

PETRUS J. GRÄBE

The Power of God in Paul's Letters

Second Edition

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zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

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Mohr Siebeck

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123



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To My Wife
Rachel

Vorwort zur zweiten Auflage¹

Gott hat Macht.

Die paulinische Theologie ist von der Ohmacht des Gekreuzigten geprägt. An der Schande von Golgatha hatte Saulus Anstoß genommen, ihr weicht er als Apostel nicht aus, weil Gott diesen Jesus, der einen verfluchten Tod hat sterben müssen, von den Toten auferweckt und „in“ ihm offenbart hat, dass er ihn den Völkern als Gottes rettendes Wort verkünde.

Gott hat Macht.

Sein Wort erreicht die Grenzen der Erde: Gebildete und Ungebildete, Griechen und Barbaren, Juden und Heiden, Sklaven und Freie, Männer und Frauen. Gottes Evangelium hat die Kraft, Menschenleben zu retten; es hat sie durch Menschen, die den Glauben verkünden und selbst glaubwürdig sind, weil sie sich von Gott gesandt wissen und mit all ihrer begrenzten Kraft dieser Sendung treu bleiben.

Gott hat Macht

Seine Kraft kommt in Schwachheit zur Vollendung. Gottes Macht muss die Menschen in all ihrer Weisheit, all ihrem Lebenswillen, all ihrer Stärke an ihre Grenzen führen und darüber hinaus, um ihnen die ganze Fülle seiner Gnade zu schenken.

Gott ist Liebe.

Der Satz aus dem Ersten Johannesbrief (1Joh 4,8.16) würde bestens zu Paulus passen: Gott *hat* Macht, aber er *ist* nicht Macht; doch er hat Liebe, wie er Liebe *ist*. Wäre allerdings seine Liebe nur guter Wille, könnte sie keine Hoffnung begründen. Nur wenn der Allgütige auch der Allmächtige ist, um es traditionell auszudrücken, können Schuld und Tod vergeben und überwunden werden.

Petrus Gräbe hat eine Monographie geschrieben, die dem Motiv der Kraft Gottes in den Paulusbriefen gewidmet ist. Er wirft auch einen Blick auf die

¹ An English translation follows after this German preface.

Paulusschule und das lukanische Doppelwerk; aber er konzentriert sich auf die paulinischen Hauptbriefe an die Korinther und die Römer. Als guter Exeget, der sein Handwerk versteht, geht er den Text entlang und von den sicheren Belegen aus. Aber er weiß von Anfang an um die Brisanz seiner Studie: Der Kreuzesprediger Paulus – soll er eine Theologie der Macht vertreten? Der christusfromme Apostel – soll er substantiell zur Rede von Gott beitragen? Der Missionar der Agape – soll er der „Power“ huldigen?

Petrus Gräbe gibt auf diese Fragen erhellende Antworten. Ihm ist mit seiner Monographie ein mehrfacher Brückenschlag gelungen.

Die Entstehung der Dissertation verbindet die südafrikanische Heimat mit der akademischen Szene in Deutschland; die zweite Auflage schlägt den Bogen über den Atlantik: von Nordamerika nach Europa und zurück. Das ist für die Paulusforschung höchst bedeutsam, die zwischen soziologischen und anthropologischen, religionswissenschaftlichen und theologischen Deutungsmustern einen Weg der interkonfessionellen, interdisziplinären und interkontinentalen Verständigung suchen muss. Karl Kertelge und Ferdinand Hahn, Graham Stanton und Christopher Rowland, Alexander Wedderburn und Jörg Frey haben das Werden der Studie gefördert, die Andrie du Toit angeregt und promoviert hat. In Pretoria liegen die Wurzeln; Münster und München sind Studienorte und Forschungsstätten, die der Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst dem Stipendiaten aufgeschlossen hat; Virginia Beach ist das gegenwärtige Wirkungsfeld des Lehrers und Forschers.

Das Buch verbindet Exegese und Hermeneutik. Die Basis bildet die philologische Analyse; das Ziel ist die theologische Klärung. Der Autor arbeitet drei wesentliche Bedeutungsdimensionen heraus: die theologisch-christologische, die pneumatologische und die ekklesiologische – in dieser signifikanten Reihenfolge.

Petrus Gräbe hat eine nicht nur exegetisch, sondern auch ökumenisch erhellende Arbeit vorgelegt. Seine Prägung durch reformierte Traditionen leugnet er nicht; die Begegnung mit katholischer Theologie in der Münsteraner Fakultät hat ihn inspiriert; seine Sympathie mit der Pfingstbewegung lässt ihn die Ekklesiologie von der Apostolatstheologie her begreifen, die sich im „Erweis des Geistes und der Kraft“ (1Kor 2,4) verwirklicht.

Konsequente Exegese wird zur Biblischen Theologie. Gottes Kraft im Licht des Todes und der Auferstehung Jesu vom Wehen des Geistes her zu verstehen, wie Paulus es vorgibt, ist elementare Trinitätstheologie. Mit dieser These

endet Petrus Gräbes Dissertation und beginnt eine neue Gesprächsrunde über die Macht der Liebe, das Wirken des Geistes und den universalen Heilswillen Gottes in Jesus Christus.

Juli 2008
Ruhr-Universität Bochum

Thomas Söding

Preface to the Second Edition¹

God is powerful.

Pauline theology is shaped by the powerlessness of the Crucified. Saul was offended by the shame of Golgotha. As apostle he, however, did not evade this shame, because God raised this Jesus, who had to die a cursed death and revealed in him that the apostle would preach Jesus to all peoples as God's saving word.

God is powerful.

His word reaches the ends of the earth: Educated and uneducated, Greeks and barbarians, Jews and heathen, slaves and free people, men and women. God's gospel has the power to save human lives; a power that becomes a reality through human beings, who proclaim the faith and who are trustworthy themselves, because they know they have been sent by God and remain faithful to this mission with all their power, limited though it may be.

God is powerful.

His power is made perfect in weakness. God's power must lead people in all their wisdom, in their desire to live, in all their strength to the limits of their existence and beyond, in order to bestow on them the fullness of his grace.

God is love.

The statement from the First Letter of John (1 John 4,8.16) is most relevant to Paul: God has love, because he *is* love. If his love were only a positive attitude, it could not have established hope. Only when the One who is all-loving is also all-powerful, to state it in traditional terms, can guilt and death be forgiven and overcome.

Petrus Gräbe wrote a monograph, devoted to the theme of God's power in the letters of Paul. He also gave an overview of the remaining Corpus Paulinum and the two writings of Luke (the Gospel and Acts). He focused, however, on the main letters of Paul to the Corinthians and to the Romans. As a good

¹ Translated: PJG

exegete, who understands his trade, he finds his point of departure in the text and in the most certain and important instances in which the concept of power occurs. From the beginning, however, he is aware of the explosive force of his study: Paul the messenger of the cross – would he support a theology of power? The Christ-devoted apostle – would he contribute substantially to the discourse about God? The missionary of “agape” – would he render homage to “power”?

Petrus Gräbe sheds light on these questions. He succeeded in his monograph to forge several links.

The emergence of this dissertation linked his South African home country with the academic scene in Germany; the second edition reaches over the Atlantic: from North America to Europe and back. This is very significant for Pauline research, which has to find between sociological and anthropological, science of religions and theological models of interpretation a way to interconfessional, interdisciplinary and intercontinental understanding. Karl Kertelge and Ferdinand Hahn, Graham Stanton and Christopher Rowland, Alexander Wedderburn and Jörg Frey have all contributed to this study. Andrie du Toit suggested the theme and was supervisor for this doctoral dissertation. In Pretoria lie the roots; Münster and Munich were places of study and research, enabled by scholarships from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). Virginia Beach is the present field of activity of this teacher and researcher.

The book connects exegesis and hermeneutics. Textual analysis forms the basis; the goal is theological exploration. The author explores three essential dimensions of meaning: the theological-christological, the pneumatological and the ecclesiological – in this significant order.

Petrus Gräbe has not only shed light on exegetical issues in this study, but it also has a significant ecumenical dimension. He does not deny his formation through Reformed traditions; the encounter with Catholic theology at the University of Münster inspired him; his sympathy with the Pentecostal movement led him to understand ecclesiology from the perspective of the theology of the Apostle, which realizes itself in “a demonstration of the Spirit’s power” (1 Cor 2,4, NIV).

Rigorous exegesis becomes biblical theology. To understand God’s power in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus from the blowing of the Spirit, as Paul presents it, is basic Trinitarian theology. With this thesis ends Petrus

Gräbe's dissertation and begins a new round of conversation about the power of love, the work of the Spirit and God's intention of universal salvation in Jesus Christ.

16 July 2008
Ruhr-Universität Bochum

Thomas Söding

Acknowledgements

In its present form this work is a revised and extended version of my doctoral dissertation, “*Δύναμις* in the Sense of Power in the Main Pauline Letters”, which was accepted by the Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, in November 1990. It is a privilege to express due acknowledgement and appreciation to the following people for their invaluable assistance in the completion of this study.

