

4.6 - Crowns

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There are two types of crowns mentioned in the [NT](#), [στέφανος](#) [stephanos] and [διάδημα](#) [diadēma]. Most discussions of these two words indicate that the stephanos is a *victor's crown*, whereas the diadēma is a *royal crown*. "The stephanos was the usual crown of exaltation for victors of games, achievements in war, and places of honor at feasts (AV 1Cor. 9:25; RSV, NEB 'wreath')." ¹ "Probably the widest NT use of the word [stephanos] is in conjunction with the Greek games as parallels to the Christian life (cf. 1Cor. 9:24, 25; Gal. 2:2; Php. 3:14; 2Ti. 2:5; 1Pe. 5:4)." ² "In each biblical use the diadem is a badge of royalty." ³ However, when one analyzes the context within which these two terms appear, it appears that they are not as clearly distinguished as these definitions would imply.

4.6.1 - Stephanos

The Greek word for *crown* is Stephanos in the following passages:

1. Jesus' crown of thorns (Mat. 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2, 5).
2. Man crowned with glory and honor (Heb. 2:7).
3. Jesus crowned with glory and honor (Heb. 2:9).
4. Paul's Philippian believers (Php. 4:1).
5. Paul's Thessalonian believers (1Th. 2:19).
6. The Twenty-Four Elders (Rev. 4:4⁺, 10⁺).
7. The rider on the white horse (Rev. 6:2⁺).
8. Locusts from the abyss (Rev. 9:7⁺).
9. Woman with twelve stars (Rev. 12:1⁺).
10. One like the Son of Man (Rev. 14:14⁺).
11. [Believer's Crowns](#).

Significantly, in instances where the *royalty* of Jesus is plainly in view (Mat. 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2, 5), the crown used is *not* diadēma, but stephanos.

When they had twisted a crown of thorns [**stephanos**], they put *it* on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, **King** of the Jews!" (Mat. 27:29) [emphasis added]

Here the Roman soldiers clearly are mocking Jesus as *royalty*, yet He is wearing the stephanos. This use is contrary to the assertion that stephanos is a victor's crown whereas diadēma represents royalty. Hemer explains the use of stephanos for royalty in this situation because the crown of thorns is literally a wreath: "There is certainly no reason for denying [στέφανος](#) [stephanos] its most usual sense here. It is 'wreath', not 'diadem', *Kranz*, not *Krone*. The 'crown of thorns' is admittedly [στέφανος](#) [stephanos] in the evangelists (Mat. 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2, 5), but that was literally a garland. To the soldiers it meant mock royalty; perhaps to the writers it also implied victory." ⁴ But this fails to explain why Jesus is crowned with a stephanos in other contexts where a wreath is not in view (Heb. 2:9; Rev. 14:14⁺). The evidence that the Romans understood Jesus as claiming to be a *king* and not a *victor* is overwhelming (Mat. 27:11, 29, 37; Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26; Luke 23:3, 37, 38; John 18:33, 39; 19:3, 12, 14, 19, 21). Moreover, Jesus is *frequently* found wearing the stephanos. Those who assert that the horseman of Rev. 6:2⁺ cannot be Christ because he is wearing a stephanos need to make this determination from other factors.

4.6.2 - Diadema

The Greek word for *crown* is [διάδημα](#) [diadēma] in the following passages:

1. Crowns on the seven heads of the fiery red dragon (Rev. 12:3⁺).
2. Crowns on the ten horns of the beast rising up from the sea (Rev. 13:1⁺).
3. Crowns upon the head of the one called Faithful and True (Rev. 19:12⁺).

The “royal crown” is found upon the head of Jesus in only one passage. In the other two passages, it is upon the heads of the enemies of God.

4.6.3 - Believer’s Crowns

The crowns associated with the reward of the believer are always *stephanos*. Paul associates this crown with the reward of *victory* in competition (1Cor. 9:25). Trench argues that Paul’s use of *stephanos* may not be consistent with that of John in the book of Revelation. Given Paul’s Roman background, he frequently drew from the imagery of Greek athletic competition, but these games were offensive to Palestinian Jews like John and hence unlikely to provide a backdrop for the use of *stephanos* in Revelation. Therefore, *stephanos* may denote rule or royalty when used by John.⁵

Crowns for Believers

Crown	Verse	Description
stephanos	1Cor. 9:25	Incorruptible Crown
stephanos	2Ti. 4:8	Crown of Righteousness
stephanos	Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10 ⁺	Crown of Life
stephanos	1Pe. 5:4	Crown of Glory ⁶

4.6.4 - Not Technical Terms

Our short survey of the Greek terms underlying the word *crown* indicates that it is best not to take these terms in a technical sense (as if their meaning consistently differentiate between victory and rule). It is best to let the *context* be the deciding factor in determining the sense which either term conveys.

It is doubtful whether the distinction between [στεφανος](#) [*stephanos*] and [διαδερμα](#) [*diadema*], the victor’s “wreath” and the kingly “crown,” was strictly observed in Hellenistic Greek. “The crown of thorns” [στεφανος](#) [*stephanos*] placed on our Lord’s head, was indeed woven, but it was the caricature of a royal crown.⁷

Notes

¹W. E. Raffety, “[Crown](#),” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., [The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979, 1915), 1:831.

²Robert L. Thomas, [Revelation 1-7](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992), 172-173.

³Geoffrey W. Bromiley, “[Diadem](#),” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., [The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979, 1915), 941.

⁴Colin J. Hemer, [The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 72.

⁵Richard Chenevix Trench, [Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches in Asia](#) (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1861), 109-110.

⁶Incorruptible: “that does not fade away.”

⁷M. R. Vincent, [Vincent’s Word Studies](#) (Escondido, CA: Ephesians Four Group, 2002), Rev. 4:4.