to their own creation so also they contributed nothing to their new creation; both are God’s work.”⁶¹ They are God’s workmanship (ποίημα) “created in Christ Jesus for good works.”

The “dead” are resuscitated with vitality to share in the privileges of Christ; they are “saved” (Eph 2:5), “raised up” and “seated” in an exalted position with Christ (Eph 2:6). This is both initiated and executed by God. Salvation does not come about by human effort lest anyone should boast or lay claim to entitlement. God acted from the abundance (πλούσιος) of his mercy and “love” (τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην) to “save” a people under a guilty verdict who were liable to chastisement. That is, “His nature as a holy God warranted vengeance yet his wrath gave way to the deepest expression of his character in love (1 Jn 4:8).”⁶² The imagery is that of an injured victim going out of his way to reach out munificently and from a heart full of mercy to extend “love” to his own perpetrators. To be saved is to benefit from God’s rescue. Consequently, their very existence in solidarity as God’s community signals defeat to the principalities and powers in the heavenly realms (Eph 3:9–10). The “heavenly realms” here is not a place reserved to inhabit after death. It is rather the spatial dimension of the cosmos.⁶³ The word ἐπουράνιος (“heavenly”) appears consistently in the plural form in Ephesians to denote the locus of spiritual blessings (Eph 1:3), where Christ exercises his lordship (Eph 1:20), and here, as the sphere from which believers share in the exaltation of Christ (Eph 2:6). In Ephesians 3:10, ἐπουράνιος is the realm from which God’s manifold wisdom is made known to the powers through the existing church. The echoes of salvation as deliverance from and triumph over “the ruler of the power of the air” is strongly implied in the notion of believers’ exaltation with Christ in the heavenly realms.

61. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 114.

62. D. K. Darko, “What Does it Mean to be Saved? An African Reading of Ephesians 2,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 24 (2015): 50. Cf. Rom 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4, 5.

63. R. Martin Pope, “Of the Heavenly Places,” *Expository Times* 23 (1911–1912): 366 and Christopher J.A. Lash, “Where Do Devils Live? A Problem in the Textual Criticism of Ephesians 6:12,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 30 (1976): 161–174; Andrew T. Lincoln, “A Re-Examination of ‘the Heavens’ in Ephesians,” *NTS* 19 (1972/73): 468–483. These scholars suggest that ἐπουράνιος refers to the “celestial realm” or the “unseen world.” They do not necessarily equate ἐπουράνιος to eschatological hope and bliss in heaven.

By God's Grace—Not of Human Works

The condition of humanity under “the ruler of the power of the air” was radically altered as a result of God’s intervention. A subsequent change to the human disposition and condition occurred as effects of the new status owing to a better and much more powerful spiritual overlord. Human beings are now saved by and live under God’s headship in a kinship relationship. Ephesians 2:8–9, as one sentence, buttresses the point of divine agency; it came about as God’s initiative and grace extended to a people subject to and influenced by the devil. Salvation is a votive gift of God (Eph 2:8–9).⁶⁴ Unlike περιπατέω in Ephesians 2:2, here God is the one who gives those who are saved the ability to conduct themselves in a befitting manner (Eph 2:10), as if to say the previous way of life was a deviation from the creator’s design. In other words, ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς (“good works”) is antithetical to the previous way of life (Eph 2:2–3). The paragraph division of Ephesians 2:1–10 from 2:11–22 obscures the holistic portrait of conditions from which people are saved and the reality toward which they are saved.⁶⁵

The Devil's Defeat and the Emergence of God's New Community

The good works (ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς, Eph 2:10) associated with salvation are elucidated to the effect that they are exhibited in relationship with God and in mutuality with fellow believers. Prior social, moral, and mental conditions are reordered as converts become members of the household of God (οἰκεῖται τοῦ θεοῦ, Eph 2:19). Salvation ushers in future eschatological goals as believers experience the microcosm of life with God that will ultimately be realized at the macro scale in cosmic unification (Eph 1:9–10). This soteriological framework undercuts an escapist neglect of social and moral responsibilities in the hope for a better life in heaven after death. There is a direct continuum in what God is currently doing, the conduct of the “saved” and God’s ultimate goal (Eph 1:9–10). The church stands as the microcosm of God’s macro vision for the world. The inferential διό (“therefore,” Eph 2:11) recalls the conditions that necessitated God’s gracious act of salvation.⁶⁶ Gentiles were hitherto labeled verbally by Jews as the uncircumcised “other,” those who lived apart from the messianic promises and a people without a relationship with the true God (Eph 2:11–22). Socially, they were stereotyped as the excluded “other” from τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ (“the commonwealth of Israel”).⁶⁷ According to Jewish social

64. Cf. Demosthenes, *Cor.* 18: 109; Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.*, 55.5.

65. Darko, “What Does it Mean to be Saved?,” 44–56. I made this case in this article where I also challenged the notion of individual-centered soteriology in modern western theological reasoning.

66. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 135. The OT shows a similar pattern where God’s people recall precedence as the basis for conduct in the present and/or future (e.g. Exod 12:14; 1 Cor 11:25).

67. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 137.

demarcations, they were strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope and ἄθεος (“without God”) in the world.⁶⁸ The term ἄθεος denotes ignorance or lack of insight into the character of the true God, not atheism. Roman literature⁶⁹ and Josephus⁷⁰ (in reference to Jews) similarly employed ἄθεος as a descriptor for those who abstained from fundamental religious obligations or rites that were important to the community as a whole.

The opening of Ephesians 2:13 with νυνὶ δέ (“but now”) contrasts ποτέ (“at one time”) in Ephesians 2:11 to make another dramatic reversal from the pre-conversion past to the current standing with God. The ποτέ – νυνὶ δέ formula was previously utilized in Ephesians 2:2–3 to distinguish the past of Christ followers from the current state of unbelievers. It is instructive that there, ποτέ was associated with social conditions and diabolic activity (Eph 2:2), followed by the contrasting δέ (Eph 2:4) to indicate God’s intervention. Here, the clause νυνὶ δέ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ὑμεῖς οἱ ποτε ὄντες μακρὰν ἐγενήθητε ἐγγὺς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“but now in Christ Jesus you who were at one time far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ,” Eph 2:13) contrasts the previous condition marked by sin—distancing from God—and alienation to indicate the means by which they were brought near, namely in (or by) the blood of Christ. God is the implied subject who brought them near, and Christ is the means by which he carried that out. Christ is the embodiment of peace, who broke down the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles. Ephesians 2:13–18 is full of powerful descriptors underscoring the role of Christ in bringing God’s plan into effect. In fact, this framework of salvation finds echoes in other NT correspondences associated with Asia Minor. For example, 1 John captures this idea in the line, “whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8 ESV).

It is noteworthy that in Ephesians 2 “reconciliation” occurs between people and God, that is, the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles to God and not inter-ethnic reconciliation. Christ followers are reconciled to God through Christ. Believers are not being admonished to unite in a church plagued with divisions. The issue is fundamentally salvific in nature; it is about their initiation into the community of faith and what that entails. Consequently, to belong to the new community is to become a member of the multi-ethnic household of God. Ethnic differences are not absorbed or obliterated; rather the church is made up of an amalgam of people from various ethnic or racial backgrounds.⁷¹ When people found new life with Christ, there ceased

68. The plural τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας (“the covenants of the promise”) may be an allusion to repeated covenants and accompanied promises between Yahweh and his people (cf. Gen 15:7–21; 17:1–21; 26:2–5; 28:13–15; Exod 24:1–8; 2 Sam 7).

69. Margaret Y. MacDonald, “The Politics of Identity in Ephesians,” *JSNT* 26.4 (2004): 430.

70. Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.146–149.

71. See Benjamin H. Dunning, “Strangers and Aliens No Longer: Negotiating Identity and Difference in Ephesians 2,” *HTR* 99.1 (2006): 16. This point is made rather forcefully by Dunning.

Daniel K. Darko: *'The Ruler of the Power of the Air' in the Salvific Story of Ephesians 2* to be room for social distancing, stereotyping, and religious prejudice in the ingroup. Christ came to preach peace to those far and near so that they may have access “in one Spirit to one Father” (Eph 2:18).⁷² Lincoln asserts: “Access to God as Father through Christ and in the Spirit is the ground of the peace proclaimed to both Jews and Gentiles, but it is also true that the exercise of this new privilege by both groups in the one Spirit is the sign of the peace between them.”⁷³ The triune God works in concert to bring about this new life with horizontal and vertical ramifications—members gain access to the Father in one Spirit by the instrumentality of Christ, and consequently they are able to live at peace with one another in the community of faith (cf. John 10:10). Solidarity in the ingroup resulting from salvation is quite different from the notion of salvation espoused in liberation theologies. The scope is narrowed to ingroup mutuality that is supposed to serve as a witness even to the “principalities and powers” (Eph 3:9–10).