I would like to convey my sincere gratitude to Professor A B du Toit, who suggested this important topic to me, for his scholarly guidance.

Major portions of this monograph were completed during the year spent in residence at the “Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität” in Münster. I am especially indebted to Professor Karl Kertelge who, in many ways, showed personal interest in my work. During a sabbatical in Cambridge, Professor Graham Stanton offered valuable suggestions in the preparation of the final manuscript. I would also like to acknowledge Professor Christopher Rowland for his contribution to this research during a short visit to Oxford, as well as Professor Alexander Wedderburn, Professor Jörg Frey and Professor Ferdinand Hahn for their interest in this theme during my stay in Munich.

Furthermore, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the “Association of Commonwealth Universities” (ACU) and the “German Academic Exchange Service” (DAAD) which made my research in Cambridge and Munich possible. I would also like to acknowledge my own institution, the University of South Africa (UNISA), which gave me the opportunity to complete this research project, and would like to convey my gratitude to Mrs Kay Du Plessis, Mr Willem Oliver and Rev Du Toit van der Merwe for their assistance in editing the manuscript and preparing the indexes.

Finally, I would like to thank Professor Martin Hengel for accepting this study in the series “Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament”.

In appreciation of her constant encouragement and support, I dedicate this study to my wife, Rachel.

May 2000
Pretoria

Petrus Gräbe

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
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Section A: A Lexico- and Conceptual-historical Overview of the Concept of Power

1. The Hellenistic (profane Greek) use of δύναμις	11
1.1 All areas of life — especially physical	11
1.2 Δύναμις as world principle	12
1.3 Δύναμις as religious concept	13
1.4 Magic and healing	13
1.5 The question of a power of salvation	15
2. Old Testament background (with special reference to the use of δύναμις in the sense of power in the Septuagint)	17
2.1 Introduction	17
2.2 The theological use of δύναμις in the Septuagint	18
2.2.1 In praise of the Lord's power as it was manifested during the Exodus	19
2.2.2 God as the power of those who trust in him	20
2.3 Δύναμις related to glory (δόξα), wisdom (σοφία) and salvation (σωτηρία)	21
2.4 The dimension of power in the Old Testament message concerning the Spirit of God	21
2.4.1 The רוח representing God or his character	21
2.4.2 The רוח as the power of God enabling individuals to perform a specific task	22
2.4.2.1 The leaders	22
2.4.2.2 The רוח as the source of prophetism	23
2.4.2.3 The future king of salvation	23
2.4.3 The רוח יהוה and creation as well as recreation	24
3. Concepts of power in early Judaism	27
3.1 Introduction	27
3.2 Eschatological emphases	28
3.3 Power and the essence of God	29
3.4 The question of saving power in early Judaism	29
4. Philo	31
5. Qumran and the power of God	33

6. Concluding remarks	36
-----------------------------	----

Section B: An Exegetical Investigation of the Concept of God's Power in Paul's Letters

7. 1 Corinthians 1,18.24; 2,4.5.....	43
7.1 Location within the macrocontext of 1 Corinthians	43
7.2 Discourse analysis: 1 Corinthians 1,18—2,5	45
7.2.1 A few notes on the structure of this pericope with special reference to actants and structural markers	47
7.2.1.1 Structural markers (and actants) occurring throughout this pericope	47
7.2.1.2 Structural markers/actants occurring only in specific parts of this pericope.....	49
7.2.1.3 Division into sub-pericopes	50
7.3 Textual criticism.....	50
7.4 An exegetical overview	51
7.4.1 Introduction	51
7.4.2 Sub-pericope A (1 Cor 1,18—25)	54
7.4.2.1 1 Corinthians 1,18—19.....	54
7.4.2.2 1 Corinthians 1,20—25.....	55
7.4.3 Sub-pericope B (1 Cor 1,26—31)	59
7.4.4 Sub-pericope C (1 Cor 2,1—5)	61
7.4.4.1 Introduction.....	61
7.4.4.2 1 Corinthians 2,1—3.....	62
7.4.4.3 1 Corinthians 2,4—5.....	63
7.5 Conclusion.....	65
8. 1 Corinthians 4,19—20	67
9. 1 Corinthians 5,4	71
10. 1 Corinthians 15,43.....	75
10.1 Location within the macrocontext of 1 Corinthians	75
10.2 Discourse analysis: 1 Corinthians 15,42—49.....	76
10.2.1 A few notes on the structure of the pericope.....	77
10.3 An exegetical overview	78
10.4 Conclusion.....	82
11. 1 Corinthians 15,56.....	83
11.1 Conclusion.....	85
12. 2 Corinthians 4,7	86
12.1 Introduction	86
12.2 Location within the macrocontext of 2 Corinthians 1—9	87
12.3 Discourse analysis: 2 Corinthians 4,7—5,10	88
12.3.1 A few notes pertaining to the structure of 2 Corinthians 4,7—5,10, with special reference to actants and structural markers	91
12.4 An exegetical overview	94

12.4.1	Introduction	94
12.4.2	Sub-pericope A (2 Cor 4,7—12)	95
12.4.3	Sub-pericope B (2 Cor 4,13—15)	102
12.4.4	Sub-pericope C (2 Cor 4,16—18)	103
12.4.5	Sub-pericope D (2 Cor 5,1—5)	106
12.4.6	Sub-pericope E (2 Cor 5,6—10)	113
12.5	Summary and conclusion	116
13.	2 Corinthians 6,7	120
13.1	Location within the macrocontext of 2 Corinthians, as well as delimitation of the pericope	120
13.2	Discourse analysis: 2 Corinthians 6,3—10	122
13.2.1	A few notes pertaining to the structure of this pericope	123
13.3	An exegetical overview	123
13.4	Conclusion	130
14.	2 Corinthians 12,9	132
14.1	Location within the macrocontext of 2 Corinthians 10—13	132
14.2	Discourse analysis: 2 Corinthians 11,16—12,10	133
14.2.1	A few notes pertaining to the structure of this pericope	136
14.3	Textual criticism: 2 Corinthians 12,9	138
14.4	An exegetical overview: Christ's power in 2 Corinthians 12,9	139
14.4.1	Introduction	139
14.4.2	The Lord's answer to Paul's pleading	144
15.	2 Corinthians 13,4	150
15.1	Location within the macrocontext of 2 Corinthians 10—13	150
15.2	Discourse analysis: 2 Corinthians 13,1—4	150
15.2.1	A few notes on the structure of 2 Corinthians 13,1—4	151
15.3	An exegetical overview	152
16.	Romans 1,4	158
16.1	Location within the macrocontext of Romans	158
16.2	Discourse analysis: Romans 1,1—7	160
16.2.1	A few observations suggested by the discourse analysis	161
16.3	An exegetical overview	162
	<i>Excursus:</i> Interpretation of the phrase <i>πνεῦμα ἁγιοσύνης</i>	164
16.4	Conclusion	169
17.	Romans 1,16	170
17.1	Location within the broader context	170
17.2	Discourse analysis: Romans 1,8—17	172
17.2.1	A few notes pertaining to the structure of this pericope	173
17.3	Textual criticism: Romans 1,16—17	175
17.4	More detailed exegesis: Romans 1,16—17	176
17.4.1	Gospel (<i>εὐαγγέλιον</i>) — power of God (<i>δύναμις θεοῦ</i>) — righteousness of God (<i>δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ</i>)	180
17.5	Conclusion	182
18.	Romans 1,20	183
18.1	Location within the macrocontext of Romans	183

18.2	Discourse analysis: Romans 1,18—21a.....	184
18.2.1	A few notes pertaining to the structure of Romans 1,18—21a.....	184
18.3	Exegetical perspectives	185
18.4	Conclusion.....	188
19.	Romans 15,13.....	189
19.1	Location within the macrocontext of Romans.....	189
19.2	Discourse analysis: Romans 15,1—13	190
19.2.1	A few notes pertaining to the structure of Romans 15,1—13 with special reference to actants and structural markers	191
19.3	An exegetical overview	193
19.3.1	Verses 1—3a (colons 1—3)	193
19.3.2	Verses 3b—4 (colons 4—5)	194
19.3.3	Verses 5—6 (colon 6)	195
19.3.4	Verses 7—9a (colons 7—8)	196
19.3.5	Verses 9b—12 (colons 9—12)	198
19.3.6	Verse 13 (colon 13).....	198
19.4	Conclusion.....	201
20.	Romans 15,19.....	202
20.1	Romans 15,14—21 within the macrocontext of Paul's letter to the Romans...	202
20.2	Discourse analysis: Romans 15,14—21.....	203
20.2.1	A few notes pertaining to the structure of Romans 15,14—21 with special reference to actants and structural markers	204
20.3	Textual criticism: Romans 15,19	205
20.4	An exegetical overview of Romans 15:14—21	206
20.4.1	Clusters A (vv 14—16, colons 1—2) and B (v 17, colon 3)	207
20.4.2	Verses 18—21 (cluster C, colons 4—7)	209
20.4.2.1	Verses 18—19 (colon 4)	209
20.4.2.2	Verse 19b (colon 5).....	211
20.4.2.3	Verses 20—21 (colons 6—7).....	213
20.5	Conclusion.....	214
21.	Overview of the remaining Corpus Paulinum	215
21.1	1 Thessalonians 1,5	215
21.2	Philippians 3,10	216
21.2.1	The context: 3,7—11	216
21.2.2	Conclusion	219
21.3	The power of God in Ephesians	219
21.3.1	Ephesians 1,19	219
21.3.2	Ephesians 3,16	220
22.	Perspectives from the broader New Testament context.....	223
22.1	God's power in Luke	223
22.1.1	Introduction	223
22.1.2	The dimension of power in the Jesus narrative	223
22.2	The power of the Spirit in Acts	228
22.2.1	"Power" as part of the early message about Jesus (10,38)	228
22.2.2	Power to be Jesus' witnesses (1,8; 4,33; 6,8)	228
	<i>Excursus:</i> Social impact of the presence of the power of God	230

