Exousia

In classical Greek, the noun *exousia* appears in different type of literature. It could denote authority to rule, one bearing such authority, the sphere controlled by this authority, and the power to do something. It is closely related to *dunamis*, “power” but differs by its intent of the delegation of authority rather than the capability of the inherent power of *dunamis*.

*Exousia* appears in the fifth century B.C. in the writings of Thucydides and was used by Antiphon Orator meaning “an ability to do something” as long as there were no hindrances (Kittel, 2:562). The word generally denotes the right to act according to legal or moral standards. Thus it is often used in an official sense to describe the authority of a king.

The word has a derived meaning “authoritative position” and in the plural “authorities.” It appears over fifty times in the Septuagint where it retains the idea of “authority.” The noun *exousia* is used in the Septuagint for God’s power in the sense of His absolute sovereignty. Josephus and Philo used the word in this manner as well.

*Exousia* appears 103 times in the Greek New Testament where both the classical and Septuagint meanings are retained. The word denotes “delegated authority, authoritative position, and office of state, official power, head of state.”

A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature-Third edition lists the following definitions for the noun *exousia*: (1) a state of control over something, freedom of choice, right (2) potential or resource to command, control or govern, capability, might, power (3) the right to control or command, authority, absolute power, warrant (4) Power exercised by rulers or others in high position by virtue of their office, ruling power, official power (5) bearer of ruling authority (a) human authorities officials, government (b) of transcendent rulers and functionaries (6) the sphere in which power is exercised, domain (7) means of exercising power, 1 Cor. 11:10. (Pages 352-353)

The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon: (1) power of choice, liberty of doing as one pleases; leave or permission (2) physical and mental power; the ability or strength with which one is endued, which he either possesses or exercises (3) the power of authority (influence) and of right; delegated authority (4) the power of rule or government (the power of him whose will and commands must be submitted to by others and obeyed; authority (Page 225).

Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains lists the following definitions for the noun *exousia*: (1) the right to control or govern over – ‘authority to rule, right to control’ (volume 2, page 476). (2) the domain or sphere over which one has authority to control or rule – ‘jurisdiction’ (volume 2, page 476). (3) a means or instrument by which authority is marked or symbolized –

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‘symbol of authority, symbol of subjection to authority’ (volume 2, page 476). (4) one who has the authority to rule or govern – ‘an authority, ruler’ (volume 2, page 477). (5) a state of control over someone or something – ‘control’ (volume 2, page 473). (6) the power to do something with or without an added implication of authority – ‘power’ (volume 2, page 681). (7) a supernatural power having some particular role in controlling the destiny and activities of human beings – ‘power, authority, lordship, ruler, wicked force’ (volume 2, pages 147-148). (8) the right to judge on the basis of having the potential to evaluate – ‘right, freedom of choice, freedom of action, power to evaluate’ (volume 2, page 365).

The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised, “power, ability, faculty; efficiency, energy; liberty license; authority, rule, dominion, jurisdiction; authorities, potentates, powers; right, authority, full power; privilege, prerogative; a veil” (Page 146).

The noun *exousia* is used of the temporary authority of the fallen angels and Satan (Luke 4:6; 22:43; Acts 26:18; Ephesians 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Colossians 1:13, 16; 2:10, 15). When used in relation to the Satanic order of battle the word is always listed after the noun *arche*, “rulers” (Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15; Eph. 1:21; 3:10).

*Exousia* is used of the delegated authority that the apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ received from Him (Luke 10:19; Acts 8:19; 2 Corinthians 10:8; 13:10). It is used often of the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to heal, forgive sins, to judge, to rule over men and angels, both elect and non-elect and the church and raise Himself from the dead (Matthew 7:29; 9:8; 10:1; 21:23, 24, 27; 28:18; Mark 1:22, 27; 2:10; 3:15; 6:7; 11:28, 29, 33; Luke 4:32, 36; 5:24; 9:1; 12:5; 20:2, 8; John 1:12; 5:27; 10:18; 17:2; Jude 25; Revelation 12:10;

The noun is used of the authority in the millennium that Christ will delegate to the overcomers (Revelation 2:26). It is used in relation to the fourth seal judgment during the last three and a half years of the Tribulation period and refers to the power of the ashen horse rider to kill through war, famine and pestilence a fourth of mankind (Revelation 6:8).

*Exousia* is used of the power of the fallen angels to torment the unsaved for five months during the last three and a half years of the tribulation (Revelation 9:3, 10, 19). It speaks of the power of the two witnesses during the Tribulation (Revelation 11:6).

The word is used of the authority and power of the Antichrist over the human race during the Tribulation period (Revelation 13:2, 4, 5, 7; 17:13) as well as the power and authority of the false prophet (Revelation 13:12). The noun is used of the power and authority to rule that will be delegated to the ten kings help to compose the Revived Form of the Roman Empire during the Tribulation (Revelation 17:12). It is used of the power of an elect angel (Revelation 14:18; 18:1).
The word is used of the Father’s authority (Acts 1:7; Romans 9:21; Revelation 16:9). Exousia is used also in relation to the power of the second death, which refers to eternal condemnation or in other words, the perpetuation of real spiritual death in the eternal lake of fire (Revelation 20:6). It is used of the right of access that believers from all dispensations will have to the tree of life in eternal state (Revelation 22:14).

The noun speaks of the authority a person has over their own soul in 1 Corinthians 7:37. It speaks of freedom or liberty in 1 Corinthians 8:9, 9:4, 5, 6 and 2 Thessalonians 3:9. The noun is used of the authority assumed by the false teachers among the Judaizers (1 Corinthians 9:12).

Exousia means “control” in Acts 5:4. It means “authority” in 1 Corinthians 11:10 where it is used of the women’s long hair, which is symbolic of the fact that she is under the authority of her husband. The word is used of human governmental authorities (Matthew 8:9; Luke 7:8; 12:11; 20:20; 23:7; John 19:10; Acts 9:14; 26:10, 12; Romans 13:1, 2, 3; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 3:22).

In Romans 9:21, the word is in a Pauline analogy where the potter’s “authority” over the clay, which he molds into a vessel and is analogous to God’s authority over Israel. In Romans 13:1, the word is used in the plural and means “authorities” and refers to the civil governmental authorities in Rome who were delegated authority and power by God as His servants to govern the affairs of men and to exercise justice against law breakers. The word speaks of the power or right to govern and to exercise authority over the citizens of the Roman Empire.