

Psalm 20

To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David

Psalm 20 and 21 go together: The first is a psalm of intercession by the people on behalf of the king before battle; the second is a psalm of thanksgiving for the victory achieved.

In Psalm 20 there is first a petition for the king (verses 1-5), then the divine assurance that victory is certain (verses 6-8); finally, the psalm closes with a prayer (verse 9).

Verses 1-9:

Psalms 20 and 21 are twin warfare events, Psalm 20 is mostly ceremony before a battle, while Psalm 21 is mostly celebration after a battle.

In the theocracy, these were to be considered holy wars with the chain of command being as follows: The LORD is Commander-in-Chief over the anointed king-general and the theocratic people, soldiers.

All holy convocations, both before and after battles, involved prayer and praise assemblies dedicated to God, who grants victories through the theocratic king-general.

Psalm 20, in anticipation of a military campaign, commemorates a 3-phased ceremony that is regularly conducted by the people in the presence of the Commander-in-Chief on behalf of the king-general.

- I. An Offering of Their Prayers (20:1-5);
- II. A Confirmation of Their Confidence (20:6-8);
- III. A Reaffirmation of Their Dependence (20:9).

Verses 1-5:

The “day of trouble” can be a day of opportunity for the LORD to demonstrate His glorious power for those who know and worship Him.

“Burnt sacrifice” was performed for the atonement of sin and was thus vital to one’s relationship with God (Lev. 1:3-4).

The psalmist prayed for God to both preserve the king in battle and to give him unqualified, abundant help.

Psalm 20:1 "The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee;"

“The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble”:

This is the prayer of God's people for their king-general (compare "His anointed", verse 6).

This certainly recalls the patriarch's words (Gen. 35:3), "I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress."

The "name" alone of the God of Jacob was a safeguard to the people, called after their great forefather "Israel.

So even under the shadow of the greatness of human monarchs and heroes, whole peoples have often felt secure and strong, using no other weapon but his name.

"The Name of the God of Jacob defend thee":

On the force of the expression, "the Name of God" (see the comment upon Psalm 7:17).

"Jacob's God", a favorite expression with David, is the God who made him the promise, "I will be with thee, and I will keep thee in all places whither thou goest" (Gen. 28:15).

"Defend thee" is scarcely a correct rendering.

Translate, "exalt thee".

Many people never pray, until there is a great crisis in their lives.

God fellowships with mankind in man's prayers.

The truth of the matter is that God knows the desires of our heart, even before we pray.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the same God that we pray to.

If we have been regularly communing with God in prayer, He is already listening for our prayer.

This seems to be a prayer of the people for David, their leader.

I cannot say enough about praying for those who are your leaders.

I believe the mention of the God of Jacob here, is saying the God of the covenant which came down from Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob.

Christians are part of that covenant with Abraham also.

Galatians 3:29 "And if ye [be] Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Psalm 20:2 "Send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion;"

“From the sanctuary ... out of Zion”:

These are designations about the place of God’s symbolic presence in the ark which David had recaptured and installed in a tabernacle on Mt. Zion.

The people’s wish was that the LORD Himself would uphold, support and sustain the king-general with His extending, powerful presence throughout the military campaign.

Believers are to help each other.

Help from the sanctuary would however, indicate help from God.

Zion is symbolic of the church.

We do know that battles that the Israelites were in when God sent them, and when the ark of the Covenant was with them, were all victorious.

Psalm 20:3 "Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice; Selah."

The spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise which Christ, as the great High Priest, offers up for his people.

Or which they offer by him and are acceptable to God through him, by virtue of the incense of his mediation.

Or the offering up of himself, which answers to, and is the body.

The sum and substance of all the offerings of the law.

They were types of this, and what they could not do this did.

And therefore, it is expressed in the singular number in the next clause.

"And accept thy burnt sacrifice":

The word rendered "accept" signifies to "reduce to ashes".

And the way in which it was known that sacrifices were acceptable to God was by fire coming down from heaven upon them and consuming them (Lev. 9:24).

And therefore, the word is rightly rendered "accept".