Saved to Belong to the Household of God

Salvation transfers members from the domain of “the ruler of the power of the air” (cf. Col 1:13–14) to a true relationship with God. Gentiles are no longer ξένοι (strangers) and πάροικοι (resident aliens)⁷⁴ in relationship to God. As explained elsewhere,

The term ξένοι refers to *immigration status* in relation to the *polis* whereas the second πάροικοι implies temporary status in a family home (one who does not have a permanent place in the household) . . . the author is here prompting a new self-understanding and awareness of an important change of status that ushers gentiles into a new relationship with Jews in the household of God (5.5).⁷⁵

Unity is not uniformity. Appreciation of difference is a moral necessity for Christ followers then and now.

72. Another way of explaining this would be that Christians or others who struggle to embrace other people groups do so for lack of a relationship with God.

73. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 150.

74. See Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 150. As a black native of Ghana who has spent about half on my life among whites in Croatia, England, and the United States, I find ethnic differentiation in America to be particularly instructive. Despite being a citizen of the United States, my white friends and external family members who know I am a citizen would often prefer to introduce me as a Ghanaian when we meet other white Americans. Implicit bias becomes apparent in the assumptions and stereotypes of interlocutors, as they subtly demarcate between “them” and “me.” In the case of Ephesians, Gentiles were in their homeland, yet diaspora Jews stereotyped them in vitriolic parlance and treated them as the “other” on religious and ethno-racial grounds. However, salvation in Christ Jesus abrogates these differences and accords shared identity in God’s polis and belonging in his household.

75. D.K. Darko, “Adopted Siblings in the Household of God: Kinship Lexemes in the Social Identity Construction of Ephesians” in *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament*, ed. J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 340.

Salvation offers a new status as συμπολίται τῶν ἁγίων (“fellow citizens with the saints”) and belonging into οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ (“members of the household of God”) with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto. All previous social and religious appeals to differentiation have been abrogated in Christ. The relational tone of solidarity is antithetical to the social disparities of the pre-conversion past (Eph 2:2; 2:11–14). Jew and Gentile believers are not only sharers in the privileges of Christ (Eph 2:6), but equal members in the household of God (Eph 2:19). The use of an architectural metaphor⁷⁶ further underlines the integrity of the apostolic and prophetic foundation undergirding God’s new community, which is solidified by Christ who is the metaphorical cornerstone (or keystone) of the edifice,⁷⁷ namely the church.⁷⁸ It is in Christ that all the constituent parts join together and grow to become a Holy Temple (Eph 2:21), where God would make his dwelling (Eph 2:22).

Conclusion

Ephesians 2 portrays the human condition prior to God’s intervention as a domain under a spiritual overlord called “the ruler of the power of the air.” Human conduct therein is described as that which was lived according to the “age,” in rebellion against God’s design for humanity. The devil controls living conditions, personal lives, and subordinate spiritual forces in this domain. It is not only the state of persons enslaved by or living in sin, but also a people subject to the spiritual control of the devil. They live according to the whims of the “the ruler of the power of the air”—a spiritual agent that currently works in and among unbelievers. Thus, Satan exercises dominion over the domain outside of Christ and he operates in the lives of the people. Subjects follow the passions of their flesh with unrestrained impulses along with corrupt mindsets (Eph 2:3; 4:18–19).

Salvation ensues as a release from the dominion of “the ruler of the power of the air” and the realm in which he exercises control. This is not total defeat of the devil, but the deliverance of people who were subject to his control in order that they might belong to the household of God, the domain where God presides. Though human beings are trespassers deserving punitive retaliation, God showed immense mercy, love, and grace in saving believers from their wretched condition. Salvation transfers subjects of diabolic influence to the realm where God reigns. The change of spiritual overlord then leads to a radical change in regard to identity (Eph 4:24),

76. Barth, *Ephesians*, 270–271. The origin of the architectural metaphor is a debated matter among some scholars. Some find allusion to the tower of Babel, the Jerusalem Temple, or the construction of a royal palace. Building metaphors were commonplace in the ancient world. I do not think that it is necessary to determine the exact referent in order to follow the point here.

77. Herschel H. Hobbs, *New Men in Christ* (Waco, TX: Word, 1974), 51. See more discussion on the import of the keystone or cornerstone relative to the integrity of a building structure.

78. Cf. Arthur G. Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 202. See Mark 12:10; 1 Peter 2:7; and Acts 4:11.

Daniel K. Darko: *'The Ruler of the Power of the Air' in the Salvific Story of Ephesians 2* mindset (Eph 4:17–19; 4:23–24) and group dynamics (Eph 2:15–22). The readers could have done nothing on their own to attain their current standing with God; they were “dead in trespasses and sins.” However, salvation renders the ability to exhibit good deeds that God had prepared beforehand for them (Eph 2:10).

