

PSALMS

Chapter 21

O LORD, in your strength the king rejoices, and in your salvation how greatly he exults!
² You have given him his heart's desire and have not withheld the request of his lips. *Selah*
³ For you meet him with rich blessings; you set a crown of fine gold upon his head. ⁴ He asked life of you; you gave it to him, length of days forever and ever. ⁵ His glory is great through your salvation; splendor and majesty you bestow on him. ⁶ For you make him most blessed forever; you make him glad with the joy of your presence. ⁷ For the king trusts in the LORD, and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved. ⁸ Your hand will find out all your enemies; your right hand will find out those who hate you. ⁹ You will make them as a blazing oven when you appear. The LORD will swallow them up in his wrath, and fire will consume them. ¹⁰ You will destroy their descendants from the earth, and their offspring from among the children of man. ¹¹ Though they plan evil against you, though they devise mischief, they will not succeed. ¹² For you will put them to flight; you will aim at their faces with your bows. ¹³ Be exalted, O LORD, in your strength! We will sing and praise your power.

Ps 21 A psalm of praise for victories granted to the king. It is thus linked with Ps 20, but whether both were occasioned by the same events is unknown. Here the people's praise follows that of the king (see v. 1); there (Ps 20) the people's prayer was added to the king's. In its structure, the psalm is framed by vv. 1, 13 ("O LORD, in your strength" is in both verses) and is centered around v. 7, which proclaims the king's trust in the Lord and the security afforded him by God's unfailing love. (CSB)

Luther: "A prophecy of the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom which is and remains eternally and spiritually before God" (*PIML*, p 29. (TLSB))

Format: Vv 1–2, the king rejoices; vv 3–7, blessings for the king; vv 8–12, destruction for his enemies; v 13, the Lord's power. (TLSB)

Psalm 21 is the response of King David when God answered his prayer for a victorious battle. We don't know which battle is meant here. As we have seen so often, the psalms most often remain somewhat general so that we can read into them our own circumstances and needs. (LL)

The people thank the Lord for the blessings He has given to their king. Notice how verse 2 of Psalm 21 echoes verse 4 of Psalm 20. This shows that God has granted the very blessing the people and the king had requested. The rich blessings and the crown of gold which the king receives may refer to booty captured in the battle. See 2 Samuel 12:30 for an example of David's receiving the crown of a conquered king. In verse 6 the people proclaim that the Lord has given the king more than he asked for. Not only has He saved his life in battle. He has assured him of eternal life through faith. In verse 7 the king's piety is again referred to as the source of his confidence, just as it was in Psalm 20:3. This statement of faith is emphasized by its position in the center of the psalm. (PBC)

It's not hard to see how this psalm applies to Christ and to His kingdom. (Verse 1) Jesus rules in God's strength, and we rejoice in His great – the greatest! – salvation. (Verses 3-6) God has made Jesus King forever in the church; He rules there in honor and majesty. (Verse 7) Jesus will never lose His throne, will never be deposed. (TLSB)

Psalm 21 is probably the complement of Psalm 20 because of the repetition of idea. At least it fits as a complementary thanksgiving to the prayer (and so placed next to it in the collection). In Psalm 20, David was going into battle, trusting the Lord, with the people interceding for him by praying, “May the Lord grant you the desire of your heart.” Here he praises the Lord saying “You have given him the desire of his heart.” In his praise the king acknowledges that the battle was won by the Lord whose powerful help was indispensable. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

21:1 The first verse sets the tone for the entire psalm – it is a time of great rejoicing. The verse announces that the king rejoices in the might of the Lord. The king is probably the speaker, referring to himself in the third person (as in 20:6); but his words are addressed to the Lord directly. He announces that he rejoices (s.v. Ps. 48:11) in the Lord’s might and exults (Ps. 13:6) in his deliverance. The verse is actually a summary introduction: the king rejoices – and what he rejoices about will be recorded next. The rejoicing is greatly intensified in the second half of the verse,, not only by the choice of a word that describes cultic celebration, but also by the addition of the adverb “greatly.” (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Strength...salvation – Twin motives for the king’s joy; leading themes of the psalm. (TLSB)

David begins by professing his joy in God’s abundant strength and His victories. (LL)

Salvation, here, is not from sin, but salvation from certain death in the battle. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

21:2–6 The people celebrate the Lord’s many favors to the king: all “the desire of his heart” (v. 2). Verse 2 announces the theme; vv. 3–5 develop the theme; v. 6 climactically summarizes the theme. (CSB)

Now God has done what David has asked and more, blessing him with gifts that David could never have imagined. Each gift exceeds the request that David had made. He asked for a long life (v. 4), and God gave an eternal throne through the Messiah. He asked (v. 5) for victories, and the Lord made him a king of great splendor and majesty. He asked (v. 6) for blessings, and the Lord promised the One who would bless all people for all time. (LL)

