

Introduction

Psalm 20 appears to be authored by David as a prayer to be recited in the Tabernacle before engaging in a formal military campaign. The High Priest and the people present would respectively speak their appropriate parts. Many scholars date this as a prelude to the war with the Arameans which broke their alliance with Ammon. (2 Sam. 10:17-19) It was a very decisive victory. Likewise, Psalm 21 appears to be written for the purpose of thanking and praising God after the victory and intended to be recited in the Tabernacle. These Psalms provide insight into the proper preparation before engaging the enemy and the proper follow-up after its successful conclusion.

For the choir director. A Psalm of David.

¹May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble!
May the name of the God of Jacob set you securely on high!
²May He send you help from the sanctuary
And support you from Zion!
³May He remember all your meal offerings
And find your burnt offering acceptable! Selah.

Read 20:1-3

Q: As a prayer just prior to going into battle, what might be surprising about what is NOT requested in this opening?

A: There is no request for anything specifically attached to the military or even an individual soldier, nor for any kind of personal enhancement. It is singularly focused on seeking the response and presence of the Lord.

Point: As we learned in the much more extensive Psalm 18, earthly victory is accomplished by the Lord's will and never by our own.

Q: What is specifically requested?

- (v.1) "May the LORD answer you..."
- (v.1) "...set you securely on high..."
- (v.2) "...send you help..."
- (v.2) "...support you..."

Q: How does the focus change in v.3?

A: It raises the issue of David's spiritual condition as it relates to obtaining a response from God.

Q: What is the difference between a "meal offering" and a "burnt offering"?

A: A "meal offering" is a gift offering which does not include a sacrificial animal. A "burnt offering" is an animal offered on an altar which seeks the continual blessing of God. This is an Old Testament way of describing someone in a right personal relationship with the Lord so that their sacrifices are properly accepted, rather than someone attempting to offer them in order to compensate for their ill behavior to the contrary.

Application: Properly worshiping and serving God **to begin with** significantly alters God's **response** when He is called up in times of **crisis**.

⁴May He grant you your heart's desire
And fulfill all your counsel!
⁵We 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.

Read 20:4-5

Q: What are the three things sought for David personally?

- "...may He grant your heart's desire..." addresses obtaining a satisfying outcome on a personal level.
- "...may He...fulfill all your counsel..." addresses commanding in the character of God's wisdom so that all decisions will be successful and God-directed.
- "...fulfill all your petitions..." addresses properly petitioning God so the outcome will occur in concert with God's Word and ways.

Q: What kind of a response will these result in where his supporters are concerned?

- "...we will sing for joy..." emphasizes a heavenward celebration.
- "...we will set up our banners..." emphasizes a parallel earthly celebration.

Q: What does "set up our banners" specifically mean?

A: In the past, banners, or flags, were set up to celebrate a victory. It was a visual proclamation celebrating success.

Application: A proper victory realized by submission to God's **hand** is a cause for **celebration** on the part of **everyone**.

Read 20:6-9

Q: What is significant about the opening to v.6, "Now I know..."?

A: God's response to the activities of a king in the right spiritual relationship with God produces faith in his supporters. His faith and trust is considered by him to have become a fact.

Q: How does that faith take form in v.7?

A: Abandoning all pride and glorification in earthly things to instead boast of God.

Observation: In the Old Testament economy, the spiritual condition of the king was experienced by the people. The nation experienced blessings or curses based on the character of the king.

Q: What is the contrast of God's subsequent working of this victory in the king's supporters vs. detractors?

A: "...bowed down and fallen" vs. "risen and stood upright..." (v.8) It's not just strictly a literal result, but an even greater spiritual one.

Q: Why, then, does this Psalm end with a desire to call upon David?

A: In the NASB, the translators have capitalized "King" to indicate they are not calling upon the earthly king, but the heavenly King from who salvation actually derives.

⁶Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed;
He will answer him from His holy heaven
With the saving strength of His right hand.
⁷Some boast in chariots and some in horses,
But we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God.
⁸They have bowed down and fallen,
But we have risen and stood upright.
⁹Save, O LORD;
May the King answer us in the day we call.

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For the choir director. A Psalm of David.

¹O LORD, in Your strength the king will be glad,
And in Your salvation how greatly he will rejoice!
²You have given him his heart's desire,
And You have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah.
³For You meet him with the blessings of good things;
You set a crown of fine gold on his head.
⁴He asked life of You, You gave it to him,
Length of days forever and ever.
⁵His glory is great through Your salvation,
Splendor and majesty You place upon him.
⁶For You make him most blessed forever;
You make him joyful with gladness in Your presence.

Point: The greatest benefit to be realized through a godly leader is the lesson for those who consistently pursue their own personal agenda of faithfulness to God.

Application: An earthly victory in the course of proper **submission** to God's will and working results in spiritual **benefits** for everyone.

Read 21:1-6

Observation: This Psalm is a contrast between how God uses His power to reward in the first part, to how God uses His power to destroy in the second part. Many see this Psalm as a "coronation Psalm" or what we might think of as an inauguration prayer.

Q: How might this first part be characterized in general?

A: As the people giving thanks to God for the king and His working on the king's behalf.

Point: In the Old Testament economy, the condition of the king reflected that of the whole nation, so it would be seen that God's working to and through him would be passed down and experienced by all. This foreshadows the work of the Messiah the Son of David to come.

