

A Crown of Glory

Proverbs 16:31

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“The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.” – Proverbs 16:31 (Cf. 4:9, 10; 3:2; 20:29).

There are numerous times when, not only Solomon, but virtually all of the OT writers use terms that when first translated into English seem to use outdated terms in their writing; and that, not at all surprisingly! This is one of those times! He uses the word “hoary” which is actually NOT a term from the Solomonic era but one that is more from the time when the KJV was written. The newer versions, even the New KJV (NKJV) use a term more understandable to those around in the 16th and/or 17th centuries. The King James refers to it as the “Hoary” head. The newer versions speak of it as “silver haired” head. Comparing the two one has to look back to the King James era to get hold of just what is in mind. The term actually arose from the old English term that came from Botany and spoke that which was moldy and spoke of that which demonstrated or was the result an old growth.

The Hebrew word was used to refer to anything that demonstrated age in a visible fashion. It is used only 19 times in the OT. 19 occurrences...the KJV translates it as “old age” six times, “gray hairs” six times, “hoar head” three times, “hoary head” twice, “gray headed” once, and “hoary” once. You and I need not consider “hoary” a term that we need to incorporate into our vocabulary; but we do need to recognize it (when it appears) for that of which it speaks.

³¹ *The silver-haired head is a crown of glory,
If it is found in the way of righteousness. (Proverbs 16:31)*

Solomon’s point is to declare what old age or the movement into the portion of life which can be seen as the result of the earlier part of life spent in the pursuit of godliness and submission to God and acquiring of the knowledge of God’s Word and teaching results in. Solomon’s point is not just that getting older is the crown of glory for a person. It is his intention that we see the great value in seeing to it that, as we progress from youth to our older years, we build the things into our lives that bring to us the qualities that result in elder years being a glory to us instead of just, well, old age. Solomon speaks to this general issue often throughout and, indeed there are a number of men in the Bible that can be seen as have a “righteous hoary head”.

1. Jacob is clearly in this category (Gen. 47:9, 48:1). The Scripture tells us that the blessing of the venerable Jacob was prized by a heathen king, as well as by his own sons.

2. Not long after Jacob, Simeon's *nunc dimittis* was even more honorable than Jacob's, since to him it was permitted to see with his bodily eyes, what the other had waited for and died in faith of seeing.
3. Of course, Samuel, the great Prophet was as well. (1 Sam. 12:2-4)
4. 2 Sam. 19:32-37 tells us of one Barzillai also set in this category.
5. The powerful Prophet Elisha, in 2 Kings 13:14, falls into this category. It is interesting that Elisha's age had at one time subjected him to ridicule, was, in the decline of life, revered by all; and on his deathbed visited by the king whom he had reprovved.
6. Then, one of the kings of Israel, Jehoida, falls here as well.
7. We could also place Abraham, "the friend of God," a "good old age" was granted, and respect even from foreigners (Gen. 25:10) attended him to the grave.

We must take note that Solomon makes clear that it is not only the age that brings the glory of which he speaks, but rather it is that old age combined, so to speak, with a righteousness that is the implied result of a younger life lived to build godliness and honor to the Lord that he has in view. We all grow to old age (should God privilege us to progress into that stage of life instead of calling us to Himself earlier). The trait of "Righteousness" is seen 128 many times in the OT and speaks of a number of related ideas. Justice, righteous acts, comparative rightness, justice, consistent with judicial properness, in line with the known character of God, and such.

Just to rehearse/clarify our interpretation - The word "if" is not in the original, but is implied by the qualifying clause, "*it shall be found in the way of righteousness.*" In other words, "*The hoary head*" which "*is a crown of glory*" is that which shall be "*found in the way of righteousness.*" The crown of glory is, in fact, "*the crown of righteousness*" (comp. 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:4). "*The hoary head*" may belong to one who is found, when old age has come upon him, in the way of unrighteousness. Then it becomes a crown of shame. But from the wise man's point of view (as expressed before), old age is the usual reward of a life spent in habits of virtue and true religion.

Thinking by way of the matter of application, who has not known the good old man, rich in wisdom and experience, beloved, looked up to, honored; it may be with children and grandchildren following in his footsteps; with "two staves to lean on—the remembrance of a life well spent and the hope of eternal life"? Who has not seen such a one and *felt* that his grey head was a bright diadem—the pledge and foreshadowing of "*the crown of glory*" to come? Do I not wish to be like him? But if so I must tread the same path. Not only must I enter upon it, but pursue it to the end. The path of holy living is the true path to honour. Having given myself to the Lord, let me abide in Him, and so "be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless," when He cometh. How will the hoary head before which men rose up and bowed down upon earth (Lev. 19:32), be irradiated with the glory of "the Ancient of days" in heaven! Jesus is thus crowned now (Rev. 1:14), and the aged saints "worthy of double honor," will be

the most like Him. The honor they receive on earth, what is it but a foretaste of this? On the other hand, many through their own folly or wickedness never attain to old age, do “not live out half their days” (Ps. 55:23). Or, if otherwise, a graceless old man, by whom is he revered? His white hairs only bespeak his ripeness for wrath. Accursed is he of God, and not unfrequently of men (Isa. 65:20).

But, oh, be it mine to lay up a store of blessings against old age!
