

For We Must All Appear Before the Judgment Seat of Christ

Second Corinthians 5: 10

DIG: What is the *bema*? Who is it that appears before the *bema* of Christ? On what basis are the crowns rewarded? When does this take place? Who is the Judge?

REFLECT: Every believer receives at least one crown. Which crown or crowns could you possibly receive? Why? What purpose do these crowns serve? What are you doing with the gifts God has already given you? What will He say to you at the *bema*?

This is a judgment that will take place in heaven after the Rapture of the Church. For all believers must all appear before the *bema* of Christ, that each one may receive what is due them for the things done while in the Body, whether good or bad (Second Corinthians 5:10). In the synagogue, the *bema* is the raised platform where the Word of God is read and the service is conducted. It is a place of reward; it is a place of honor and blessing. There is no fear at the *bema*. John spoke of the *bema* when he wrote: In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like Him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love (First John 4:17-18).

The basis of blessing at the *bema* will be the believer's works done in the Body of Messiah after salvation. This is illustrated in the parable of the Bags of Gold. Some were faithful and were rewarded, and some were not and lost their reward (see my commentary on [The Life of Christ Jx - The Parable of the Bags of Gold](#)) The believer's sins will not be judged, because they have already been forgiven at the cross, and **there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1)**. It will not be a question of the believer's sins, but a matter of reward to determine degree of authority in the millennial Kingdom.

What will we do with our crowns when we receive them? John tells us that believers will lay their crowns before the throne in heaven and proclaim: You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being (Revelation 4:10b-11).

Paul gives us a more detailed passage dealing with the *bema*. **By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Yeshua the Messiah (First Corinthians 3:10-11).** Rabbi Sha'ul again explains that the basis for judgment is the works of the believer. **The foundation is Jesus Christ.** In addition, their works will not be based on *quantity*, but *quality* instead. **If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. The question will not be how much gold, silver and costly stones or wood, hay or straw, but was it gold, silver and costly stones or was it wood, hay and straw? Thus, some believers will find their works burned up, while others will merely find them refined. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work (First Corinthians 3:12-13).** Forgiveness does not exclude accountability. It's just burning away the dross to purify the real stuff that is to be rewarded. Finally, the rewards are given. Those who have built with **gold, silver and costly stones** will find their works still remaining, but purified after the fire has been applied. **If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward (First Corinthians 3:14).**

But if they have built with **wood, hay and straw**, they will be burned up. Therefore, **he will suffer loss**, in the sense of lost rewards and authority in the Millennium, nothing more. Lest anyone think that **he lost his salvation**, Rabbi Sha'ul says in no uncertain terms that **he himself will be saved**. His works do not determine salvation. **His eternal relationship with the Lord is guaranteed because He has anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (Second Corinthians 1:21-22).** Salvation equals faith . . . plus nothing. But **he will spend a thousand years in the messianic Kingdom as one escaping through the flames** with nothing to show for his spiritual life **(First Corinthians 3:15).**

This passage says nothing about the nature of the reward; however, other passages do. They speak of these rewards as being crowns. The Greek language has two words meaning **crown**. The first word is *diadem*, which is a king's **crown**. It is the **crown** of sovereignty and of a person who is royal by his nature and by his position - a king. This is the kind of **crown** that **Jesus** wears. The second Greek word is *stephanos*, which is a **crown** given to an overcomer, a victor, one who has won a race. These are the kinds of **crowns** available to believers because they overcame in the spiritual warfare with Satan and are now **crowned** at the *bema* seat of Christ. **There are five such crowns mentioned in the Bible.**¹⁵⁰

The first is called the incorruptible crown: Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever (First Corinthians 9:24-25). This crown is given to believers who faithfully run the race, believers who crucify every selfish desire in the flesh and point people to **Christ**. **God** calls some people to do things that will require some sacrifice in the way they live and conduct their lives. This verse also implies that these people will receive this **crown** for the sacrifices they were willing to make for **ADONAI** in order to successfully complete the call or mission **God** called them to do. They were faithful to that call.

The second crown is called the crown of rejoicing: For what is our hope, our joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His Second Coming? For you are our glory and joy (First Thessalonians 2:19-20). Paul asked rhetorically, what would be the greatest blessing he could possibly receive at the *bema seat* of **Christ**. The **Thessalonians** were! They were everything that was worth anything to **Messiah**. They were His hope, crown, glory and joy. In essence, Paul said, "When life is over and we stand in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His Second Coming, you **Thessalonians** will be His source of glory and joy, you mean that much to Him." This is the soul winner's crown. It is not hard to understand **God's** eagerness to reward those who bring the lost to Him. Some have the gift of evangelism, but we are all to evangelize. We need to understand that a relationship with **Jesus** is exactly what unbelievers are searching for, whether they realize it or not, and reaching out to them causes **God** to rejoice.

The third crown is the crown of righteousness: Now there is in store 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 longed for His appearing (Second Timothy 4:7-8). Rabbi Sha'ul had stored up spiritual currency in heaven, and so can we. **Jesus Himself** said: **Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal it (Matthew 6:20)**. **Yeshua** tells us that there isn't anything that you have suffered in this life that that will not be rewarded **at least a hundred times as much (Mark 10:29-30)**. This crown of righteousness describes itself. It is the crown of eternal righteousness - the very righteousness of the Redeemer granted in full perfection to the glorified believer. When we receive our glorified bodies, we will receive this crown. All believers will be rewarded.

The fourth crown is called the crown of life: In **James**, it is a crown for those people who remain faithful to the Gospel even under persecution: **Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him (James 1:12).** And in the book of **Revelation**, it is given to those who suffer martyrdom for their faith. **Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death (Revelation 2:10-11).**

The fifth and final crown mentioned in the Bible is the crown of glory: To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed. There are glorious days coming when those who serve **Yeshua** with the right heart and in the right way will be rewarded. **Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers - not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And then Peter makes an application: When the Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away (First Peter 5:2-4).** This is a crown for faithfully feeding the flock of **ADONAI**. It is available to those pastors, messianic rabbis, elders and other teachers who feed the sheep with the milk and meat of the Word of **God**.

There may be other crowns available, but these are the only ones referred to in the Bible. At least these five are available to those whose works remain, which are built of **gold, silver and precious stones**. These crowns are for the purpose of determining degree of authority in the messianic Kingdom and not for the Eternal Order. In eternity, all believers will be equal, but not so in the millennial Kingdom where believers will have different positions of authority **(Luke 19:11-27).**¹⁵¹