



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 20

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Introduction

- The title of this psalm is the same as several others: *To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David*
- The psalm may have been chanted in a liturgical method, as part of the sacrifice liturgy
- It is addressed to a king going to battle, and was plainly arranged for part-singing in the Temple
- It is most likely that David wrote this Psalm to pray it before going to war with the Ammonites and Syrians, who came with great numbers of horses and chariots to fight with him, (2 Samuel 10:6-8; 1 Chronicles 19:7)



Introduction

- It was written to encourage the people to pray
- The people offer up their prayers on the king's behalf
- It was customary for the people to assemble in the temple to pray, so that God would grant victory to the king and his army (1 Samuel 7:9,13:9; 1 Kings 8:44; 2 Chronical 20:18)
- Yet since this is *A Psalm of David*, perhaps David took a moment of spontaneous prayer by the people on his behalf and shaped it into a song to remember and recall the spiritual strength and glory of that moment
- Ben Ezra says, there are some that interpret it of the Messiah; and some passages in it are, by Jewish writers (m), applied unto him, as Psalm 20:6



Introduction

- Many of the church fathers think the whole psalm is a prophecy of Christ's sufferings, and His deliverance out of the hand of the enemy, for which the church with Him triumphs
- As for Psalm 21, it is connected to Psalm 20 and it is read as a thanksgiving service after obtaining victory
- This psalm is prayed at the “Third Hour” prayer of the Agpeya because it shows the work and support of the Holy Spirit
- According to St. Augustine the title of this Psalm “is a well-known title; and it is not Christ who speaks; but the prophet speaks to Christ, under the form of wishing, foretelling things to come.”



Introduction

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A Prayer for the Success of the King 20:1-4



- The people pray for their king in a *day of trouble* when danger approaches
- They are asking first of all, that God will hear the king's prayers, which are no doubt being silently offered
- It is the pleasure of the Father to answer His believers' prayers, those who trust in Him
- He grants them victory, safety, and joy
- Everyone has their days of trouble – even the apostles, the saints and the capable kings – may all face pain and hardship
- They need others' prayers on their behalf, so God supports them

A Prayer for the Success of the King 20:1-4



- In the Coptic liturgies, the priest prays for the people, as well as the people's prayers for the priests
- It is the praying church together – priests and congregation – and this is praised in heaven
- He calls him the God of Jacob, or Israel, not only to distinguish Him from false gods, but as an argument to enforce the prayer, because God had made a covenant with Jacob and his descendants
- Jacob was the one of the patriarchs from whom, after his other name, the Hebrew people derived their name Israel, and the word seems here to be used with reference to the people of all the nations rather than to the ancestor

A Prayer for the Success of the King 20:1-4



- Also, Jacob had his day of trouble, he wrestled, was heard, was defended, and in due time was set on high, and his God is our God still
- Let God by His providence keep you safe, and secure from the reach of evil
- The God who preserved Jacob in the days of his trouble; let Him by His grace keep you free from the fear of evil
- With the eye of faith, we see that this also speaks to the great battle fought by one greater than King David – by Jesus, the Son of David and the King of Kings

A Prayer for the Success of the King 20:1-4



- A day of trouble for Him was when He was in the garden, heavy and *“His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground”* (Luke 22:44), and His soul was, “exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.” (Matthew 26:38)
- And more especially this was His case when He hung upon the cross where He would fight the greatest battle against sin, death, and Satan’s power
- *from the sanctuary*, From the tabernacle, or the holy place where God was worshipped, and where He was supposed to reside, (Exodus 28:43,29:30,35:19,39:1)
- This was His seat; His throne; where He abode among the people

A Prayer for the Success of the King 20:1-4



- The prayer here is, that God would accept those offerings, and hear those supplications, and would now send the desired help from the sanctuary where He resided and He would grant His protection and aid
- The prayer that God would *strengthen you out of Zion* is fitting for more than the field of battle
- It is also appropriate for the church pulpit, which is a field of battle in a spiritual sense
- The Lord's holy sanctuary on earth is a symbol of the heavenly holies, or His very heavens themselves

