

## “You shall receive Power”

### Introduction

In order to understand a passage in the Bible correctly, the question must be asked: what did it mean to the readers to whom it was first written? Other passages in Scripture that relate to the same topic, must also be consulted – Scripture must be allowed to explain Scripture. Unfortunately, traditional preconceived ideas have influenced the way in which certain passages in the Bible have been interpreted. The way in which the word “power” in **Acts 1:8** is sometimes understood, is a good example of this.

### Power

*“But you will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (**Acts 1:8**, my emphasis).*

Usually the power referred to in this passage is explained and understood in terms of the imagery associated with dynamite. This is done because the word dynamite is derived from the word *dunamis*, which in the Greek text is translated as “power.” With the force of dynamite in mind, the power of the Holy Spirit spoken of in **Acts 1:8** is usually associated with dramatic miracles. There is something basically wrong, though, with this comparison. What must be remembered is the fact that ages before dynamite was invented by Alfred Noble in 1866, the Greek word *dunamis* had already been in use. To get a better understanding of what the word “power” (*dunamis*) means, one must not look at the modern meaning and usage of the word “dynamite,” but at the meaning of *dunamis* as it was originally understood in New Testament Greek.

### The two meanings of *dunamis*

According to Greek dictionaries the word *dunamis* can have two meanings.

**Dunamis:** “...power, especially inherent power...intrinsic power, **either physical or moral...**”  
1411 – *The Complete Word Study Dictionary – New Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, my emphasis.

According to the dictionary, *dunamis* can mean to have the power to do extraordinary things, but it can also mean to have the ability “to be.” Which one of these two meanings is the most suitable to fit into the context of **Acts 1:8**? I am of the opinion that there are Scriptural reasons why the traditional understanding of the word to mean to have the ability to do extraordinary miracles, should be questioned.

Long before the fulfilment of the promise in **Acts 2** to receive power, the disciples already had the ability to heal the sick and to drive out demons (**Matt. 10:8, Luke 10**). These same disciples, though, had to go and wait in Jerusalem for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to receive something more. The power that they were promised to receive had to be something different from the ability they already had to do miracles by healing the sick and driving out demons. Furthermore, it must be kept in mind that miracles did not start

happening with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit – they were common in the Old Testament; even Balaam’s donkey, as far back as **Numbers 22:28**, received the ability to speak in a language! Nobody would, by looking at this miracle, make the deduction that the animal was filled with the Holy Spirit. Men like Samson and David were familiar with the power of God which enabled them to do mighty feats, but they were prone to weakness when faced with sexual temptation (**Jud. 14:19, 2 Sam. 11**).

The fact that God still enables believers to do extraordinary things, is not questioned, but the ability to do miracles says nothing about the moral character of a person. The operation of the Gifts of the Spirit are just proof of the grace of God and that is why they are called gifts. There is a difference between being used by God as an instrument (think of the donkey) and being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ which involves obedience to His teachings.

### **Power for witnessing**

*“...when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, **you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me...**” (Acts 1:8, my emphasis).*

### **What “power” is required to be an effective witness?**

Paul had to write to the Corinthians to correct their wrong idea of power and also to admonish them because of immorality in the congregation. He also addressed the problem concerning the abuse of the Gifts of the Spirit in their meetings (**1 Cor. 4-14**).

About power he had the following to say to them:

*“For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power (dunamis).”*

The Amplified Bible brings out a clearer understanding of this power, it describes it as

*“moral power and excellence of soul” (1 Cor. 4:19-20).*

With this definition in mind the meaning of other passages also become clearer:

**Phil. 4:13:** *“I have the strength **to face all conditions** by the **power** that Christ gives me” (GNB, my emphasis).*

**(power: endunamo** – “to strengthen, to make strong, vigorous...” *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*).

**2 Cor. 12:9:** *“And he hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for **my power (dunamis)** is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that **the power of Christ** may rest upon me”(My emphasis).*

This power that had been unknown to past generations before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, had now been revealed and was described by Paul as being:

*“Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:25-27).*

## **Conclusion**

Rather than comparing the power of the Holy Spirit with dynamite, it would be more appropriate to compare it with a dynamo. The Holy Spirit as the Helper is there to generate “electricity” to strengthen us to face and endure all conditions and circumstances.

A one-sided understanding of the power of the Holy Spirit has contributed to the fact that the development of the fruit of the Spirit, which is so important in order to be an effective witness, has been neglected in many lives. Seeking external manifestations as signs of the power of the Holy Spirit, instead emphasising moral strength, has led to the downfall of many gifted men and women.

Miracles and signs can be counterfeited by the enemy, therefore taken on their own, they serve as no proof of the power of the Holy Spirit. The development of moral integrity and purity of soul, on the other hand, are qualities that are dependent on the inner working of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

Especially in times of adversity it is the one thing that we need and that we should pray for – to be strengthened in the inner man by the power of the Holy Spirit.

*“We ask our God to make you worthy of the life he has called you to live. May he fulfil **by his power** all your desire for goodness and complete your work of faith” (2 Thess.1:11).*

**Nick Maartens**  
**Jeffreys Bay**  
**0827826074**  
**E-mail: [nickmaartens@hotmail.com](mailto:nickmaartens@hotmail.com)**