

Battle Songs

Psalm 20 & 21

Psalm 20 - *“May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble; may the name of the God of Jacob defend you. May He send you help from the sanctuary, and strengthen you out of Zion. May He remember all your offerings, and accept your burnt sacrifice. Selah*

May He grant you according to your heart's desire, and fulfill all your purpose. We will rejoice in your salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners! May the LORD fulfill all your petitions. 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. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. They have bowed down and fallen, but we have risen and stand upright. Save, LORD! May the King answer us when we call.”

Background Notes

Psalms 20 and 21 go together. They are battle songs of David, set to music and singing by the choir director. Psalm 20 is a psalm of prayer *before* battle, and Psalm 21 is a psalm of praise *after* battle. Both psalms have Messianic implications.

As so often with the psalms, we don't know the specific battle for Psalm 20, but it may refer to David's victory over the coalition of the Ammonites and Syrians. 2 Samuel 10:14-19: *“When the people of Ammon saw that the Syrians were fleeing, they also fled before Abishai, and entered the city. So Joab returned from the people of Ammon and went to Jerusalem. When the Syrians saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they gathered together. Then Hadadezer sent and brought out the Syrians who were beyond the River, and they came to Helam. And Shobach the commander of Hadadezer's army went before them. When it was told David, he gathered all Israel, crossed over the Jordan, and came to Helam. And the Syrians set themselves in battle array against David and fought with him. Then the Syrians fled before Israel; and David killed seven hundred charioteers and forty thousand horsemen of the Syrians...So the Syrians were afraid to help the people of Ammon any more.”*

Anticipation of this war with the Ammonites and Syrians may have been the occasion for this psalm. In any case, David's loyal subjects were praying for his victory over the enemy, and David's response of assurance in the verses that follow.

Doctrinal Point for Psalm 20

Prayer and assurance bring victory.

Notice - in this prayer for victory, the Lord is not described as the God of Abraham, but as the God of *Jacob* (v1). Using the name "*the God of Jacob*" would have been very encouraging for the believers in that day - and should be for us as well. Jacob was not "Mr. Perfect," but God was pleased to bless Jacob, in spite of his faults and failures.

In answering our prayers for victory, the Lord takes into account our obedience to His commands (v3), and the godly desires of our hearts (v4). "Help from the sanctuary" (v2) means help from the Lord Himself, whose presence was in the sanctuary. Total victory is assumed (v5) and as a result, David is assured a victory (v6ff). God will answer from heaven and defeat the enemy. Chariots and horses are no match against the Lord! Prayer and assurance bring victory.

Practical Application for Psalm 20

Go with confidence in the name of the Lord.

Notice that "the name of the Lord" is mentioned three times in this psalm. "*May the name of the God of Jacob defend you*" (v1), "*And in the name of our God we will set up our banners*" (v5), and "*Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God*" (v7). The phrase, "the name of the Lord" refers to the Lord Himself and all His attributes. When you pray to the Lord and have the assurance that He hears and will answer, you can then go with confidence, with no anxiety about the outcome.

Our Lord went to the cross with confidence. He was crucified and put to death - but that was not defeat. It was part of the ultimate victory! The godly remnant of restored Israel in the future will confidently put their trust in the Lord, not in the weapons of war, and God will answer their trust with victory.

What and whom are you trusting for your security and wellbeing? If you want to live in line with the Bible, then pray, trust God, and go with confidence in the name of the Lord!

Psalm 21 - *"The king shall have joy in Your strength, O LORD; and in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! You have given him his heart's desire, and have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah*

For You meet him with the blessings of goodness. You set a crown of pure gold upon his head. He asked life from You, and You gave it to him - length of days forever and ever.

His glory is great in Your salvation. Honor and majesty You have placed upon him. For You have made him most blessed forever; You have made him exceedingly glad with Your presence. For the king trusts in the LORD, and through the mercy of the Most High he shall not be moved.

Your hand will find all Your enemies; Your right hand will find those who hate You. You shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of Your anger; the LORD will swallow them up in His wrath, and the fire shall devour them. Their offspring You shall destroy from the earth, and their descendants from among the sons of men. For they intended evil against You; they devised a plot which they are not able to perform. Therefore You will make them turn their back. You will make ready Your arrows on Your string toward them.

Be exalted, O LORD, in Your own strength! We will sing and praise Your power.”

Background Notes for Psalm 21

In our introduction, we mentioned that Psalms 20 and 21 go together. Psalm 20 is a psalm of prayer before battle, and Psalm 21 is a psalm of praise after battle. One reason for suggesting that the battle David was referring to his war with the Ammonites and Syrians comes from the end of verse 3: *“You set a crown of pure gold upon his head.”*

2 Samuel 12 tells us that when David completed his victory over the Ammonites, the beautiful golden crown of the Ammonite king was given to David to wear as a sign of his victory. 2 Samuel 12:29-30 - *“So David gathered all the people together and went to Rabbah, fought against it, and took it. Then he took their king’s crown from his head. Its weight was a talent of gold, with precious stones. And it was set on David’s head.”* So this event may have been in David’s mind in Psalm 21:3.

Doctrinal Point for Psalm 21

Rejoicing and confidence follow victory.

In verses 1-7, David rejoiced because his prayer and heart’s desire for victory had been answered - not in his own strength, but in the strength of the Lord. *“The king shall have joy in Your strength, O LORD; and in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! You have given him his heart’s desire, and have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah”*

David’s life had not only been spared but he had also been blessed with kingly splendor and majesty (v3-6). David was now more confident than ever in the Lord. In Psalm 20 he went into battle with confidence - but there’s nothing like a victory to give you more confidence!

David was confident that he would not be shaken as he trusted in the Lord and in the Lord’s loving kindness: *“For the king trusts in the Lord, and through the mercy of the Most High he shall not be moved”* (v7). David was confident that the Lord would search out and destroy all his enemies, because they were also enemies of God (v8-12).

The psalm closes with praise to the Lord: *“Be exalted, O Lord, in Your own strength! We will sing and praise Your power.”* Rejoicing and confidence follow victory!

Let's not miss the prophetic implications of this psalm. We can see from certain verses that Psalm 21 is a "typical Messianic" psalm – that is, it goes beyond the experiences of David to provide a picture, or a foreshadowing, or a "type" of the experiences of the Messiah. Verses 4-6, for example, look forward to the risen and exalted Messiah: *"He asked life from You, and You gave it to him - length of days forever and ever. His glory is great in Your salvation. Honor and majesty You have placed upon him. For You have made him most blessed forever. You have made him exceedingly glad with Your presence."*

Verses 10-14 look forward to the End Times, when all the Lord's enemies will be defeated and subdued, and the Lord will be exalted and praised.

Practical Application for Psalm 21

Get ready for the showdown!

I'm not talking here about a sports showdown, like the World Series or the Super Bowl. No - I'm talking about the **ultimate** and **final showdown!** In view of the coming victories of the Messiah over all God's enemies, get ready for **the** showdown!

There have been showdowns between God and the enemy in the past, such as the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, or the Lord "removing" 185,000 Assyrian soldiers from encircling Jerusalem - in one night! But nothing in the past will compare with the final showdown when the Lord returns.

Zechariah 14:2-3 tell us that at that time all nations will be gathered together against Jerusalem - but the Lord will return to fight for His holy city: *"Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle."*

Revelation 19:11-16 speaks of the Lord's return to earth: *"Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS!**"*

When the Lord returns to this earth, what a showdown there will be! Get ready for the showdown!