

eternal kingdom without any unrighteousness! So the crown of righteousness is a fitting reward for living a righteous life now. And it's well deserved, since we will be persecuted if we love righteousness (Matt 5:10). Perhaps fighting the good fight (faithfulness and victory in spiritual warfare), finishing our mission (cf. 'in order that I may complete my mission' Acts 20:24), and keeping the faith are also requirements. If we love righteousness, we'll fight for it, suffer for it, make sacrifices for it, and even die for it. We must fight the good fight (engage in spiritual warfare), finish our mission (not get discouraged, give up, and quit), and keep the faith (be obedient and faithful) to the end of our lives to be righteous enough to deserve this crown. *Giver:* Jesus ("the Lord, the righteous judge"). *Time:* "in the future" and "on that day" (probably the Judgment Seat of Christ). *Reward:* this crown is payment for fighting the good fight, finishing our mission, keeping the faith, living a righteous life, and loving the future appearance of Jesus at the Rapture and Second Coming. *Stored in heaven:* this crown is earned now and put away for safekeeping in heaven.

4. An **imperishable crown** is not another crown (no definite article) but a quality of all biblical crowns. They're received by having a lot of self-control: "And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable" (1 Cor 9:25). They're available to every believer, not just to those with ruling spiritual gifts. A perishable wreath of leaves or flowers is contrasted with a future imperishable wreath, perhaps with leaves or flowers of pure gold (cf. the angel's gold crown in Rev 14:14). They are victors' crowns: (1) a laurel wreath received for a victory in athletic games, and (2) a future crown for a victory in spiritual warfare. Paul goes on to mention his own self-discipline: "I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified" (1 Cor 9:26–27). Two important principles to note: (1) self-control (*egkrateia*), one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:23), can help you win an imperishable crown, and (2) without self-control you will lose or forfeit your crown. That was Paul's concern: after years of successful ministry he could still be disqualified. Self-control will help you be faithful to the end of your life. The figure of winning a race (9:24) changes to winning any of the slated athletic events (9:25a–b) and finally to winning not athletic contests but a victory in spiritual warfare (9:25c).

As athletes compete against each other for perishable crowns, so we compete against each other for imperishable crowns. A few win; most lose. We are all in competition with one another. Any Christian who decides to compete may win if he has enough self-discipline. The crown of life, crown of righteousness, and crown of glory are all imperishable crowns. *Promise:* of an imperishable or lasting crown (permanence). *Recipients:* the saints in the church at Corinth. *Requirements:* self-control in all things, victory (implied), and faithfulness to the end of your life (9:27). *Competition:* one or a few win in each event and the rest lose. *Giver:* not specified, but probably Jesus. *Time:* probably at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

5. The **crown of pride or boasting**, a crown to be proud of, is given for evangelism and discipleship: "Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved" (Phil 4:1). "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?" (1 Thess 2:19 NIV). *Kauchasis* is an "act of taking pride in somet., *boasting*" (BAGD). Paul's hope will be realized, joy experienced, and crown received at the Judgment Seat. In the next life he will not boast of his own accomplishments but in the Lord (cf. 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17). This reward is for grounding people in the faith and may be the same as the crown of glory (1 Pet 5:4).

The backdrop for biblical crowns is the Angelic Conflict. Crowns are earned by winning *single* battles in spiritual warfare, such as victory over suffering in times of testing (Rev 2:10) and victory over persecution from the synagogue of Satan (3:9–11). In these two cases the crown of life is *not* a reward promised to overcomers; overcomers may, in fact, earn much greater rewards by winning *many* battles (2:17, 26–27; 3:12, 21). The ultimate prize is to receive a diadem and reign with Christ (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26–27; 3:21; 20:4).



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CROWNS AND DIADEMS



Coin of Antiochus III the Great
Wearing a Diadem (223–187 B.C.)
British Museum, London

ROMAN MILITARY CROWNS

After a battle, generals gave rewards to soldiers for bravery and courageous deeds, such as praise, spears, cups, and horse trappings (Polybius, *Histories*, 6.39.1–4). Crowns were higher honors given for the most distinguished military service. They were bestowed after a Roman triumph by victorious generals to soldiers who won personal victories in battle (a cavalry fight, a battle at sea, capturing a point by storm) or accomplished something extraordinary on the battlefield (gained distinction, feats of valor, first to scale a wall, save the life of a Roman citizen) (Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 6.21). They were victory crowns, not royal crowns.

• **Grass or Siege Crown** (*corona graminea* or *corona obsidionalis*): highest and rarest military decoration, crown with the greatest glory, given only to generals who delivered a besieged army (Pliny, *Natural History* 22.4–7) or city (Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Attici* 5.6.8–10). It was made with green grass (also weeds, wild flowers, and cereals such as wheat) growing within the siege perimeter and was conferred by the soldiers or people he delivered.

• **Civic Crown** (*corona civica*): oak leaves woven into a garland “which one citizen gives to another who has saved his life in battle” (Gellius, *NA*, 5.6.11–15; cf. Pliny, *NH* 22.4). It was the second highest military decoration and was given only by the emperor in the days of the Empire (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.12). The recipient was entitled to “wear it for the rest of his life; when he appears at the games it is the custom for even the senate always to rise at his entrance, and he has the right to sit next to the senators” (Pliny, *NH* 16.5).