22.2.3	Miracles	232
22.2.4	Conclusion	233
22.3	The power of God in Revelation	234

Section C: Theological Scope of the Concept of God's Power in the Pauline Letters

23.	Theological-christological emphasis.....	239
23.1	Introduction	239
23.1.1	The "place" of the concept of God's power in Paul's message	239
23.2	Soteriological dimension	240
23.2.1	Theology of the cross — message of justification, from Corinth to Rome.....	242
23.3	Ethical dimension.....	243
24.	Pneumatological emphasis	245
24.1	Introduction	245
24.2	"Power" explicitly connected with the Spirit	245
24.2.1	The power of the Holy Spirit to enkindle hope.....	245
24.2.2	The Holy Spirit empowering Paul's apostolic ministry	247
24.2.3	The power of the Holy Spirit in the inner person	250
24.3	The power of God closely related to the Spirit	251
24.3.1	The pneumatological substratum of God's power in Paul's ministry	251
24.3.2	The pneumatological dimension of God's resurrection power	252
24.3.3	The kingdom of God anticipated in the present through the power of the Holy Spirit	253
24.4	Conclusion.....	254
25.	Paul's ministry within the christological perspective on weakness and power	256
25.1	The catalogues of hardships as horizon for the understanding of power in Paul's ministry	256
25.2	The christological perspective within the context of the "eschatological tension"	258
26.	Conclusion	265
26.1	The broader New Testament context	265
26.2	The Pauline perspective	266
	Bibliography	269
	Index of References	285
	Index of Authors	297
	Index of Subjects.....	303

Introduction

The concept of God's power functions in key passages of Paul's letters and is intrinsically linked to his theology of the cross and its soteriological explication in his message of justification. Because this concept is so closely related to the message of the cross,¹ Paul often speaks of "power" in a paradoxical context² — compare for example the following two passages: In 1 Cor 1,18 Paul states that the message of the cross is *foolishness* to them that perish, but to us who are saved, it is the *power of God* (1 Cor 1,18); and in the context of his own apostolic ministry, he affirms that he will rather glory in his *weaknesses* (infirmities), that the *power of Christ* may rest upon him (2 Cor 12,9). Owing to the rhetorical function of alienation,³ these paradoxical contexts have caught the attention of exegetes (especially as far as the relation between weakness and power in 2 Corinthians is concerned). Although "power" is generally assumed to be an important motif in Pauline theology (cf *inter alia* Forster [1950:178]: "Power ... *dúnamis* ... is a favourite word of St. Paul ..."; Nielsen 1980:140), the concept has *not yet been fully explored*.

For the concept of God's power, Paul *exclusively uses the Greek word δύναμις*. It is noteworthy that *κράτος* appears within the broader Corpus Paulinum only three times: Eph 1,19; 6,10 and in Col 1,11. In Eph 1,19 and Col 1,11 *κράτος* is used synonymously with *δύναμις*, while in Eph 6,10 it is (together with *ἰσχύς*) linked with the verb *ἐνδυναμόω*. *Ἰσχύς* occurs only three times in the Corpus Paulinum: synonymously with *κράτος* and *δύναμις* in Eph 1,19, as already mentioned in Eph 6,10 and in

¹ " ... die wohl der stärkste Ausdruck von Paradoxalität bei Paulus ist" (Hotze 1997:345).

² Broadly speaking, a paradox can be defined as a phenomenon which contradicts the general understanding of an issue. (Cf Hotze 1997:26: "Im weitesten Sinne läßt sich das Paradox definieren als *Phänomen, das dem landläufigen Vorverständnis von einer Sache widerspricht*.")

³ Cf Lausberg (1982:39—41), referred to by Hotze (1997:35).

2 Thess 1,9, referring to the glory of the Lord's might (τῆς δόξης τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ). In Paul's letters δύναμις ("power") and ἐξουσία ("authority") also function quite differently. While δύναμις refers to the divine power of the crucified and exalted Lord, the Pauline use of ἐξουσία does not have a christological dimension (cf however 2 Cor 10,8; 13,10).⁴

It should be noted that the Greek term δύναμις occurs for a whole range of meanings in the Pauline letters: "ability"; "power"; "mighty deed"; "ruler"; "supernatural power"; "meaning" (cf Louw & Nida 1988b:67).⁵ The present investigation is devoted to δύναμις in the sense of power — specifically with reference to *the power of God*.

Brief overview of the history of research

In 1927 Schmitz wrote an article on the concept δύναμις in Paul. His article bears the sub-title, "Ein Beitrag zum Wesen urchristlicher Begriffsbildung," and he sets himself the goal of pointing out the "religionsgeschichtliche Eigenart" of this concept. Schmitz's conclusions will be discussed in chapter 6.

During 1932 and 1935 the results of Grundmann's penetrating research into δύναμις were published. Up to the present day Grundmann has done the most extensive research on δύναμις, paying special attention to the religio-historical background of this concept.

Forster (1950) proposes two foci around which Paul's thinking about power revolves: His conviction that Jesus had risen and his own personal experiences as a missionary. A critical evaluation of this important issue will be given in section C of this monograph.

⁴ Cf Scholtissek's comparison between Paul's use of ἐξουσία and δύναμις in his study, *Die Vollmacht Jesu* (1992:67—71).

⁵ A few examples of passages in which δύναμις occurs for some of these meanings may be mentioned: "ability" — 2 Cor 1,8; 2 Cor 8,3; "mighty deed" (or, as Louw & Nida [1988a:681 put it] — "deed manifesting great power, with the implication of some supernatural force — 'mighty deed, miracle' ") — 1 Cor 12,10.28.29; Gal 3,5; "ruler" — Rom 8,38; "supernatural power" — 1 Cor 15,24 (it is also possible to interpret δύναμις in Rom 8,38 as meaning a supernatural power, cf Louw & Nida 1988a:479); "meaning" — 1 Cor 14,11 (cf also Nielsen 1980:140 note 13).

The different meanings of δύναμις are relatively far apart in semantic space. Only the meanings "power" and "mighty deed" belong to the same semantic domain (Louw & Nida 1988a:680—1; 1988b:67; cf also 1988a:ix emphasising the importance of the context to signal which of the various meanings may be involved).

Fascher (1959) published valuable information on *δύναμις* both in a profane as well as in a Christian context. He discusses the use of *δύναμις* in the New Testament, the Apostolic Fathers, Gnosticism magic and concludes with a section on the Christian power of the apostles and martyrs.

Both exegetical as well as religio-historical aspects receive attention in Karl Prümm's (1961a; 1961b) research on *δύναμις*. He not only focuses on *δύναμις* in the Greek-Hellenistic religion and philosophy, but also strives to render a contribution to a "*dynamis*-Theologie" (Prümm 1961b:643).

In 1980 two important essays on *δύναμις* appeared. i. Friedrich in his article in the "Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament" discusses the appearance of *δύναμις* in the New Testament and the different meanings to which it is applied. He also refers to certain themes, namely God's *δύναμις*, the *δύναμις* of Christ, of the disciples, miracles, word and power, Spirit and power as well as supernatural powers ("Geistermächte").

ii. Nielsen wrote an informative article on "Paulus' Verwendung des Begriffes *δύναμις*". This article focuses on the implications that Paul's view of *δύναμις* has for a theology of the cross (cf the sub-title: "Eine Replik zur Kreuzestheologie").

Valuable contributions have more recently been made to the understanding of "weakness" and its relation to "power" in 2 Cor. In 1993 Ulrich Heckel's important dissertation on *Kraft in Schwachheit. Untersuchungen zu 2 Kor 10—13* was published. Timothy Savage made an important contribution to our understanding of Christian ministry with his monograph *Power through weakness. Paul's understanding of Christian ministry in 2 Corinthians* (1996). In 1998 Gruber's extensive work on *Herrlichkeit in Schwachheit. Eine Auslegung der Apologie des Zweiten Korintherbriefs 2 Kor 2,14—6,13* appeared.

