



"If you want to get along with God, you had better stay off His throne."
—Charles Simpson

23-Jun-06

The Power of the Holy People

Over the last decade or so, as the church of [God](#) has come to terms with its splintering and scattering, a frequently quoted verse has been [Daniel 12:7](#):

Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and *when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered* [KJV, *scatter[ed]*], all these things shall be finished. (emphasis ours throughout)

We have typically applied this verse to the church, and this is reasonable, for we certainly do find ourselves in a scattered condition because of our sins. But are the "holy people" in this verse actually the church of God? If so, what is their power that is completely shattered right before the end?

[1 Peter 2:9](#) could back up the interpretation that the "holy people" of [Daniel 12:7](#) are the church of God: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a *holy nation*, His own *special people*. . . ." However, the church is not the only group of people whom God has declared holy. Ancient Israel was also designated by God to be holy:

- For you are a *holy people* to the LOORD your God; the LOORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.

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([Deuteronomy 7:6](#); [14:2](#))

- Also today the LOORD has proclaimed you to be His *special people*, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a *holy people* to the LOORD your God, just as He has spoken. ([Deuteronomy 26:18-19](#))

Israel was holy, not because of their purity of conduct or irreproachable morality—far from it—but because God declared them to be so. They were holy in the sense of being *set apart*—not because of any inherent [goodness](#), but because of the oath that God swore to their fathers ([Deuteronomy 7:7-8](#)). Therefore, while the Israelite nations at this end time are not holy in their conduct, they are still holy in that God has set them apart to fulfill a purpose.

Notice that [Daniel 12:7](#) does not say that the *people* are shattered, but that their *power* is shattered. If we interpret the holy people to be Israel in general, their power would be representative of their political clout, military ascendancy, financial control, and cultural influence. The Hebrew word translated here as "power" is elsewhere translated predominately as "hand," indicating the means or agency by which something is accomplished. It is easy to understand a prophecy about the "hand"—strength, effectiveness, means, capabilities—of the [nations of Israel](#) being completely shattered before the end, for many such prophecies are well-known.

But what would the "power" of the church be? Because of the church's overriding focus in times past on preaching [the gospel](#) to [the world](#), we would typically answer that the power of the church is related to its effectiveness in preaching the gospel. However, notice [Acts 1:8](#):

But you shall receive *power* when the [Holy Spirit](#) has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Similarly, Paul tells Timothy that Christians have not been given a Spirit of fear but of *power*, and of love, and of a sound mind ([II Timothy 1:7](#)). When these two verses are put together, they show that it is the Holy Spirit—the essence of God's mind, and the agency by which the Father and the Son live in the begotten Christian—that is the "power of the holy people" where the church is concerned. More specifically, the church's power is God Himself, the source of that Spirit. Jesus even tells His disciples that "all power" had been given to Him in heaven and on earth ([Matthew 28:18](#)).

In recent church history, God did empower His servants to preach the gospel in a way that had not been done for 1900 years. But to limit the church's power merely to its ability to preach publicly is to limit God Himself—for He is involved in far more than merely making a witness to the world before the end ([Matthew 24:14](#)). His work is centered on true belief ([John 6:29](#))—which begins with the prodding of the Holy Spirit and ends in the regenerated Christian inheriting the [Kingdom of God](#). This work requires much more than a public witness; it requires the transformation of individuals from sinful humans to spirit-composed members of the God Family. The means—the power—of that transformation is God, through the agency of His Spirit.

If the church's power—[Jesus Christ](#), living in us by His Spirit—were ever "completely shattered," the gates of the grave *would* prevail against the church, and God's purpose would fail! But we know that cannot be so. Even though it is prophesied that the "holy"—set-apart—peoples of Israel *will* fall, and even though the church of God may not always have an open door to preach the gospel powerfully to the world—depending on what God is doing at any point in time—we can have every confidence that the power of the New Covenant church will *never* be shattered—for that power is God Himself!

In general, the book of Daniel contains prophecies of world-ruling empires that are mentioned only as they encounter Israel. The "holy people" of [Daniel 12:7](#) could just as easily represent the nations of Israel, and the fact that their "power" can be shattered strongly implies that God's power is not under discussion. Defining the power of God's church as "shatterable" reveals a humanist bent, as it assigns importance based on corruptible human action rather than the will and outworking of the unassailable Head of the church. In fact, such an inclination on our part may have been part of the cause of the church's scattering in the first place!

Jesus Christ will lead and sustain His church—in that we can, and must, trust.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[What Is the Work of God Now? \(Part 1\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh suggests that the preaching the gospel to the world, held by some to be the only identifying mark of the church, is at best the beginning of a long, complex process of creating disciples and godly offspring through steady feeding and

encouragement to overcome (feeding the flock). God, as a responsible parent, is not one-dimensional in assigning responsibilities to His children, but frequently shifts gears, changing circumstances, giving His begotten children a well-rounded education. God - not Satan or an incompetent ministry - engineered the massive scattering of the church of God to move it away from pernicious and fatal Laodiceanism. We need to adjust to the new situation, realizing that God has engineered these events with the real work of God in mind: making man in His image and reproducing Himself.

From the Archives: Featured Article

Power

by David C. Grabbe

The concept of *power* brings many different ideas to mind, any and all of which may certainly be valid. David Grabbe, however, concentrates on the 'little strength' of the church of the Philadelphians, suggesting that Christ commends them for being 'faithful in little' and will reward them with much.

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