And Christ's sacrifice of himself, putting away sin, and perfecting for ever them that are sanctified, is a sweet smelling savor to God.

For hereby his justice is satisfied, his law is magnified and made honorable.

The sins of his people are atoned for, their persons are accepted, and their sacrifices of prayer and praise come up also with acceptance to him through the virtue of this sacrifice.

And so, these petitions have their accomplishment.

It appears from this that David gave offerings and sacrifices in the holy place, before he went out to battle.

Perhaps the word Selah means that he paused and waited for God's blessing in battle, before he went any further.

We Christians could learn a lesson from this.

Before we do battle with the enemy, we should take time to pray and wait until the LORD says it is okay to proceed, before we take on the enemy.

We too might try the sacrifice of praise, and then perhaps, fast a few days to show our sincerity in our prayer.

Psalm 20:4 "Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel."

Which is to see his seed, the travail of his soul, and to have the pleasure of the LORD prosper in his hand.

To have all his people called, preserved, and glorified.

"And fulfil all thy counsel":

Whatever was agreed upon in the council and covenant of peace between him and his Father, relating to his own glory, and the salvation of his people.

This prayer seems to end with (if it be thy will O LORD).

Notice who David took counsel from.

He took counsel from God.

How many of us are so headstrong that we go blazing into a war with the enemy without taking counsel of God in the matter?

We should learn to say, LORD the battle may be mine, but you have already won the war.

Are we fighting for God, or ourselves?

Let us win battles for the LORD, and not for ourselves.

Psalm 20:5 "We will rejoice in thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up [our] banners: the LORD fulfil all thy petitions."

"Thy salvation":

Here by contrast, God's salvation is victory in battle.

Hereby they show their confidence in God, and their assurance of the victory.

"In the name of our God":

That is, to the honor of God.

"We will set up our banners":

In the way of triumph, which, among other ways, was celebrated by the setting up of banners, or of trophies.

The LORD fulfil all thy petitions":

The same as in Psalm 20:4.

This is put here to show that the church will be in such a frame as before described, when the LORD shall have fulfilled all the petitions of his Anointed.

Of which the church had a full assurance, as appears from the following words in the next verse.

Christians should be raising their flag of victory throughout the land.

Jesus Christ our Savior has won the war.

Our flag should be red, white, and blue.

Red is for the life that Jesus purchased for us with His blood.

White is for the righteous battle.

And blue is for our heavenly calling.

Salvation is the trophy we have won by choosing the LORD.

Colossians 1:27 "To whom God would make known what [is] the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"

Matthew 21:22 "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

Philippians 4:6 "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

John 16:24 "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full".

We can see from the verses above that, God answers the prayers of His people.

Psalm 20:6 "Now know I that the LORD saveth his anointed; he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand."

I.e., the king who is the subject of the poem, it being out of keeping with the rest of the poem to understand "Israel" or the "ideal" king here.

The "now" is emphatic.

Now after seeing the sacrifice performed, and feeling sure of its acceptance, this confidence is now expressed.

"He will hear him from his holy heaven":

Where his throne and temple are, which is the habitation of his holiness.

Whither the prayers of the Messiah when on earth ascended, where they were received, heard, and answered.

Before the church prays that he might be heard, now she believes he would; and that;

"With the saving strength of his right hand":

That is, by the exertion of his mighty power, in strengthening him as man to bear up under his sorrows, go through his work, and finish it.

By upholding him with his right hand while engaged in it.

And by raising him up from the dead with it, and setting him down at it in the highest heavens.

As we have said in these lessons before, Jesus Christ is the Right Hand of God.

We can see from the next 2 verses who anoints.

2 Corinthians 1:21 "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, [is] God;"

Hebrews 1:9 "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, [even] thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

You might even say God's anointed in these verses.

Those who have been chosen by God to fulfill a certain purpose in His plans are the anointed.

As we said before, it is dangerous to come against God's anointed.

Jesus Christ (the Right Hand of God), is their strength and their protection.

God will not allow anyone, or anything, to prevent His anointed from fulfilling their task that He has given them.

Psalm 20:7 "Some [trust] in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God."