Our understanding of the *pneumatological* dimension of power in Paul's theology has been broadened by Gordon Fee's *God's empowering presence. The Holy Spirit in the letters of Paul* (1994).⁶

The above-mentioned scholars made important contributions to our understanding of *δύναμις* in Pauline theology. Two observations can however be made:

⁶ Cf also the literature on exegetical investigations of the paradoxical passages in Paul given by Hotze (1997:21—3).

- i. As far as the older works are concerned I need to point out that progress in the field of linguistics has made the New Testament scholar of today sensitive to issues which were not so sharply distinguished in studies up to 1961.
- ii. The more recent works (with the exception of Fee's study of Pauline pneumatology) focused primarily on the paradoxical relationship between weakness and power in *2 Corinthians*.

Methodological observations

Recognising the importance of both a synchronic and a diachronic study, these two should, however, not be confused. A diachronic study is important, since it provides the only background against which the specific nuances Paul attached to his use of *δύναμις* can be distinguished. In order to understand the function of power in Pauline theology, the point of departure must, however, be the *pericopes* in which *δύναμις* occurs in Paul's letters. The intended contribution of this study is to lay special emphasis on the Pauline use of *δύναμις* and to do it mainly from an exegetical viewpoint through a responsible exegetical investigation of the different pericopes in which the concept of power occurs in the Pauline letters. This procedure has not been followed yet. The nature of Friedrich's study, as a contribution to an exegetical lexicon, does not allow such an intensive study of the different pericopes in which *δύναμις* occurs, while Nielsen and Savage deal with specific aspects of *δύναμις*/power in Paul, namely the implications for a theology of the cross (Nielsen) and for Christian ministry (Savage).

Section A is devoted to a *lexico- and conceptual-historical survey of δύναμις*. Attention is paid to the Hellenistic (profane Greek) use of *δύναμις*, to the Old Testament background concerning the concept of power in Paul's letters and to concepts of power in early Judaism, Philo and Qumran. The purpose of this section is not to provide an exhaustive investigation into the concept of power in these contexts, but to establish a few relationships in order to cast light on power in Paul's letters. A lexico- and conceptual-historical investigation of *δύναμις* is also meaningful in the sense that it gives the reader an idea of the relevance of this concept (e.g. as power of salvation in early Judaism and Hellenism) without implying any direct influence on Paul. As this lexico- and conceptual-historical aspect of "power" has been dealt with most extensively in existing studies on

δύναμις, special attention will be paid to the results of these enquiries. However, the present writer wishes to endorse Eichholz's (1985:227) statement:

“ ‘Entscheidend ist nicht die Begriffsgeschichte, sondern der *Kontext*’ ... Die Vorgeschichte des Begriffs kann nur in Grenzen hilfreich sein, weil der jeweilige Kontext bei Paulus ein anderer ist und dieser der eigentliche Verstehenschlüssel sein muß.”⁷

Many of the pericopes in the Pauline letters in which δύναμις occurs, are pericopes which confront the exegete with numerous problems of interpretation. It is, therefore, not strange that entire dissertations and monographs have been devoted to some of these pericopes or even sub-pericopes.⁸

The purpose of the *exegetical section (section B)* is to provide a responsible exegetical overview of the pericopes that constitute the context in which the concept of power has to be interpreted. The reader will observe that throughout this section the writer has applied a fairly strict pattern. After locating a pericope within the macrocontext of the letter in which it occurs, its structure is analysed. A discourse analysis proves to be helpful in this regard, although it has not been considered necessary in chapters 8, 9 and 11. As a first step in analysing the structure, all pericopes have been divided into colons (used in the sense of a syntactic unit, comprising an independent verbal and nominal element [cf Louw 1976:77—8]). One colon can be divided into several commata (subordinate phrases). Colons may also be grouped together in “clusters”. The structural analysis is followed by an exegetical overview of the pericope, focusing on the immediate context in which δύναμις occurs. The length and nature of the discussion will determine whether or not a conclusion will be added.

As “power” in Rom 9,17 occurs in a quotation from the Old Testament, the reader is referred to the section dealing with the use of

⁷ “ ‘Crucial is not the history of a concept, but its *context*’ ... The history of a concept has only limited value, because the specific Pauline contexts are different and these should be the real interpretative key” (freely translated: PJG).

⁸ Cf for example Lang (1973); Smith (1983). Betz (1972), McClelland (1980) and Zmijewski (1978) may also be mentioned in this regard.

δύναμις in the Old Testament (Septuagint). The context in which 1 Cor 6,14 occurs, does not seem to justify a detailed discussion of this passage in the exegetical section. In the discussion of God's resurrection power (chapter 24.3.2) this passage will however be dealt with.

In the light of the exegetical study, it is clear that the ways in which the concept of power functions in specific pericopes in Paul's letters are related to one another. In Section C these pericopes will be grouped together in the discussion of certain themes. To emphasise the fact that the way this grouping has been done has emerged from a thorough exegetical investigation and has not been decided upon beforehand the pericopes in section B will not be grouped but will be arranged chronologically.⁹

The purpose of *section C* is to *distinguish the nuances* present when Paul relates the concept of God's power to specific themes and to integrate the results with *Pauline theology* in a broader sense. A theological-christological as well as a pneumatological emphasis has been distinguished. Paul's ministry within the christological perspective on weakness and power will also be discussed.

The purpose of this section is not to provide a "scheme" into which all the passages in which the concept of power occurs, can be fitted. The themes discussed in this section emerged from an intensive exegetical study of the relevant passages and reveal the emphases in Paul's understanding of power. It is perhaps in this regard that the weaknesses of previous studies of δύναμις are most clearly evident. (It will, e g, become clear from the following discussion that Forster affirms that there are two foci around which Paul's thinking about power revolves, namely the conviction that Jesus was risen and his own personal experiences as a missionary. This view is highly inadequate.)

In the ensuing discussion it will be emphasised that the concept of power is intimately related to various other crucial themes in Paul's theology, for example: "righteousness" (Rom 1,16—17, 1 Cor 1,24.30); "sanctification", "redemption" (1 Cor 1,30); "hope" (Rom 15,13); "faith" (1 Cor 2,5); "the life of Jesus" (2 Cor 4,10.11); "grace" (2 Cor 12,9); "immortality" (ἀφθαρσία), "glory" (δόξα) (1 Cor 15,42.43); "kingdom of God" (1 Cor 4,20) (cf Fascher 1959:437—8; Friedrich 1980:861—2;

⁹ For a recent discussion of Pauline chronology, cf Söding (1997:3—30). Extensive reference to literature on this subject is also given in this essay (cf note 1 on page 3).

Forster 1950:180; Nielsen 1980:140—1; Prümm 1961b:647.649.657—8. 676—7; Schmitz 1927:164).

Although this work focuses on the main Pauline letters,¹⁰ an overview is also presented of the way in which the concept of the power of God functions in the rest of the Corpus Paulinum. This study is also placed within the context of the New Testament as a whole, taking into account the motif of the power of God in Luke (as an example from the synoptic tradition),¹¹ Acts as well as in Revelation. The overview of this broader context makes it possible to distinguish more clearly the *specific Pauline interpretation* of the power of God.

¹⁰ Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians.

¹¹ Luke has been selected as the concept of power (*δύναμις*) occurs most in this Gospel.

Section A:

**A Lexico- and Conceptual-historical Overview
of the Concept of Power**

Index of References

1. Old Testament

Gen

1,2 82
2,7 81
18,7 142

Ex

3,11 142
7,3 210
8,19 210
9,16 19
14,31 27
16,7 226
20,18 62

Lev

18,8 72
20,11 72

Deut

3,24 18, 19
7,7—8 60
8,15 225
8,17—18 20
15,4 231
17,5—7 72
19,15 151, 152
21 57
22 57
23 57
32,43 198

Judg

6,15 142

1 Sam

2,1—10 148
10,10 23
16,13 24
18,23 142

1 Sam

19,20 23

1 Kings

17,45 17
19,10 17
19,14 17

2 Kings

22,32—33 20

1 Chron

29,11—12 27
29,11 18

Neh

1,10 19

1 Mac

4,9—11 27

2 Mac

3,24 18
9,8 18

3 Mac

2,6 19, 27
6,13 18, 19

4 Mac

7,8 208

Job

9,10 27
11,20 18, 21
12,13 18, 20, 21, 34
12,17—24 60
37,14 18
39,19 34

<i>Ps</i>		<i>Is</i>	
18,50	198	19,12	55
21,2	18, 21	24,23	235
21,14	18	28,6	23
29,5	164	31,3	26
29,11	29	32,15	24, 224
34,18	142	33,18	55
46,2	20	40,10	28
50,13	164	41,19	25
54	33	42,1—4	23
59,17	18	42,1	23, 24
63,3	18	44,1—5	25
66,3	18	44,3	24
66,7	33	44,25	55
68,29	17, 18	49,6	229
69	194	57,15	142
71,1	33	59,21	23, 24
71,15	33	61,1	23, 24, 228
79,5	17	63,10	21, 164
79,15	17		
79,20	17	<i>Jer</i>	
84,6—8	20	5,14	17
91,13	225	9,22—23	60
95,6	164		
96,12	164	<i>Ezek</i>	
104,30	24	1	234
110,1	164	11,19	24, 25
116	102	18,31	24
117,1	198	20,33	28
118,17—18	129	28,13	234
119,43	126	36,23	25
119,160	126	36,25	25
138,3	20	36,26	24, 25
140,8	20, 21	36,27	24
144,5	164	37,3	25
145,4	18	37,11	25
145,6	18	37,14	24
145,11	18	39,29	24
<i>Is</i>		<i>Dan</i>	
2,19	28	2,23	20
6	234	4,35	234
10,33	19	4,37	234
11,1—3a	23	7,9	235
11,1—2	23		
11,1	24	<i>Hos</i>	
11,2	24	12,6	17
11,10	198		