We, too, can look at all we enjoy from the hand of God and, seeing the abundance of His blessings, use them to give glory to Him for all He has done. (LL)

21:2 *you have given him* – The people thank the Lord for the blessings he has given to their king. Notice how verse 2 echoes verse 4 of Psalm 20. This shows that God has granted the very blessing the people and the king requested. (PBC)

In this verse the tenses change to the perfect tense to report the answer of the prayer, but since the benefits of that answer remain, a present perfect is the best translation: “you have given.” The deliverance that David had desired in his heart he also requested with his lips (Ps. 20:4). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Hearts desire. The word desire means a thing desired; it is a strong word, even used in the commandment prohibiting coveting (Ex. 20:17). And the parallel word “request” expresses not only the desire but the need, for he was poor in strength and so prayed for God to manifest his divine strength. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

He counseled in his heart, formed his plans, and had spoken about the execution of his plans before the Lord. Now the king witnesses that the Lord had blessed his thoughts and spoken requests. The king's ways were aligned with the Lord's plans; therefore the king was successful. (Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

The king has received everything he asked for and could have hoped for. (TLSB)

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)

21:3 *welcomed him*. Back from the battles. (CSB)

In this verse the psalmist explains how God did this: God anticipated his need and blessed him with good things. The verbs now are prefixed conjunctions; and while they could express the continuous actions on the part of God as he answers prayers and cares for his people, it is more likely in this context that they refer to what God did. First God “came to meet him.” This verb could also be interpreted to mean that God “came before him,” meaning that God anticipated the prayer and went before him. Either idea fits the context. The purpose of the divine intervention was to meet him “[with] blessings of good,” or, “good blessings.” (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Often refers to the access granted through prayer and worship at the tabernacle or temple. (TLSB)

placed a crown ... on his head. Exchanged the warrior's helmet for the ceremonial emblem of royalty—possibly the captured crown of the defeated king (see 2Sa 12:30). (CSB)

a god put a golden crown on his head. This could be his own crown that was a symbol of his honor from God, or it could refer to something like the crown of the king of Ammonites captured by David (2 Sam. 12:30). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

21:4 The king's life has been spared—to live for ever and ever (see 1Ki 1:31; Da 2:4; 3:9; see also 1Sa 10:24; 1Ki 1:25, 34, 39). (CSB)

It was because of the battle that the psalmist asked for his life, meaning protection in the battle from death; but God went far beyond that. It can give a greater answer in that the Lord will also deliver his people from death to eternal life. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

David sought God's deliverance from Saul and other enemies. (TLSB)

21:5 *glory ... splendor and majesty*. See 45:3; like that of his heavenly Overlord (see 96:3). (CSB)

“Glory” is usually used as a divine attribute or perfection, but here, as in Psalm 3, it is used of the king’s honor in representing the divine glory. It was through the deliverance, the victory on the battlefield, that God displayed the glory of David; and the second line enhances this point, adding that God gave him honor and majesty (s.v. Ps. 96:6). The first word means “majesty, vigor, splendor”; and the second word is “ornament, splendor, honor.” (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Not the result of the king’s efforts, but honor the Lord has graciously bestowed on him. (TLSB)

21:6 *eternal blessings*. Either (1) blessings of enduring value or (2) an unending flow of blessings.

Cf v 4; the blessings pertain to eternal life. (TLSB)

The reason for this glory and honor is that God gave him eternal blessings and made him glad with his presence. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

your presence. Your favor, which is the supreme cause of joy because it is the greatest blessing and the wellspring of all other blessings. (CSB)

One of the greatest blessings of heaven, of course, is basking in the fullness of God’s presence (cf Rv 21:3). (TLSB)

21:7 The center of the psalm. A participant in the liturgy (perhaps a priest or Levite) proclaims the reasons for the king’s security. *LORD...* (CSB)

Psalm 21 pivots on verse 7 with the change in focus from past to future. The Lord has vindicated David’s trust in the past; the Lord’s unfailing love will not allow His king to fall in the future. (LL)

Trusts – This verses begins with a causal clause; and the verb is it is a participle, stressing continual or durative action. The verb means “rely on” or “be confident, secure,” its related nouns means “quietness, security, safety, confidence” (s.v. Ps. 4:5). David had confidence in the Lord; his confidence gave him a sense of safety and security. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

It must be first stressed that the king is not a man who trusts in his own strength and abilities, his trust is in the Lord. It is only because the Lord is so faithful to his covenant that the king will not be moved or brought to fall. (Leupold)

Most High. That is, LORD Most High. (CSB)