“Some trust in”:

Trust, boast, and praise must not be directed to the wrong objects but only to God Himself therefore (compare e.g., Deuteronomy 17:16; 20:1-4; Leviticus 26:7-8; Psalm 33:16-17; Isaiah 31:1-3; Jeremiah 9:23-24; Zechariah 4:6).

Preparation for battle is necessary, but trust in God is priority one (33:16-17; Deuteronomy 20:1; Proverbs 21:31).

“The name of the LORD” refers to His character, reputation and nature.

David gained confidence as he meditated on his God.

Pharaoh had many chariots and many horses, but they were no help when he followed the Israelites into the Red sea.

Pharaoh's horses and chariots were drowned, along with his mighty warriors when they came against God's people.

Notice in the following verses that, Moses used the name of the LORD to fight Pharaoh.

Exodus 14:13-14 "And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will show to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever." "The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."

Now let us see the results of Moses' faith in God.

Exodus 15:1-6

"Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown

into the sea." "The LORD [is] my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he [is] my God, and I will prepare him a habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him." "The LORD [is] a man of war: the LORD [is] his name." "Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea." "The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone." "Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy."

Psalm 20:8 "They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright."

Confident of the result, the speaker represents it as already achieved.

He sees the enemy bowed down to the earth, and fallen.

He sees the host of Israel erect and triumphant.

All stands out clearly before his vision, as though he were an actual spectator of the fight.

We have seen in the previous verses, how God fights for His own.

Just as these Israelites were greatly feared by the people around them after God dealt with Pharaoh so harshly.

The LORD will make our enemies tremble as well.

We stand upright, not in our own power, but in the power of God.

Psalm 20:9 "Save, LORD: let the king hear us when we call."

Not "the king", as the Septuagint, Ethiopic, and Arabic versions read the words.

Joining the word "king" to them, which is in the next clause.

But this, as Aben Ezra observes, is not right, because of the accent "athnach", which divides these words from the following.

Rather the word "us" may be supplied.

And so the Syriac version renders it, "the LORD will deliver us"; and the Targum is, "O LORD", "redeem us", or "save us".

That is, with a temporal, spiritual, and eternal salvation.

This petition is directed to Jehovah the Father, as the following is to the King Messiah.

"Let the King hear us when we call":

For not God the Father is here meant, though he is an everlasting King, the King of kings; and who hears his people, when they call upon him, and while they are calling.

Yet he is rarely, if ever, called "the King", without any other additional epithet.

Whereas the Messiah often is, as in the next psalm (Psalm 20:1).

And prayer is made to him, and he hears and receives the prayers of his people.

And as Mediator, presents them to his Father perfumed with much incense.

For he is a Priest as well as a King.

This verse could also be rendered: "Lord, grant victory to the king! Answer us when we call!"

The King here is possibly the Lord Jesus who will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.

This cry to me, is a shout of I know you will save me Lord. I know Jesus will reign.

Psalm 20 Questions

1. In verse 1, (The LORD hear thee in the _____ of _____).
2. The _____ of the God of Jacob defend thee.
3. When is the only time that many people pray?
4. What does the author believe is meant by (God of Jacob)?
5. If ye be Christ's, then are ye _____ seed and heirs according to the promise.
6. Send thee help from the _____.
7. What is Zion symbolic of?
8. What did David do, before he went into battle showing that he needed God's help?
9. Before we do battle with the enemy, we should take time to _____.
10. In verse 4, how does this prayer seem to end?
11. We should win battles for the _____, and not for _____.
12. What should be the colors of the Christians flag?
13. What is the trophy we have won as Christians?

14. Christ in you, the hope of _____.
15. Who is the Right Hand of God?
16. Who is the one who anoints?
17. Who are the anointed?
18. It is dangerous to come against God's _____.
19. What does verse 7 say some trust in?
20. Who should Christians put their trust in?
21. What did Moses use to fight Pharaoh?
22. What did Moses tell the people to stand still and see, at the Red sea?
23. Where are the Scriptures found that show the results of Moses faith in God at the Red sea?
24. What effect on the Israelite's enemies, did the incident at the Red sea have?
25. Who is the King in verse 9?
26. What does the author believe this cry in verse 9 really is?