Joel

2,24 26
3,1—5 24, 25

Amos

3,13 17
5,14 17
5,16 17
6,14 17

Hab

2,4 175
3,19 20

Hg

2,5 24

Zach

4,6 20

2. *New Testament**Mt*

10,32—33 par 176
12,28 210
18,20 73
19,21 96
26,64 29

Mk

3,23—27 228
6,2 224
8,38 par 176
14,62 29, 226, 233
15,23 194
15,36—41 194

Lk

1,17 226
1,26 226
1,32 226
1,35 223, 224, 226, 227, 265
1,46—55 148
1,52 60
1,54—55 226
1,70 226
1,72—73 226

Lk

2,32 229
3,21—22 224
3,22 225
4,1 224, 225
4,14 223, 224, 225, 227,
265
4,15 224
4,18 228
4,36 223, 224
5,17 223, 225, 227
6,19 223, 225
8,46 223, 225
9,1—6 225, 227
9,1 223
9,26 176
10,1—20 227
10,17—20 225
10,18 227
10,19—20 223, 265
10,34—43 228
11,20 210
12,8—9 176
12,34 96
14,18—19 225
17,22—37 226
21,25—28 226
21,27 223
22,69 223, 226, 233
24,44—49 229
24,46—49 229
24,48—49 230
24,49 223, 226, 229, 265

John

2,17 194
3,8 22
15,25 194
19,29 194

Acts

1,8 224, 225, 228, 229,
230, 231, 265
1,22 230
2,22 232
2,24 218
2,43 230, 231
3,6 232, 234

Acts

3,12	232
3,15	230
4,1—7	234
4,2	230
4,7	232
4,29—30	234
4,30	231
4,31	230, 234
4,33	230—1
5,5	74
5,10	74
5,12	230, 231
6,8	231
8,4—25	232
8,13	232
10,8	232—3
10,38	265
10,34—43	228
13,11	74
13,47	229
17,6	231
17,31	115
19,11	232
26,23	229

Rom

1,1—17	174
1,1—7	158—69
1,2	176, 194
1,4	158—69, 177, 218, 221
1,5	209
1,8—17	158, 170—82, 206
1,8—12	159
1,11—13	213
1,11	129
1,13—17	159
1,16—3,31	53
1,16—17	6, 54, 116, 240, 241, 257
1,16	29, 36, 61, 97, 117, 118, 126, 130, 146, 163, 169, 170—82, 240, 242
1,17	130, 241
1,18—4,25	183
1,18—3,20	178, 183

Rom

1,8—2,29	53
1,18—32	183, 185
1,18—23	54, 186, 187
1,18—21a	183—8
1,20	38, 183—8, 239
2,1—3,20	185
2,1—3,8	183
2,6	115
2,8	79
2,16	115
3,20—4,25	183
3,21	194
3,25—26	181, 241
4,10	115
4,18	195
5,2	195, 258
5,4—5	195
5,8—11	116
5,9	178
5,13	84
5,15	200
6,1—11	267
6,3—4	267
6,4—5	157
6,4	100
6,5	100
6,6	104, 156, 267
6,8	100
7	84
7,6	110
8,1—39	177, 245
8,8	194
8,11	79, 80, 218, 252
8,17—30	195
8,17	100, 109, 264, 267
8,18—27	108
8,21	109
8,23—24	247
8,23	80, 108, 109, 111, 112, 116, 242, 264
8,24—25	109
8,26	108
8,35—39	154
8,35	97
9,17	5, 19
9,30—10,8	194
10,6—7	81

<i>Rom</i>		<i>1 Cor</i>	
10,9—10	169	1,18	243
10,12	129	1,20—25	55—9, 65
10,14	215	1,21	58, 176
11,12	129	1,22—24	145, 176
11,13	197	1,22	65
12,1—15,13	189, 201, 207	1,23—24	241
12,1—2	208	1,23	176
12,1	198	1,24	6, 35, 43—54, 97, 117, 118, 163, 240, 241, 243
12,2	104		
12,12	195	1,25—29	22
13,8—10	194	1,26—31	59—61
13,11—14	195	1,30	6, 242, 243, 244
13,11	178	2,1—5	61—5, 248
13,12	110	2,1—3	62—3, 266
13,14	110	2,2	118
14,1—15,13	189	2,3—5	97, 117
14,1—15,6	196	2,4—5	63—5, 69, 177, 245, 266
14	245		
14,1—12	189	2,4	36, 43—54, 65, 70, 126, 154, 156, 163, 177, 209, 210, 216, 221, 262
14,8	115		
14,10	115	2,5	6, 43—54, 242
14,13—23	189	2,6	47, 55
14,17	69, 70, 127, 199, 253, 254	2,8	116
15,1—13	189—201, 245	2,13—14	80
15,12—13	195	3,1—3	80
15,13	6, 189—201, 221, 245, 246, 267	3,5	197
15,14—16,27	202—14	3,13—15	115
15,18—19	262	3,15	72, 178
15,19	64, 127, 154, 176, 202—14, 216, 245, 247, 250	3,19	55
15,22—33	202	4,1—21	67
15,22—24	171	4,4—5	115
		4,9—13	62, 97
		4,11—13	123
		4,12—13	127
		4,13	128
		4,14—21	67
		4,19—20	67—70
		4,20	6, 64, 176, 253, 254
		5,1—13	71
		5,1—5	71
		5,4	71—4
		5,5	178
		6,1—11	71
		6,9	71
<i>1 Cor</i>			
1,4—9	171		
1,5	68, 129		
1,17	54		
1,18—2,5	45—65, 243, 257		
1,18—25	54—9, 60, 145		
1,18—19	54—5		
1,18	1, 35, 43—54, 65, 97, 116, 117, 118, 126, 130, 145, 163, 176, 177, 240, 241, 242,		

1 Cor

6,11	154
6,12—20	71
6,14	6, 35, 80, 177, 218, 252, 253
6,19	80
8,1—2	68
8,10—11	68
9,1—18	129
9,9—10	152
10,26	258
12,3	169
12,8	125, 131, 252
12,10	177
12,28—29	177
13,12	114
13,28	68
14,6	68
15,1—58	75
15,1—5	62
15,20	157
15,24—28	69
15,35—58	111
15,35—41	75, 78
15,42—49	65—82
15,42	6
15,43	6, 35, 75—82, 163, 177, 221, 252, 253
15,44	221
15,49	108
15,50—58	83
15,53	110
15,54	109
15,55—57	241
15,55	83
15,56	83—5, 241

2 Cor

1,1—5	63
1,4—7	98
1,5—7	100
1,5	98, 117, 118
1,8—10	267
1,8	174
1,10	98
1,14	103
1,20	116
1,22	80, 100, 111, 246

2 Cor

2,1	129, 153
2,14—16	129
2,14	94, 106
2,17	126, 140
3,4—4,6	86, 102, 106, 251
3,4	130
3,5—6	96
3,5	146
3,6—7	197
3,6	84, 116
3,7—4,6	95, 117
3,7—18	116
3,8	113, 116, 127
3,9	116, 127, 197
3,11	116
3,12	102, 130
3,18	100, 113, 114, 247
4,1	102, 103, 130
4,2	126
4,4	116
4,6	129
4,7—5,10	86, 88—119, 129, 251, 256, 261
4,7—18	106
4,7—15	62, 63, 103, 262
4,7—12	95—101, 129, 259
4,7—11	128, 218, 261
4,7—9	263
4,7	86—119, 126, 130, 219, 251, 257, 263, 264
4,8—9	123, 148
4,8	128, 257
4,9—11	264
4,9	257
4,10—14	264
4,10—12	129, 156, 157
4,10—11	97, 267
4,10	6, 106, 156, 257
4,11	6, 106, 156, 219
4,12	156
4,13—15	102—3
4,13—14	261
4,13	106, 130
4,14	264
4,16—18	103—5
4,16	263