Q: How does the opening verse speak to the source of the king's personal disposition?

A: He "will be glad" and "will rejoice" because God is the source of his strength and salvation, respectively.

Q: How is this reinforced in v.6?

A: His experiencing God's presence makes him personally "joyful with gladness".

Application: The king has an authentic personal relationship with God. He derives personal satisfaction from God rather than from the mere earthly benefits of being a monarch.

Q: What are the earthly benefits of this relationship listed in this passage?

- (v.2) "You have given him his heart's desire..."
- (v.2) "...You have not withheld the request of his lips."
- (v.3) "...You meet him with blessings of good things..."
- (v.4) "...You gave it [life] to him...length of days..."

Q: What are the spiritual benefits?

- (v.6) "...You make him most blessed forever..."
- (v.6) "You make him joyful with gladness in Your presence."

Application: Authentic earthly blessings bestowed by the Lord always reflect the even greater spiritual blessings they represent.

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Q: How do we know that this king is not acting as his own authority?

A: In v. 3 it stipulates, "You set a crown of fine gold on his head".

Note: This is why for centuries the Roman Catholic pope would preside over coronations and place a crown on the new ruler's head because everyone would recognize that the king was subject to the pope, who could then take it away. When Napoleon snatched the crown from the pope's hands and crowned himself, this is why it was viewed as an act of self-deification as it circumvented what was thought to be the pope acting with the authority of God.

Q: How does v.5 describe the ultimate benefits experienced by the king which are passed along to his subjects?

A: "Glory", "splendor", and "majesty". Notice that these are directly attributed to the working of God's salvation, not just as in being rescued in battle, but in the greater spiritual sense as well.

Point: This was an even greater result on a much larger scale in the wake of Christ's working on the cross, which brought salvation to mankind who could then experience the glory, splendor and majesty of Christ.

Application: The spiritual **disposition** and **benefits** of the king are in turn passed along to be experienced by his **subjects**. This is exactly what we have all experienced in **Christ**.

⁷For the king trusts in the LORD,
 And through the lovingkindness
 of the Most High he will not
 be shaken.
⁸Your hand will find out all your
 enemies;
 Your right hand will find out
 those who hate you.
⁹You will make them as a fiery
 oven in the time of your
 anger;
 The LORD will swallow them up
 in His wrath,
 And fire will devour them.
¹⁰Their offspring You will
 destroy from the earth,
 And their descendants from
 among the sons of men.
¹¹Though they intended evil
 against You
 And devised a plot,
 They will not succeed.
¹²For You will make them turn
 their back;
 You will aim with Your
 bowstrings at their faces.
¹³Be exalted, O LORD, in Your
 strength;
 We will sing and praise Your
 power.

Read 21:7-13

Q: Verses 8-12 lists all the ways by which God enables the king to overcome his enemies. To what is this attributed on his part in v.7?

A: His trust in the Lord.

Q: What exactly is the meaning of “trust”? Is it the same as “faith”?

A: While faith is certainly a key component, the underlying Hebrew term conveys the idea of feeling secure to the point of being unconcerned, someone having a strong sense of well-being and security.

Observation: When the Hebrew translators authored the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, they never used the word “believe in” for this Hebrew word but consistently employed “hope”. This was a positive view meant to convey a meaning of “to rely on God”. Biblical “hope” means to believe in something so strongly that it is already seen as a fulfilled fact.

Q: What is the agent by which God processes biblical trust?

A: “Lovingkindness”—the Old Testament expression of God’s love acting in combination with His mercy.

Q: And what is the final result of these two things?

A: “...he will not be shaken.”

Application: Biblical trust results in not being shaken either spiritually or literally.

Q: What are the actions God will take in v.9?

- “...make them as a fiery oven...”
- “...swallow them up in...wrath...”
- “...the fire will devour them.”

Point: These are a dramatic way of describing complete and total eradication.

Q: What is listed in v.10?

A: Their “offspring” and “descendants”.

Point: This removes their heritage and potential future impact for this life.

Q: What do v.8-12 show as the probable justification for taking such drastic actions in this case?

- (v.8) “...those that hate you...” (David)
- (v.11) “...they intended evil against You...” (God)
- (v.11) “...devised a plot against You...” (God)

Point: Those who plot and intend evil against God Himself likewise hate the one possessing unshakeable trust in God. These are not mere backsliders but conscious enemies of God and all who trust Him.

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Q: What does v.12 mean?

A: The worst thing one can do in battle, especially in ancient times, is to turn their back to the enemy. This is the least protected part of the body and takes away all offensive capability.

Application: *The battles recorded in Scripture which were **God**-directed experienced complete and total victory both **literal** and **scriptural**. They work to strengthen those who embrace a **lifestyle** producing biblical **trust**.*

Overall Application

Psalms 18-20 should really be studied together as they address the whole issue of what we might call “biblical conflict management”. Far from employing the world’s notion of dealing with issues which rise in temperature between two or more parties, these Psalms provide a complete view of the scriptural basics which are reinforced by a great many parallel supporting passages:

- Psalm 20 sets the stage of preparation before the conflict
- Psalm 18 provides a depth of detail for handling the conflict itself
- Psalm 21 supplies the proper after-action follow-up

The common denominator for each phase is identical: entrust it into the Lord’s hands, only taking personal action at His direction, and maintaining our behavior according to God’s Word and ways at all times before, during, and after.