

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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Psalm 20 — A Battle Psalm

“David’s ... sword may have been hacked, but it was never rusted.”
(Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*)

1.0 Introducing Psalm 20

- Psalm 20 is sometimes referred to as one of the “royal psalms” because its subject matter involves the king of Israel and his military activities. Verse 9 is the only specific reference to the king himself.
- Some commentators think that the setting for this psalm might have been the events recorded in 2 Chronicles 20:1-30.
 - ◆ An alliance of Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites had invaded Judah to attack Jehoshaphat (vv. 1, 10).
 - ◆ Jehoshaphat and the people fasted and held an assembly in the Temple to pray for deliverance (vv. 3-13).
 - ◆ A Levite prophesied deliverance (vv. 14-17).
- Various references in the psalm appear to support a time after David:
 - ◆ the “sanctuary” (v. 2)—But, see Psalm 3:4
 - ◆ “Zion” (v. 2)—But, see 2 Samuel 5:7; 6:1-15; Psalms 9, 14, 51, 53, 65, 69, and 110 (compare Matthew 22:43-45).
 - ◆ royal “meal offerings” and “burnt offering” (v. 3)—But, see 2 Samuel 6:17 and 1 Chronicles 21:23.
- Dominant themes in this psalm are trust in the Lord (v. 7) and salvation (vv. 6, 9; cf. 3:8).
- Psalm 20 is the prayer for the king’s victory in battle and Psalm 21 is the prayer of thanksgiving for the victory.

2.0 Reading Psalm 20 (NAU)

20:1 A Psalm of David.

May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble!
May the name of the God of Jacob set you *securely* on high!

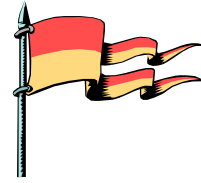
20:2 May He send you help from the sanctuary
And support you from Zion!

20:3 May He remember all your meal offerings
And find your burnt offering acceptable!

Selah.

20:4 May He grant you your heart's desire
And fulfill all your counsel!

20:5 We will sing for joy over your victory,
And in the name of our God we will set up our banners.
May the LORD fulfill all your petitions.



20:6 Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed;
He will answer him from His holy heaven
With the saving strength of His right hand.

20:7 Some *boast* in chariots and some in horses,
But we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God.

20:8 They have bowed down and fallen,
But we have risen and stood upright.

20:9 Save, O LORD;
May the King answer us in the day we call.

For the choir director.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 20

3.1 Outline

- I. Supplication (vv. 1-5)
- II. Security (vv. 6-8)
- III. Summary (v. 9)



3.2 Notes

- **vv. 1, 9**
 - “May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble!” (v. 1) opens the psalm.
 - “May the King answer us in the day we call” (v. 9) closes the psalm.
 - These two very similar statements frame the psalm with an envelope figure or inclusio.
- **v. 1** “the name of the God of Jacob”

- As a divine title “the God of Jacob” occurs 18 times in the Old Testament—12 are in the Psalms. It is associated with the name Yahweh (Jehovah) in Exodus 3:6 and 15.
- See 2 Samuel 23:1.
- This is the only usage of “the name of the God of Jacob.”
- Other references to the “God of Jacob” in a military context include Psalms 46:7, 11; 76:6; 81:1. See, also, 146:5, “How blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob.”
- v. 3 “meal offerings ... burnt offering”
 - Various kings of Israel were involved in either offering of sacrifices or in ordering them to be performed:
 - Saul (1 Samuel 13:8-10)
 - David (2 Samuel 6:13, 17-18; 24:18-25)
 - Solomon (1 Kings 3:3-4, 15; 8:62-63)
 - Ahaz (2 Kings 16:12-15)
 - Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29:20-24; 31:3)
 - Josiah (2 Chronicles 35:16)
- v. 4 “your heart’s desire”
 - Caution must be taken with regard to our heart’s desire.
 - Jeremiah 17:9
 - 1 Kings 11:4
 - 1 Corinthians 4:4-5
 - God is able to work in our hearts to cause us to desire what is consistent with His will—Philippians 2:13.
- v. 6 “Now I know”
 - A prophetic proclamation by a single voice not heard earlier in the psalm. Some think it was a Levite in the Temple (see 2 Chronicles 20:14-17).
 - It could be the king himself.
- v. 7 “Some *boast* in chariots and some in horses”
 - “In their early contacts with the Philistines and other advanced enemies, the Israelite spear-wielding infantry was at a decided disadvantage—especially on the flat plains, where chariots were particularly effective.” — Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 388. “A review of Israel’s early successes against the Philistines reveals a strategic use of restricted terrain—hill country, mountain passes, narrow valleys, or river crossings—where the horse-drawn chariot was least effective” (note 23).
 - Trust in weapons was not consistent with faith in God (cf. Psalms 33:16-19; 44:3-7; 147:10-11).



- The kings of Israel were to trust in the Lord rather than in armaments (Deuteronomy 17:16).
- The greatest illustration is God's deliverance of the Israelites from the army of Pharaoh (see Exodus 15:1-4).

- **v. 9** "Save, O LORD; May the King"
 - Spirit of Great Britain's national anthem.
 - NIV: "O LORD, save the king!" Sounds like "God save the king!"
 - KJV, NKJV, and NAU are more faithful to the Hebrew text.
 - Should it read "King" (NAU, NKJV) or "king" (KJV, NIV)? See Psalm 48:2.

4.0 Singing Psalm 20

Tune: "And Can It Be?"

- 1 Now may the God of power and grace
Attend his people's humble cry!
Jehovah hears when Isr'el prays,
And brings deliverance from on high.

- 2 The name of Jacob's God defends
Better than shields or brazen walls;
He from his sanctuary sends
Succor and strength, when Zion calls.

- 4 In his salvation is our hope,
And, in the name of Isr'el's God,
Our troops shall lift their banners up,
Our navies spread their flags abroad.

- 5 Some trust in horses trained for war,
And some of chariots make their boasts:
Our surest expectations are
From thee, the Lord of heav'nly hosts.

- 7 Now save us, Lord, from slavish fear,
Now let our hopes be firm and strong,
Till the salvation shall appear,
And joy and triumph raise the song.



— Isaac Watts

5.0 Praying Psalm 20 (See, also, 1 Timothy 2:1-3)

- Lord, send help. [v. 2]
- Please accept my offering, Lord. [v. 3]
- Thank You for answering our prayers. [vv. 5, 6]

- Help me to trust in You alone. [v. 7]
- Father, may Your name be praised. [vv. 1, 5, 7]

6.0 Applying Psalm 20

- Believers ought always to pray for governmental authorities.
- Trusting in the God of the armies is better than trusting in armies.