<i>2 Cor</i>		<i>2 Cor</i>	
4,18—5,10	87	13	97
4,18	128	13,1—4	259
5,1—10	103, 106	13,3—4	61, 163, 261, 262
5,1—5	106—13	13,4	116, 118, 150—7, 177,
5,1—2	105		218, 264
5,1	130	13,4b	97, 117
5,2—4	105	13,10	2
5,4—5	264		
5,4	105	<i>Gal</i>	
5,5	80, 100, 246, 251	1,10	194
5,6—10	113—6	2,5	126
5,11	87	2,14	126
5,12	123, 124	2,19	100
5,13b	129	2,20	104, 114, 156
5,14 ff	126, 267	2,21	181, 241
5,17	100, 104	3,1	62
5,19	65, 126	3,2	110
6,3—10	120—31, 256, 257	3,3	247
6,2	100	3,5	64, 110, 154, 177, 209,
6,4c—5	97, 148		216, 262, 266
6,4	197	3,27	110, 111
6,6	221	3,28	57
6,7	120—31, 221, 252	4,14	127
6,9	101	5,5	127
7,1	163	5,19	71
7,6—13	98	5,22	125, 131, 199, 201, 252
8,9	146	6,2	72
10—13	132—49, 150—7, 209	6,14	156
10,8	2	6,17	218
11,1—12,13	133, 153	<i>Eph</i>	
11,16—12,10	133—49, 256, 257—8,	1,13—14	221
	259	1,13	126, 246
11,7—11	129	1,14	246
11,23—29	123	1,15—23	219—20
11,23b—29	97	1,19	1, 219—20, 221, 250
11,30	61	1,20	218
12,7—10	262, 266	2,22	221
12,9—10	22, 61, 116, 117, 218,	3,7	221
	244	3,14—21	220—1
12,9	1, 6, 34, 116, 118,	3,16—17	250
	132—49, 258, 259,	3,16	220—1
	262, 264, 266	3,20	250
12,9b	96	4,22—24	110
12,10	34, 97, 101	4,23	222
12,12	64, 127, 177, 210, 216,	4,30	246
	250, 262	6,10	1, 221
12,14	152		

<i>Eph</i>		<i>2 Thess</i>	
6,11	110	1,9	2
6,14	110		
		<i>1 Tim</i>	
<i>Phil</i>		1,20	73
1,3—6	171	3,16	167
1,6	247		
1,12	174	<i>2 Tim</i>	
1,19	178	1,8	176
1,21	219	1,12	176
2,5—11	219	2,15	126
2,6—11	218, 266		
2,9	218	<i>Heb</i>	
2,11	169	2,4	64, 210, 248
2,16	103, 126	11,26	194
3,7—11	216—9, 266		
3,9—10	266	<i>Ja</i>	
3,10—11	100, 118, 264, 267	3,15	80
3,10	169, 177, 216—9, 267		
3,12—21	108	<i>1 Pet</i>	
		3,4	222
<i>Col</i>		3,18	167
1,5	125		
1,11	1, 220, 221	<i>Rev</i>	
2,12	218	1,9—3,22	234
3,1	157	4,1	234
3,9—10	110	4,11	235, 265
3,12—14	110	5,12	230, 235, 265
		5,13	235
<i>1 Thess</i>		7,12	235, 265
1,3—6	215	7,14	235
1,5—6	266	9,3—4	225
1,5	68, 126, 163, 177, 209, 216, 221, 215—6, 250	11,17	235, 265
		11,19	235
1,6—7	100	12,10	235, 265
1,6	268	13,2	235
2,3—6	63	13,4	235
2,4	194	13,8	235
2,15	194	13,12	235
2,19	103	15,3—4	235
4,1	194	15,5—8	235
3,13	163	15,8	265
4,17	115	19,1	235, 265
5,8	110	19,5—6	235
5,10	115		
<i>2 Thess</i>			
1,5	69		

3. Early Christian Literature

*Apostolic Fathers**Hermas*— *Sim*

8,6,4 176

9,21,3 176

Wisdom of Solomon

13 188

13,1—9 187

13,4 186

14 71

TestLev

18,11 164

4. Early Jewish Literature

Bar

2,11 19

2 Bar

4,3 107

48,50 105

54,17—19 186

2 Esdras

10,40—57 107

10,53—55 107

11,10 19

4 Esdras

6,6 28

1 En

39.4 107

41.2 107

103.9—15 98

2 En

4.1 235

66.6 98, 124

Judith

9,8 19

13,11 19

Wisdom of Solomon

7,25 ff 31

7,25 18

9,9 56

12,15 18

12,17 18

Qumran Writings— *4 QTL*

3,8 235

18,11 164

— *Hodayoth*

III,6—12 33

III,9 f 33

IV,31 f 34

IX,25—27 34

XI,13 f 33

— *1 QH*

2,23—25 99

5,18—19 99

5,25 99

7,17 221

7,19 221

9,3 ff 98

9,6—7 98

9,13 98

9,25—26 98

12,35 221

— *1 QM*

10.5 221

— *1 QS*

4,3 34

11,5 34

Philo— *ConfLing*

136 32

172 32

- *Fug*
69 31
101 31, 32
- *MigrAbr*
181 32
- *VitMos*
I,111 31, 32
II,99 32
- Rabbinic Texts*
- *TgO Deut*
33,26 29
- *TgIs*
48,13 27
- *TgJer*
16,19b 29
- *B Pesachim*
118a 28
- *B Berakot*
58a 27
- *Mek Ex*
15,2 27
5. *Graeco-Roman Literature*
- Aristotle*
- *Probl*
7,5 11
- Epictetus*
- *Book I*
ix.16—17 104
xxiv.1 98
- *Book II*
xix.24 128
- *Book IV*
viii.35 128
- Iamblichus*
- *Mystr*
II,1 14
- Plato*
- *Tim*
41a 31
41c 31
- *Sacr*
60 32
- *Som*
I,62 32
- *Menex*
235A—C 62
- Plutarch*
- *Symp*
4,2,1 14
- Seneca*
- *Ep*
xxiv,19 100
xxxi,10 128
xxxix,14 128
xli,4—5 104
- Corpus Hermeticum*
- I,26 16, 28
I,27 16
I,32 16, 36
XIII,7 f 15
- Hippolytus*
- *Refut*
1,15 12

Dio Chrysostomos

— *Or*

viii, 15 ff 124

Marcus Aurelius

— *Book VII*

67 128

Pseudo Crates Epectetus

7 130

Index of Authors

A

Abraham, *Diakonia* 260
 Albertz & Westermann,
 — *Geist* 22, 24, 25
 Allen, Joel, *Obadiah,*
Jonah and Micah 26
 Andrews, *2 Cor 11* 258

B

Barré, Paul 99
 Barrett, *Corinthians* 43, 67, 69
 — *Spirit* 246, 249
 — *2 Corinthians* 111, 150, 154,
 155, 157
 — *Acts* 228, 229, 230,
 231, 232, 233
 Barton, *Sociology* 230
 Bartsch, *Römerbrief* 166
 Bauckham, *Revelation* 234, 235, 236
 Baumann,
 — *1 Kor 1,1—3,4* 52, 53, 54, 55,
 57, 58, 63
 Beale, *Revelation* 234
 Benjamin, *Pneuma* 247
 Betz, Paulus
 — *Apologie* 5, 142, 243,
 262
 Bieringer, *2 Corinthians* 87
 Bishop, *Pots* 95
 Black, Paul 147
 Blass & Debrunner,
 — *Grammatik* 208, 211
 Blunt, *Apologies* 56
 Bockmuehl, *Philippians* 217, 218
 Bovon, Lukas 226
 Braun, *Qumran* 34
 Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians* 43, 67, 68, 69,
 150
 — *Paul* 247
 — *1 & 2 Thessalonians* 215
 Bultmann, *Theologie* 180

Bultmann,

— *2. Korinther* 113, 115, 120,
 123, 124, 126,
 127, 133, 141,
 144, 146, 147,
 150, 152, 154,
 155, 156, 257

C

Chamberlain, *Grammar* 211
 Collange, Paul 108, 102, 111,
 112
 Combrink,
 — *Pneuma-Dunamis* 38
 Conzelmann,
 — *1. Korinther* 43, 55, 56, 60,
 65, 67, 68, 72,
 73, 75, 81
 Cranfield, *Romans* 158, 162, 163,
 164, 168, 169,
 170, 174, 178,
 179, 180, 189,
 193, 194, 195,
 196, 197, 198,
 200, 206, 207,
 208, 209, 210,
 212, 213

D

De Goeij, *Apokalyps* 186
 Diels, *Vorsokratiker* 12
 Dieterich,
 — *Mithrasliturgie* 36
 Dodd, B, Paul 217, 219
 Dodd, C H,
 — *Apostolic Preaching* 191, 228
 Dunn, *Spirit* 247
 — *Jesus* 166, 167, 168
 — *Jesus & Spirit* 227, 249, 258
 — *Romans* 158, 170, 177,

