

What the word “NIKE” means



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The Nike swoosh symbol has become one of the most recognized symbols in the world. Youth around the world love wearing Nike shoes and shirts.

Nike is a BIG word in our world, but very few know what it means. Most people think it is just a snazzy word used by the Nike sports company. However “nike” has been a word full of powerful meaning for more than 2500 years.

Nike is a word from the Greek language. To *nike* means to be victorious, to conquer, and to overcome. In Greek mythology, Nike is the Greek goddess of Victory. She gives victory in battle and sport competitions. She is the fastest runner among the gods. When the Greeks won battles, they thanked Ares, the god of War, and Nike, the goddess of Victory.

Alexander the Great conquered (*niked*) many nations from 336 – 323 B.C. to form the Greek Empire with Greek as the official language. When the Romans conquered (*niked*) the Greeks, they continued to speak Greek throughout the Roman Empire. This means the Greek language influenced the thinking of western nations for centuries. “*Nike*” victory was a basic concept to both the Greek and Roman “conquerors.”

In 47 B.C., Julius Caesar defeated the king of Pontus and announced his victory in Latin with “Veni, vidi, vici” which means “I came, I saw, I conquered.” The word for “I conquered” is *vici* in Latin, and *nike* in Greek. The Romans spoke both languages. Caesar was declaring, “I came, I saw, I *niked*. The Romans saw themselves as the great conquerors, the *nike* victors over other nations. “We are victorious, we conquer, we overcome, we *nike*.”

Phil Knight and Bill Bowerman named their running shoe company “Nike” to say their shoes are for the fastest runners, the winners of the race, the victors, the conquerors. Carolyn Davidson designed the Nike swoosh to represent the wings of the goddess Nike. A statue of the goddess Nike is at the entrance to Nike headquarters in Oregon.

A group of English names come from the word *nike* or *vici*, like Nick, Nicki, Nicole, Nicolette and Nicholas, or Vic, Vicki, Victor, and Victoria. They are to be victorious ones, conquerors, overcomers, *nikes*.

Because the New Testament was written in Greek and uses *nike* thirty four times, it gives wonderful insight into the meaning of *nike*.

It fascinates me how Jesus and the apostles used “*nike*.” It has changed my life.

Jesus said, **“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, ESV).** (New Testament quotations are from the ESV, English Standard Version.)

In the world – trouble. In Jesus – peace. By his death and resurrection, Jesus has *niked* the sinful world to give us his peace in the tribulation the world gives. His *nike* peace is the forgiveness and peace with God he provides by his death for our sins. His *nike* peace is the fullness of God’s favor poured out on us in Christ. His *nike* peace is the Holy Spirit comforting and strengthening us in the world’s troubles so we obey God and *nike* (overcome), knowing Jesus reigns as Messiah and brings us to be with him when we die.

I love how the apostle Paul says all who connect with Jesus Christ are *supernikes*!

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors (supernike) through him who loved us” (Rom 8:35, 37).

Supernike is one big word in Greek! We are *more than victorious*, we *more than conquer*, as Christ loves us and gives us strength to conquer the worst difficulties. We are *supernikes* when by Christ’s power we keep loving the Lord and others no matter how others treat us, just as Jesus did. This is *supernike* success in life.

The New Testament presents Jesus as the great *nike* victor and conqueror, not Caesar. For centuries, the Latin church has hailed Jesus as “Christus Victor,” Christ the Victor, the *Nike* Christ. Jesus is praised for his *nike* victory at the cross:

“The Lion (Jesus) . . . has conquered (niked) . . . Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (Rev 5:5, 9-10, ESV).

By his death and resurrection, Jesus has *niked* our sin. Christ’s blood was shed for our forgiveness. This also conquers Satan’s claim on us, and the death and the hell we deserve. Christ’s death purchased people from all nations to belong to God and his kingdom, to be in God’s presence worshiping and serving him like priests, and to reign with Christ in his coming kingdom! This is *nike* victory for Christ and for us!

Because of Christ’s victory over death, the apostle Paul declared, **“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory (nike) through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:57, ESV).**

God wants to make us his victorious ones, his conquerors, his overcomers through Christ. We can *nike* because Christ has *niked*. I love how the apostle John puts it:

“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes (nikes) the world. And this is the victory (nike) that has overcome (niked) the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes (nikes) the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4, 5).

People who connect with Jesus, the Son of God, are born of God with new life and can *nike* the world with all its unbelief and evil! Living for Jesus because we believe he is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior, brings victory that overcomes all opposition. Going to Jesus by faith and depending on him for every need is the way to *nike*!

Jesus says, **“The one who conquers (nikes), I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered (niked) and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Rev 3:21, ESV).**

We face many powerful temptations that must be overcome with Christ’s *nike* power. We need a *supernike* attitude. “Lord, thank you that Jesus has *niked* sin, Satan, death, and hell for me by his *nike* victory at the cross. Praise you that Jesus reigns in *nike* victory. *Nike* my selfishness. Infuse me with your *nike* ways of holy love. I want you, Lord, and the peace and strength you give in Christ through his *nike* victory.”

Nike victory in life comes from the *nike* victory of Christ’s death and resurrection. Whenever we see a Nike symbol, we can rejoice that Jesus gives us *nike* victory!

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(A full list of all 34 uses of *nike* in the NT is available at www.GraceGodChrist.com)