• **Naval Crown** (*corona navalis*): awarded to the first man “to board an enemy ship in a sea-fight.” It was made of gold and decorated with representations of the prows of ships (Gellius, *NA*, 5.6.18–19).

• **Battlement Crown** (*corona muralis*): made of gold and decorated with turrets (*muri pinnis*) to resemble battlements on a wall. It was awarded to the first soldier over the wall of an enemy town (Gellius, *NA*, 5.6.16, 19; Polybius, *Hist.* 6.39.5).

• **Camp Crown** (*corona castrens* or *corona vallaris*): made of gold, decorated with palisades (*valli*), and “presented by a general to the soldier who is first to fight his way into a hostile camp; that crown represents a palisade” (Gellius, *NA*, 5.6.17).

DIADEMS

Diadems are royal crowns. Jesus has many, one for each nation he rules over in his Kingdom (Rev 19:12). They are also promised to believers who qualify. They will be awarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ to overcomers, to royal-priests who overcome *many* spiritual enemies—including Satan. The prerequisites for ruling with Christ are endurance (2 Tim 2:12), overcoming and faithfully doing good works to the end (Rev 2:26–27; 3:21), and martyrdom for tribulational saints (20:4).

BIBLICAL CROWNS

Crowns (*stephanoi*) are wreaths (garlands, chaplets, circlets) given as special honors (rewards) for bravery, exceptional

accomplishments, and victory in spiritual warfare—for distinguished service in the Angelic Conflict. They are not royal crowns (*diadems*). “I greatly doubt whether anywhere in classical literature στεφάνος is used of the kingly, or imperial, crown” (Trench, *Synonyms*, 78).

1. **The crown of life** is promised for perseverance and approval in testing: “Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12). “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev 2:10; cf. 3:11). To pass a test is to overcome Satan, the cause of temptations and trials (Rev 2:10). This crown recognizes exceptional merit and memorializes a life of faithfulness in testing. Such faithfulness includes enduring persecution, suffering, and tribulation. It may not be solely a martyr’s crown: (1) the preposition *achri* may be inclusive or exclusive of death (Rev 2:10), and (2) no mention of martyrdom occurs in James (1:12). This crown is available not just to pastors (Rev 2:10) but to all believers (James 1:12). *Promises*: of happiness and of the crown of life (reason for their happiness). *Requirements*: faithfulness in persecution, imprisonment, suffering, and tribulation up to and including death, endurance (steadfastness, perseverance) in testing, approval after testing (must pass the test), and love for the Lord (motivation for persevering in suffering and in danger). *Approval*: by Jesus and by God the Father. *Recipients*: pastor of the church at Smyrna and believers who love the Lord (Jesus). *Giver*: Jesus, probably at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

2. Elders will receive **a crown of glory** for shepherding their flocks: “And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (1 Pet 5:4). Elders are rulers of God’s people in local churches: “let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching” (1 Tim 5:17). This crown is a special honor received as compensation (*komizo*) for ruling well and will never wither (*amarantinos*)—perhaps because it’s made of gold. It gives them eternal glory; that is, causes people to have a high opinion of them forever. Enduring persecution, suffering, tribulation, and testing are not mentioned as prerequisites for this reward, but may be

assumed in ruling well. Since they have ruling spiritual gifts, some may also receive diadems and rule with Christ in the Millennial and Eternal Kingdoms. *Promise*: of the unwithering crown of glory. *Recipients*: elders who shepherd the flock of God in local churches. *Requirements*: being good rulers in their churches (voluntary, eager, not for money, not lording it over the people, being good examples, and making decisions according to God’s will). *Giver*: Jesus. *Time*: when Jesus appears (after the Rapture at the Judgment Seat of Christ).

3. Believers will receive **the crown of righteousness** if they live a righteous life and love the appearance of Jesus Christ: “in the future [or ‘in addition’] there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim 4:8). Jesus will appear to reward us for our righteous deeds at the Rapture and to set up a righteous kingdom at his Second Advent. People who love his coming desire such a righteous kingdom on earth. So, the crown of righteousness is given for two reasons: (1) for maintaining a righteous life (implied by the name of this crown), and (2) for loving his appearing. This crown is a memorial of a righteous life lived on earth during the Angelic Conflict—a visible testimony for all to see for all eternity. This conditional promise is made to every believer, with or without ruling gifts. In the same way Roman soldiers who distinguished themselves in battle received crowns as memorials to their bravery and heroism, but did not become rulers. Near the end of his life Paul was certain he would receive the crown of righteousness. *Promise*: of the crown of righteousness. *Recipients*: to the apostle Paul and “to all who have loved His appearing” (the Rapture and Second Coming). *Requirements*: to love the revelation that Jesus is coming again at the Rapture and Second Advent. If you love the imminence of the Rapture, you are likely living a righteous life to not be embarrassed when he comes. And if you love the fact that Jesus will come again to remove the curse on the earth, evil, and Satan and to establish a righteous Kingdom, you are probably living a righteous life because you love righteousness, hate all unrighteousness, and want to be as righteous as possible now. You see his coming as the only answer to the world’s problems. “Yes, I am coming quickly.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20). “But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13). This we love: an