

January 1996

Frank W. Nelte

THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ABOUT 'CROWNS'

In the New Testament there are many references to "crowns". For example, there are references to "a crown of life", "a crown of righteousness", "a crown of glory" and "crowns of gold". Exactly what do all of these references mean? Let's take a closer look at this matter of "crowns".

TWO DIFFERENT TYPES OF "CROWNS"

In the Greek text of the New Testament there are TWO different words, which are both translated into the text of the English KJV by the word "crown". These two words do in fact have different meanings, something that is not readily apparent when we read the KJV of the Bible.

The two Greek words are "stephanos", which is used 18 times, and "diadema", which is used only three times. There is also the Greek verb "stephanoo" which is translated as "crowned", and which is also used three times.

Let's take a closer look at these words.

THE WORD "DIADEMA"

From this word we get our English word "diadem", which, according to Webster's Dictionary, refers to "a headband worn as a badge of royalty. It comes from a Greek verb which means "to bind around". Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament mentions that this word "diadema" referred to "the blue band marked with white with which Persian kings used to bind on the turban or tiara; the kingly ornament for the head".

THIS IS THE WORD THAT MEANS "A CROWN" WHICH SYMBOLIZES THE POSITION OF A KING! "DIADEMA" SYMBOLIZES RULERSHIP!

This word "DIADEMA" is used only three times in the New Testament, all three occurrences being in the Book of Revelation. Notice:

And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and SEVEN CROWNS upon his heads. (Revelation 12:3)

The "great red dragon" is a reference to Satan; and the seven "heads" refer to the seven major empires through which Satan has controlled and still will control the kingdoms of this world. The seven heads represent: Babylon (1 head), Medo-Persia (1 head), Greece (4 heads) and Rome (1 head).

In this context "crowns" refers to kingly power and authority.

And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns TEN CROWNS, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. (Revelation 13:1)

This is the same "beast" as in the previous verse we have looked at, but here the focus is on the 10 "horns", which are on the last "head" (i.e. Rome). The 10 "horns" refer to 10 "resurrections" or "revivals" of the Roman Empire. Again, in this context "crowns" also refers to the kingly power and authority these revivals will have.

The last reference where "diadema" is used refers to Jesus Christ. Notice:

His eyes [were] as a flame of fire, and on his head [were] MANY CROWNS; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. (Revelation 19:12)

These "many crowns" symbolize that Jesus Christ will RULE as "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (see Revelation 19:16). Again, this use is clearly a reference to kingly power and authority.

All three of these uses of "diadema" refer to claiming royalty and rulership.

Let's look at the next word.

THE WORD STEPHANOS

In all 18 places where this word is used in the New Testament, it is always translated in the KJV as "crown". Here is one example:

Henceforth there is laid up for me A CROWN (Greek "stephanos") of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:8 AV)

Where the Greek word "diadema" refers to "A BADGE OF ROYALTY AND RULERSHIP", the Greek word "stephanos" refers to "A BADGE OF VICTORY". Paul had "fought a good fight" (2 Timothy 4:7), and he had been victorious! Therefore he was eligible for "the badge of victory", in Greek "stephanos".

So, apart from the three verses in Revelation we have looked at, ALL NEW TESTAMENT references to "crowns" refer to VICTORY! Now when the word "stephanos" is linked to the word "kings", THEN it means that those who have gained a victory are going to be kings.

Now gaining the victory was made possible for us by Jesus Christ.

But thanks be to God, which giveth us THE VICTORY through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:57 AV)

The Greek verb "stephanoo" is formed from the noun "stephanos", and the emphasis is thus also on being victorious! For example:

Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; THOU CROWNEDST HIM (stephanoo) with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands:" (Heb 2:7 AV)

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, CROWNED WITH (stephanoo) glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." (Heb 2:9 AV)

The focus in both these verses is also on victory, rather than on royalty! In Hebrews 2:7 it shows that God has given man VICTORY and glory and honour. And two verses later it shows that Jesus Christ obtained VICTORY and glory and honour.

So, to summarize, apart from the three places where the Greek word "diadema" is used, the word "crown" is always used to focus on VICTORY over something! Jesus Christ made clear in Revelation 2-3 that rewards in God's kingdom are for those who "overcome", and overcoming implies being victorious!

So when we read about "crowns" in the New Testament, we should be thinking more along the lines of VICTORY, rather than along the lines of "royalty". The concept of royalty is conveyed in the New Testament by the use of the word "kings", rather than the use of the word "crowns".

And hast made us unto our God KINGS and priests: and we shall reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:10 AV)

Frank W. Nelte