His faith was in the supreme God, the God who is higher than all, but the God who also established a covenant with him in love (s.v. Ps. 23:6). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

unfailing love. The Hebrew for this phrase denotes befriending. Appeal to God’s “(unfailing) love, kindness, mercy” is frequent in the OT since it summarizes all that the Lord covenanted to show to Israel (see Dt 7:9, 12) as well as to David and his dynasty. (CSB)

shaken. Disturb my well-being, unsettle my security. (CSB)

The verb “shall not be shaken comes from a verb that means “totter, shake, move” (s.v. Ps. 62:2); the meaning is here applied to David’s position as king and leader of the armies – he could not be overthrown. His kingdom was secure because his relation with the Lord was also sure. The principle expressed here would apply to all who trust in the Lord, whether subsequent kings of individuals: security comes through faith, but it is made possible by the love of God. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

The result of trusting steadfastly in the Lord is that one cannot be so much as shaken, let alone toppled over. (TLSB)

21:8–12 The people hail the future victories of their triumphant king. Verse 8 announces the theme; vv. 9–11 develop the theme; v. 12 summarizes the theme. (CSB)

Psalm shifts from addressing God to addressing the king. Series of encouragements are spoken directly to the king. (TLSB)

The people assure the king of a string of future victories for God’s anointed. Although these words can be applied to the victories of the kings of Judah, they are especially fitting when applied to Christ, David’s greatest son. These words will be fulfilled in the fullest sense on Judgment Day when Christ’s accomplishes the final defeat of all the enemies of God’s people. (PBC)

In these verses the people address the king. They share his confidence in the Lord and in the future. The enemies (v. 11) may plot against David, but they will (v. 12) fall into the Lord’s hands, helpless before they know it. (LL)

These words describe God’s anger at the wickedness of Satan and at the human agents who do His bidding. They will be utterly destroyed. With Israel of old, we (v. 13) will sing and praise the mighty King who we worship. (LL)

21:8 *to find* – This has the meaning here “to come upon, light upon, plunder.” The picture in the verse suggest a hand reaching into a nest, and evil nest in this case, to plunder it. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

21:9 *blazing oven* – The king will make them like a furnace (a portable stove) of fire, the point of the simile being that they, like the contents of the furnace will be utterly consumed (see Mal. 3:19; Is. 31:9; Gen. 19:28) (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

In his wrath the LORD. Credits the king’s victories to the Lord’s wrath. (CSB)

It would be the Lord who would swallow them up in his wrath. The image used here is bold, comparing to the defeat of the wicked and swallowing them. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Those who set themselves against the Lord’s anointed king will get burned (cf Heb 12:29). (TLSB)

21:10 The king’s royal enemies will be left no descendants to rise against him again. (CSB)

There is continuation of the wicked from generation to generation, for they all will be removed. The language used here is extravagant, for the psalmist certainly was referring to the total defeat

of his immediate enemies. But in the typological sense of the psalm the extravagant language will be literally and historically fulfilled when the Messiah destroys all the wicked in the final judgment (cf. Ps. 2). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Passages such as this raise ethical concerns. The reason for a take-no-prisoners approach was to keep idolatrous Canaanite ways from infecting God’s people. God commanded that the Israelites utterly destroy the Canaanites when they took possession of the Promised Land (Dt 20:16–18). (TLSB)

21:11 *plan evil...will not succeed* – They intended (stretched out, extended evil against the king, God’s personal representative on earth. they did this by planning (s.v. Ps. 32; and compare Ps. 2:1) a treachery (a deceitful or treacherous plan; s.v. Ps. 10:2) – but it was a plan that could not succeed (a “vain thing” in Ps. 2:1). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

21:12 *put them to flight* – They will be beaten in the battle and have to turn and run away. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

21:13 Conclusion—and return to the beginning: Lord, assert your strength, in which “the king rejoices” (v. 1; see also v. 7), and we will ever praise your might. (CSB)

After encouraging the king, the people turn once more to the Lord with a final word of praise for the victories He gives. (PBC)

They will acclaim him to be the source of all strength; they will sing continually of his great deeds. Therefore, the psalm ends on the same note it began – praising the Lord because of his display of might on behalf of those who trust in him. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Ps 21 This psalm not only offers thanks to God for Israel’s king (vv 1–7) but also encourages him with promises of the Lord’s blessing (vv 8–12). Part of our Christian responsibility, as this psalm and St Paul remind us, is to offer thanksgiving and petitions on behalf of our ruling authorities. Failing to do so is an act of ingratitude. The Scriptures testify throughout that God establishes and uses the various governments of the world not only to serve His people’s earthly needs, but even to further the spread of the Gospel. • “God bless our native land; Firm may she ever stand Through storm and night.... Thou who art ever nigh, Guarding with watchful eye, To Thee aloud we cry: God save the state!” Amen. (LSB 965:1–2) (TLSB)