- Dunn, *Romans* 189, 209, 212
 — *Acts* 228, 229, 230, 231, 232
 — *Paul* 260, 263
 Du Toit, *Romeine* 158, 174, 183, 189, 202
 — (ed) *Pauline Letters* 170, 171, 174
 — *Handleiding* 172, 184
- E
- Easley, *Pneumati* 249
 Ebner, *Leidenslisten* 146, 256
 Eichholz, *Theologie* 5, 52, 61, 172, 176, 182
 Engelbrecht, *Pneuma* 246, 252
- F
- Fascher, *Dynamis* 3, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 31, 37, 38, 69
 — *1. Korinther* 43, 71, 72, 73
 Fee, *1 Corinthians* 43, 44, 51, 67, 71, 72, 74, 75, 79, 83, 84, 85
 — *Empowering Presence* 3, 215, 216, 221, 240, 250, 268
 — *Philippians* 216, 217, 218, 219, 266
 Fiorenza, *Revelation* 234
 Fitzgerald, *Vessel* 226, 256
 Fitzmyer, *Power* 218, 226
 Forster, *Paul* 1, 2, 6, 7
 Forbes, *Rhetoric* 141, 142, 143, 145
 Friedrich, *Amt* 123, 126, 127
 — *δύναμις* 3, 4, 6, 241
 Furnish, *Theology* 262
 — *2 Corinthians* 87, 88, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 114, 115, 120, 121, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 132, 133, 139, 140, 141, 146, 148, 149, 150, 152, 153, 255, 156, 262
- *2 Corinthians* 133, 139, 140, 141, 146, 148, 149, 150, 152, 153, 255, 156, 262
- G
- Gillman, *1 & 2 Cor* 110
 Gloël, *Heiliger Geist* 249
 Glombitza, *Rom* 176
 Goppelt, *Theologie* 172
 Goodwin, *Grammar* 211
 Gräbe, *Etiek* 180
 — *δύναμις* 255
 — *Power* 240
 Gruber, *Herrlichkeit* 3
 Grundmann, *Kraft* 2, 30, 74
 — *δύναμις* 2, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 36, 59, 74
 Güttgemanns, *Apostel* 263
- H
- Haacker, *Römer* 158, 170, 171, 176, 177, 178, 180
 Hafemann, *2 Corinthians* 263
 Hahn, *Heiliger Geist* 177
 — *Charisma* 249
 — *Bekenntnisformeln* 172
 Hamilton, *Eschatology* 246
 Hanson, *Cross* 96
 Harvey, *Renewal* 267
 Hawthorne, *Power* 228
 Heckel, *Kraft* 3, 264
 — *Dorn* 141
 Heil, *Romans* 198, 199, 200, 245
 Heininger, *Paulus* 141, 142
 Holtz, *1. Thessalonicher* 215, 216
 Horn, *Angeld* 216
 Hotze, *Paulus* 1, 3, 240, 256
 Hübner, *Paulusforschung* 66, 182, 263
 — *Theologie* 97
 Hughes, *2 Corinthians* 102

J

- Jervell, *Charismatiker* 263, 264 — 2. *Korinther* 150, 152, 153,
 — *Volk* 262 157, 251, 261
 — *Apostelgeschichte* 228, 229, 231, — *Umwelt* 15, 256
 232 — *Briefliteratur* 159
 Johnson, S L, *Jesus* 165 Kleinknecht,
 Johnson, L T, *Luke* 226 — *Gerechtfertigte* 256
 Knoch, *Geist* 248, 249

K

- Käsemann,
 — *Heilsbedeutung* 241, 242, 244
 — *Römer* 158, 162, 168,
 170, 174, 176,
 177, 179, 189,
 191, 192, 194,
 195, 196, 197,
 198, 200, 202,
 204, 206, 207,
 208, 209, 210,
 212, 248
 — *Versuche* 180
 Kee, *Good News* 234
 Kertelge, *Paulus* 178, 181, 182,
 241, 242
 — *Tod Jesu* 240, 241, 242,
 243
 — *δικαιοσύνη* 180, 181
 — *ἀπολύτρωσις* 244
 — *Römer* 38, 158, 161,
 162, 168, 170,
 176, 179, 183,
 185, 189, 198
 201, 202, 206,
 211
 — *Theologie* 185, 187, 188
 Klauck, *1. Korinther* 43, 44, 54, 56,
 57, 59, 60, 62,
 64, 67, 68, 71,
 73, 75, 81, 248
 — 2. *Korinther* 79, 80, 88, 95,
 96, 99, 100,
 101, 102, 104,
 105, 106, 107,
 109, 112, 113,
 114, 120, 124,
 125, 127, 128,
 129, 130, 132,
 133, 144, 148,
 — *2. Korinther* 150, 152, 153,
 157, 251, 261
 — *Umwelt* 15, 256
 — *Briefliteratur* 159
 Kleinknecht,
 — *Gerechtfertigte* 256
 Knoch, *Geist* 248, 249
 Knox, *Romans 15* 212, 213, 214
 Koskeniemi, *Brief* 171
 Kosmala,
 — *Hebräer-Essener-Christen* 33, 34
 Kramer, *Christ* 100
 Kremer, *Lukas* 223, 226
 Kuss, *Römer* 246, 247, 250

L

- Lake, *Apostolic Fathers* 231
 Lambrecht, *2 Cor 13* 154, 157
 — 2 *Cor 4* 94, 95, 96, 97,
 98, 100
 — *Outlook* 118, 258
 — *Boasting* 140, 263
 — *Strength* 258,
 — 2 *Corinthians* 87, 95, 96, 98,
 118, 132, 141,
 146, 150, 155
 Lampe, *Miracles* 230
 Lang, *Korinther* 43, 44, 52, 53,
 54, 55, 56, 57,
 58, 59, 60, 61,
 62, 63, 67, 68,
 69, 71, 72, 73,
 74, 75, 78, 79,
 80, 81, 82, 83,
 84, 88, 102,
 107, 108, 109,
 113, 114, 115,
 116, 120, 121,
 123, 124, 126,
 127, 128, 129,
 132, 133, 149
 — 2. *Korinther* 5, 106, 107,
 108, 110
 Latagan,
 — 1 & 2 *Corinthians* 44, 88
 Liddell & Scott, *Lexicon* 11

- Lietzmann-Kümmel,
— *Korinther* 67, 69, 74, 75,
80, 81
- Lim, *Spirit* 63
- Lincoln, *Ephesians* 220, 222
- Linnemann, *Röm 1,3 f.* 166
- Lohse, *Einheit* 180, 181
- Loubser, *2 Korintiërs* 133, 148, 150,
151, 156
- Louw, *Theory* 211
— *Semantiek* 5
— *Romans* 161, 168, 172,
183, 184, 185,
189, 191, 192,
194, 195, 196,
197, 198, 199,
202, 205, 206,
207, 208, 213
- Louw & Nida, *Lexicon* 2, 112, 114,
147, 148, 181,
247
- Luz, *Theologia Crucis* 261
— βασιλεία 69
- M**
- Ma, *Spirit* 21, 22, 23
- Mangan, *Christ* 57
- Marshall, *Acts* 228, 229, 230,
231
- Marshall-Green,
— *1 Corinthians* 52
- McCant, *Thorn* 139, 145
- McClelland, *Defence* 5
- Mealand, *2 Kor 6* 130
- Menzies, *Spirit* 233
- Metzger, *Text* 175, 205
— *Commentary* 50, 111, 138,
155, 157, 206
- Meyer, *Holy Spirit* 247
- Michel, *Römer* 29, 158, 162,
163, 164, 168,
170, 174, 179,
189, 191, 192,
202, 206, 211
- Moo, *Romans* 189, 202
- Morris, *Romans* 201
- Moule, *Holy Spirit* 246
- Müller, *1 Kor 1* 55, 57, 58
- Murphy-O'Connor,
— *Faith* 100
- N**
- Nebe, *Hoffnung* 199
- Newman, *Dictionary* 110, 112, 114
- Newman & Nida,
— *Handbook* 162, 168, 195,
200, 207, 208,
209, 210, 211,
212
- Neyrey, *Luke-Acts* 231
- Niederwinner,
— *Heiliger Geist* 249
- Nielsen, *Paulus* 1, 2, 3, 4, 7,
65, 66, 69, 70,
125, 209, 247,
253, 263
- Nilsson, *Religion* 14, 16
- Nolland, *Grace* 147, 223, 224,
225, 226, 227
- O**
- O'Brien, *Philippians* 217
- O'Collins, *Power* 145, 147
- P**
- Patte, *2 Corinthians* 95
- Pelser, *Romans* 158, 170, 174
- Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte* 229, 230, 231
- Peterson, *1 Kor 1,28 f.* 53
- Polhill, *Wisdom* 43, 53, 64
- Pop, *2 Corinthiërs* 148
- Preisigke, *Fluid* 37
- Prete, *δύναμις θεοῦ* 177
- Prümm, *Dynamis* 3
— *Heilsordnung* 3, 7, 20, 38
- R**
- Radermacher,
— *Grammatik* 211
- Ramsay, *Discovery* 14
- Rand, *Holy Spirit* 250
- Reese, *Book of Wisdom* 187
- Roberts & Donaldson,
— *Ante-Nicene* 56
- Roberts, *Transitions* 159
— *Techniques* 159, 171

