

# PSALMS

## Chapter 20

**May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob protect you! <sup>2</sup> May he send you help from the sanctuary and give you support from Zion! <sup>3</sup> May he remember all your offerings and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices! *Selah* <sup>4</sup> May he grant you your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans! <sup>5</sup> May we shout for joy over your salvation, and in the name of our God set up our banners! May the LORD fulfill all your petitions! <sup>6</sup> Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand. <sup>7</sup> Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. <sup>8</sup> They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright. <sup>9</sup> O LORD, save the king! May he answer us when we call.**

**Ps 20** A liturgy of prayer for the king just before he goes out to battle against a threatening force (see 2Ch 20:1–30). (CSB)

Possibly an antiphonal prayer offered before King David led his troops into battle. Likely used in times of peace as well, just as the British regularly sing “God Save the Queen.” (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–3, blessing in the Lord’s name; vv 4–5, hope for answered prayer; vv 6–8, trust in the Lord’s name; v 9, a prayer for the king. (TLSB)

Psalms 20 and 21 form a matched pair, since they are for use before and after battle. These prayers may have been intended especially for use by Israel’s army, but they would also be appropriate for the whole nations. They may have been used in public services like the one Jehoshaphat held before his battle with Moab and Ammon recorded in 2 Chronicles 20. (PBC)

**20:1–5** The people (perhaps his assembled army) address the king, adding their prayers to his prayer for victory. (CSB)

Directed to Israel’s king, the current monarch. (TLSB)

Strictly speaking, these words are more of a benediction than a prayer, since they are spoken to the king rather than directly to God. However, the spirit and intent is that of prayer, since it is God alone who can provide the blessings promised here. (PBC)

**20:1** *answer you.* Hear your prayers, offered in the present distress, accompanied by “sacrifices” (v. 3); see v. 9. (CSB)

The prayer is specifically that God would deliver him in battle. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

*name.* The name of the Lord is the manifestation of his character. It has no separate existence apart from the Lord, but is synonymous with the Lord himself in his gracious manifestation and accessibility to his people. Hence the Jerusalem temple is the earthly residence of his name among his people (see 74:7; Dt 12:5, 11; 2Sa 7:13), and his people can pray to him by calling on his name (see 79:6; 80:18; 99:6; 105:1; 116:4, 13, 17). The name of the Lord protects (see 20:1; Pr 18:10); the Lord saves by his name (see 54:1); and his saving acts testify

that his name is near (see 52:9). Accordingly, the godly “trust in” his name (20:7; 33:21), hope in his name (see 52:9), “sing praise” to his name (7:17; 9:2; 18:49) and “rejoice in” his name (89:16). Both the “love” and the “fear” that belong alone to God are similarly directed toward his name.). (CSB)

The Lord’s name was placed on His people (Nu 6:22–27). Since they belong to Him, He will protect them. (TLSB)

*Jacob. Israel. Synonyms.* (CSB)

*protect you.* Lit. “raise you to a high, secure place.” (CSB)

**20:2** *Zion.* God’s heavenly throne (see v. 7) has its counterpart on earth in his temple at Jerusalem, from which center he rules the world. For God’s election of Zion as the seat of his rule. (CSB)

The tabernacle was God’s dwelling place on earth and the place from which God’s blessings issued forth. David moved it to Mount Zion. Cf 2Sm 6. (TLSB)

To speak thus means to look for the Lord and his help where he has taught his people that they should look. He is envisioned, not as a remote God, therefore, but as One who is near. (Leupold)

By referring to that dwelling place as the source of help, they mean that Yahweh himself was the source. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

**20:3** *offerings...sacrifices* – As the OT attests elsewhere, special sacrifices (1Sm 7:7–11; 13:7–13) and prayers (1Ki 8:44–45) were frequently offered before Israel’s troops waged war. (TLSB)

He was a righteous man who was making a righteous petition to God with tributes of worship. All this made it compelling to intercede for him. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

*Selah* – Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

This often occurs in the middle of a psalm and which apparently signals an interlude. “The Sela indicates that one must be still and quickly think through the words of the psalm; for they demand a quiet and restful soul, which can grasp and hold to that which the Holy Spirit there presents and offers” (Luther). (Psalms – The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 23)

Selah may be a musical notation. It could also be a point where a pause is desirable for the singer or reader of the psalm in order that the statement last made or the thought as a whole just developed may be reflected upon before the next turn of the thought appears. (Leupold)

**20:4** *heart’s desire* – Strategies in the upcoming struggle. (TLSB)

The final line of the intercession submits the plans of the king to the power of God. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

*heart.* In Biblical language the center of the human spirit, from which spring emotions, thought, motivations, courage and action—“the wellspring of life.” (CSB)

**20:5** *We will shout ... name of our God.* They reflect Israel's religious consciousness that praise must follow deliverance as surely as prayer springs from need—if God is to be truly honored. Such praise was usually offered with thank offerings and involved celebrating God's saving act in the presence of those assembled at the temple. (CSB)

Having made their intercession for the king, the worshipers next voice their great expectation of victory. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

*banners.* To set up one's banner means to prevail in battle. Depictions of troops raising their flags are modern examples of this metaphor. (TLSB)

**20:6** A participant in the liturgy (perhaps a Levite; see 2Ch 20:14) announces assurance that the king's prayer will be heard. (CSB)

*Now I know* – This expresses certainty. One may observe that true faith in the Lord is usually expressed in such strong expressions of confidence. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

*his anointed.* The king appointed by the Lord to rule in his name. (CSB)

The king speaks about himself. (TLSB)

The psalm refers to the Davidic king and is ultimately fulfilled in Christ. The English word "Messiah" comes from the Hebrew word for "anointed one," and the English word "Christ" from the Greek word for "anointed one." (CSB)

**20:7–8** The army's confession of trust in the Lord rather than in a chariot corps (cf. 33:16–17)—the enemy perhaps came reinforced by such a prized corps. See David's similar confession of confidence when he faced Goliath (1Sa 17:45–47). (CSB)

**20:7** *chariots...horses* – Cutting-edge military equipment possessed by the Philistines. (TLSB)

The self-confident enemies had their reliance on their resources, horses and chariots. Their invincible chariots were of iron and equipped with weapons that could easily annihilate an army. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

*Trust in the name of the Lord* – Through prayer, the faithful place their trust in the Lord and His reputation as a warrior. (TLSB)

Now the psalmist avows that he and his fellow believers continually keep God in mind as their object of faith. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

**20:8** *collapse and fall* – End of those who place their hope in horses and chariots. (TLSB)

The psalmist advances from prayer to praise and from praise to confident expectation – almost prophecy – when he portrays the outcomes of the battle as if it had already taken place. Here, then, the magnitude of his faith visualizes the outcome. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

**20:9** The army's concluding petition. (CSB)

The Lord alone is able to hear and save. (TLSB)

*Answer ... when.* The psalm ends as it began. (CSB)

The point of this verse is that the people keep on praying with confidence as the king goes out to the battle. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

**Ps 20** The people desire God's blessing for their king as he prepares to lead them into battle. In modern developed countries we are easily tempted to place our confidence in certain leaders and technological wonders rather than in God. Doing so, however, is little more than old-fashioned idolatry. When we humbly pray for the authorities God has placed over us, He unfailingly answers and acts on our behalf in accord with His good and gracious will. • Guide and direct our rulers, O King of kings and Lord of lords, so that they ever acknowledge You rather than trust in their earthly might. Lead us in the way of righteousness and peace. Amen. (TLSB)