Consequently, God’s saving grace makes it possible for Christ followers to participate in God’s vision for the cosmos—to ultimately unite all things under Christ (Eph 1:9–10). The effect is immediate and ought to be evident among Christ followers in Asia Minor. Life with God ought to impact life with fellow members in concrete ways (Eph 4:24). Spiritually, people are saved, reconciled to God, and belong to the household of God, barring all ties to the “ruler of the power of the air.” Social and mental demarcations between “us” and “them” have been nullified in Christ Jesus. The labelling, stereotyping, and social distancing of the former evil realm have given way to a shared identity with Christ as members of God’s household. Moreover, members of the body—both Jew and Gentile—can no longer live to satisfy the impulses of their flesh, their corrupt mindset, and the cravings of their physical bodies (Eph 2:3; 4:17–19). The salvific story of Ephesians 2 sets God’s vision of cosmic unification in motion among God’s people. Living as a Christ follower is not a life reserved for life after death. Conversely, it is the new life that God makes possible in current relationship with him and with fellow members who were hitherto branded the outside “other” in vitriolic terms. In this frame, the only basis for which people would have problems with fellow members would be due to the fact that they fundamentally lack a good relationship with God. God opens believers’ eyes, hearts, and minds to see other people as bearers of his image and equal beneficiaries of his grace.

The “ruler of the power of the air” is not dormant in relation to Christ followers. The unfolding mystery of God’s salvific plan dealt a big blow to the workings of the cosmic powers. It is in that vein that the unification of Jews and Gentiles heralds defeat to the principalities and powers (Eph 3:9–10). However, believers need to be aware of who they have become and the spiritual covering that they have in God. The forces of evil continue to lurk in the lives of believers, exploring avenues of moral failings and disbelief as opportunities to negatively influence their standing with God. Thus, a good self-awareness, dependence on God, and dedication to sound morality are imperative to mitigate diabolic influence.

The issue here is not the individual person but a condition in which people find themselves. Diabolic control impacts human ability and sensibilities in a variety of ways. In salvation, God redeems people into a realm of his reign where members are free to live in righteousness. They are now able to develop right mental attitudes and, by disciplining the passions, deal cordially with fellow members. Escapist eschatology, individualistic soteriology, or salvation in the frame of social activism may only have partial correlation to what we find in Ephesians. Analogies are usually incomplete but perhaps my analogy here may help vivify the Ephesian portrait

of salvation to some extent. Imagine a group of people in prison under difficult conditions. They are confined even if they do enjoy occasional freedom during mealtime, games, or if they are allowed to use the prison library. In all of these cases, however, they are still incarcerated. True freedom comes when they get out of jail and live normal lives in society. Until then, prison officers represent the government in exercising control over their lives while the facility serves as their dwelling place.

Imagine “the ruler of the power of the air” and his agents controlling the lives of unbelievers. The moral failings, corrupt mindset, and inter-ethnic disparities are not the *cause* of their condition but *symptoms* of a life being lived according to “the age of the world.” The spiritual overlord determines people’s conditions, but God’s salvation releases the imprisoned and accords them permanent membership in his household through Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 1:5). The Holy Spirit seals (Eph 1:13–14), empowers (Eph 1:17; 2:18) and fills (Eph 5:18–21) Christ followers to be able to conduct themselves in a manner that befits their calling (Eph 4:1–3). Salvation is, however, incomplete until the believer is freed from the control of the “ruler of the power of the air,” the spirit now at work in the “sons of disobedience.”

Ephesians espouses a salvific concept that places the devil as a primary opponent of God’s work in his creation. To relegate the devil to the background, relative to salvation, is to ostracize the main figure that is being dealt with in the salvific story. While post-enlightenment philosophy and scientific advancement continue to promote anti-supernaturalism, readers of Ephesians must interpret this letter in its own terms and worldview. The interpreter may not share the worldview of the letter, but academic integrity requires that good analysis be devoid of anachronism. According to Ephesians, the devil and his forces seek to undermine the relationship believers have with God. Evil spiritual forces are real threats requiring the utmost vigilance and preparedness to guard against their schemes (Eph 4:26–27; 6:10–17). In a nutshell, “the ruler of the power of air” does not have a stronghold over Christ followers but he exerts control over unbelievers until they find salvation in Christ Jesus.