- Roberts,
— *Belydenisuitsprake* 159, 171
Robertson, *Grammar* 211
Rowland, *Heaven* 236
— *Revelation* 235
- S
- Savage, *Power* 3, 4, 142
Schelkle, *Paulus* 243
Schlier, *Liturgie* 214
— *Römer* 158, 162, 163,
164, 168, 170,
174, 177, 178,
180, 181, 191,
198, 199, 200,
201, 202, 205,
206
— *Herkunft* 249, 250
Schmithals, *Gnosis* 139
Schmitz, *δύναμις* 2, 7, 14, 36,
37, 38
- Schnackenburg,
— *Herrschaft* 68, 70, 254
— *Apostles* 259
— *Glaube* 248, 258
Schneider, *Pneuma* 165, 168
Scholtissek,
— *Vollmacht Jesu* 2, 11
Schrage, *Leid* 98, 257
— *1. Korinther* 43, 54
Schröter, *Apostolat* 118
Schürmann, *Bericht* 224
— *Lukas* 224, 225
Schweizer, *πνεῦμα* 246, 248
— *Heiliger Geist* 247
Shelton, *Spirit* 224, 228
Skarsaune, *Justin* 56
Siber, *Christus* 157, 259, 260,
261
- Smith, *2 Cor 3:7—4* 5
Söding, *Entwicklung* 6
— *Kreuzestheologie* 243
— *Rechtfertigung* 180
Stanton, *Jesus* 228
Stöger, *Amt* 260
Stolz, *Zeichen* 38, 210
Stuhlmacher,
— *Gerechtigkeit* 182
- *Glauben* 59
— *Erwägungen* 212
— *Kreuzestheologie* 52, 262
— *Theologie* 250
Strack & Billerbeck,
— *Kommentar* 179
Sundermann, *Apostel* 132
- T
- Talbert, *Corinthians* 62
Tannehill, *Christ* 101, 260, 261
Thrall, *Particles* 111
— *2 Corinthians* 87, 88, 95, 96,
98, 120, 125,
126, 263
— *Paradise* 141
Turner, *Power* 224, 229
- V
- Vermes,
— *Dead Sea Scrolls* 34
Versteeg, *Christus* 247, 252, 253
Von Dobschütz,
— *Thessalonicher-Briefe* 216
Vos, *Heilige Gees* 24, 25, 26
Vosloo, *Rûah* 22
- W
- Wacker, *Reich* 69
Wanamaker,
— *Thessalonians* 215, 216
Weiß, *1. Korinther* 36, 51, 52, 54,
60
- Wendland,
— *Heiliger Geist* 247, 249
Westermann, *Geist* 21, 22, 24
Wilckens, *Weisheit* 53, 54, 58, 64
— *Römer* 158, 162, 163,
164, 168, 169,
170, 174, 176,
177, 179, 180,
185, 186, 187,
189, 191, 192,
194, 195, 196,
197, 202, 204,
206, 208, 209,
212, 213, 214,
252, 253

- Windisch, *Paulus* 37, 38
 — *2. Korinther* 88, 102, 120,
 127, 128, 133,
 148, 150
- Winston,
 — *Wisdom of Solomon* 187
 Witherington, *Acts* 230
 Wolff, C, *1. Korinther* 43, 44, 67, 71,
 75, 78, 79, 80,
 81, 82, 83, 84,
 253
- Wolff, H W,
 — *Joel und Amos* 26
 — *Anthropologie* 81
- Y
- Young & Ford,
 — *Meaning* 99, 101, 126
- Z
- Zeller, *Römer* 158, 170, 177,
 178, 181, 183,
 187, 189, 191,
 202, 208, 209
- Zerwick & Grosvenor,
 — *Analysis* 217
 Zmijewski, *Narrenrede* 5, 133, 140,
 143, 147

Index of Subjects

Apostolic ministry

- accompanied by signs and wonders 209, 210
- characteristics of 209
- confidence in 106, 108, 112, 113, 115
- credentials for Paul's 124
- contrasts of 127—9, 130
- material poverty and spiritual riches 129
- Paul's pioneering aim in 211—3
- priestly function of in preaching gospel 203, 208

Baptism 110, 111, 112, 113

“Boasting” about weakness 136, 137, 138, 141, 142, 144, 145, 146, 147, 149

Boasting in the Lord 61

Christ

- “clothed” with 110, 111, 112
- contrasted to Adam 81, 82
- disciples sharing in power of 217, 221
- fulfilment of law and prophets 194, 195
- represented in Paul's ministry 261, 262
- knowing him is Paul's main aim 217, 218
- life with in present and coming age 157
- manifestation of in church of Corinth 156
- paradox of “crucified” and “Lord of glory” 116, 117
- participation in his death and resurrection 99, 100, 154, 155, 156, 259, 260
- presence of in the congregation 73, 74

Cross

- acceptance of leads to salvation 54, 58
- accepted through faith 54, 59
- and resurrection 53, 58, 62, 69, 85, 155, 156
- as sign of Christ's weakness 145, 146
- God encounters humankind in 61
- message of central in God's plan 35, 47, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 58, 59, 61, 65, 257, 259
- offence of 56, 61
- theology of 261, 262

Gentiles: God's mercy towards 191, 193, 196, 199

Glory: future of believers 105, 108—10

God

- and evil forces 28, 29, 225—8
- involved in suffering of believers 95, 99
- sovereignty of over Roman empire 235, 236
- power over Satan in OT 28, 29
- power mentioned as personification of 226, 232, 233
- trust in 19, 20
- worship of in Revelation 235, 236

Gospel

- as power of God 240—2
- requires faith 177, 179, 181, 241
- rejected by the wise 52, 53
- transforming power of 177, 182
- values in society contrasted to 176, 181

Grace in Paul's theology 258

Hardships

- Paul's catalogue of 97, 145, 148, 252
- Paul's view of contrasted to Stoics 98, 128—30
- God's causative involvement 99
- Seen in relationship to death and resurrection of Christ 90, 96, 97, 99, 100

Hellenistic philosophy 186—8

Hope

- a gift of God to believers 199—201
- biblical meaning of 194, 195

Inner person and outer person contrasted 103, 104

"In Christ" 57

Jesus: eschatological significance of exorcisms 223, 224, 227

Jewish and gentile Christians 196, 198

Judgement: Paul's view of final 115, 116

Justification

- development in Paul's theology 241—4
- not merely forensic, but new relationship 180—2
- related to gospel as message of cross 242, 243
- righteousness of God — power of God 241—3

Kingdom of God

- present and future reality 68, 69
- eschatological ushered in by Christ 223—7

Law: relationship of to sin 83—5

Miracles

- part of demonstration of Spirit's power 63—6, 126, 227, 228, 234, 235, 245, 248, 250, 254

Miracles

- performed in the name of Jesus 227, 232

New life of believer 102, 103

Paul: thorn in the flesh led to humility 141, 142, 145

Prayer: intercessory 219, 220

Rhetorical expertise disclaimed by Paul 55, 62, 63, 64, 68, 69

Resurrection of Christ

- creatively active in believers 81, 82, 155, 157
- eschatological significance of 78, 81, 82
- in gospel message 62, 63, 239, 242
- manifestation of God's power 217, 218, 219

Salvation

- believers long for fulfilment of 105, 109, 110, 111, 112, 114, 115
- dependent on faith 173, 179
- is from God 58, 60
- leads to a new relationship 179, 181
- meaning of 173, 177, 178, 240, 241

Satan and evil forces in OT 28, 29

Sexual immorality 71, 72

Sin: relationship of to law and death 83, 84, 85

Sinfulness in behaviour of Corinthian Christians 241

Spirit

- Christ works through 79, 81, 82
- gifts of 125
- guarantee of resurrection 80
- part of eschatological fulfilment 109, 112, 113, 118

Spirit

- related to power of God
21, 22, 60, 61, 65, 66, 74, 218, 219,
220, 221, 222, 224, 225, 227
- relationship to Christ 74, 79, 214
- relationship to kingdom of God 69, 70
- Servant in Isaiah empowered by
23, 24
- social changes effected by 229—31

Sufferings

- not a sign of God's displeasure 260,
261, 264, 267
- of believers 105, 107, 108
- of Christ: believers participate in 99
- of Paul in perspective of Christ's
sufferings 97, 98, 262, 263, 267
- purpose of 94, 96

Theocentricity of Paul's doctrine 52, 234,
240

Throne room: image of 234, 235

Truth: gospel as word of 126

Weak and strong Christians 189, 196

Weakness and power

- exemplified in Christ 132, 144, 145,
151, 154, 156
- relationship of 144, 145, 146, 147,
148, 149

Weapons: spiritual 124, 127, 130

Wisdom

- human: inadequate before God 52, 53
- of the world leads to division 52, 53

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

Alphabetical Index of the First and Second Series

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