A Prayer for the Success of the King 20:1-4



- There, God hears the prayers of His people rising as fragrant incense, and He answers them
- The holy God who dwells in the heavens answers the supplications that spring from a sanctified heart, in compliance with his sanctified will Out of heaven's sanctuary came the angel to strengthen our Lord, (Luke 22:43)
- There is no help like that which is of God's sending, and no deliverance like that which comes out of His sanctuary
- The sanctuary to us is the person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

A Prayer for the Success of the King 20:1-4



- *May He remember all your offerings*, Sacrifice was commonly made at important moments, such as on the eve of battle
- This is a prayer that the Lord would see and receive the sacrifices King David would make before war
- It is not to be supposed that David offered a sacrifice with his own hand, or without the intervention of a priest
- *And accept*, This reminds us that not all sacrifices are accepted before God
- If they were not offered with faith and in accordance with the Levitical system, they would not be remembered or accepted by God

A Prayer for the Success of the King 20:1-4



- The believer in his daily war, finds his victory in Christ's sacrifice, and accepting His cross as the power of salvation
- The apostle says *"but we preach Christ crucified, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God... For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."* (1 Corinthians 1:23,24,2:2)
- *Selah*, The idea in the Hebrew for this word (occurring 74 times in the Old Testament) is for a *pause*
- Most scholars think it speaks of a reflective pause, a pause to meditate on the words just spoken

A Prayer for the Success of the King 20:1-4



- It may also be a musical instruction, or a musical interlude of some kind
- In this moment, King David had one desire – to defend the people of God and the kingdom in covenant with God
- Therefore; it was good to pray *May He grant you according to your heart's desire*
- When our desires are in accord with the plan and will of God for us, we can pray this same prayer with confidence
- We can also look for God to bring our desires more and more into conformity with His

A Prayer for the Success of the King 20:1-4



- We see this statement also applied to the great desire and purpose for the King of Kings as He went to battle to accomplish our salvation
- On a personal level, we also see that God gives each one a *purpose* to fulfill in His great plan of the ages
- The key to a life of fulfilled *desire* and achieved *purpose* is to find our place in His great plan
- Jesus knew this fulfilled desire and purpose, shown by His prayer, “*I have finished the work which You have given Me to do*” (John 17:4)

A Prayer for the Success of the King 20:1-4



- The Apostle Paul knew this fulfilled desire and purpose, shown by these words toward the end of his earthly life: *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith* (2 Timothy 4:7)

Unwavering Confidence in God

20:5-7



- These words of verse 5 seem to have been spoken by David himself; or rather, by the high-priest
- It expresses the joy which they would have in the expected deliverance from danger, and their conviction that through His strength they would be able to obtain it
- The word salvation here means deliverance from the anticipated danger
- The phrase implies that God would intervene to save them; it expresses in the same way their confidence in that, and the fact that such a deliverance would fill their hearts with joy and rejoicing

Unwavering Confidence in God

20:5-7



- *in the name of our God*, This indicates a sense of dependence on God
- Also, that this battle was in order to promote His honor and glory
- It was not in their own strength, nor was it to promote their own triumph
- It was that God might be honored, and it was with confidence of success derived from His anticipated help
- They had so much trust in God's deliverance that they had already planned to *set up our banners* of joyful celebration

Unwavering Confidence in God

20:5-7



- *May the LORD fulfill all your petitions*, Once again the prayer demonstrates the confidence that God would hear and *fulfill* the prayers of His king
- *Now I know*, The offering of the fervent prayer (verses 1-5) and of the sacrifices (verse 3) has been followed by a full conviction that the prayer is granted, and the triumph of David assured
- What was previously hoped for is "now known"
- Pope Athanasius the apostolic says, "God has saved Christ by raising Him from the dead"

Unwavering Confidence in God

20:5-7



- *His anointed*, In a sense, all of the kings of Israel were God's *anointed* because they were all appointed to their office by a literal anointing of oil poured upon their head
- This literal anointing with oil was a picture of the spiritual anointing with the Holy Spirit needed for their duty of leading the people of God as king
- In saying "*His anointed*," David refers to himself as king
- *His anointed*, At the same time, it was also understood that there would come an ultimate Anointed One, the perfect King of Israel, the Christ, the Messiah

Unwavering Confidence in God

20:5-7



- It was true of David and Israel in his day that the Lord *saves His anointed* and his people; it is even more perfectly true of the ultimate and perfect Anointed One, Jesus Christ
- Heaven is represented as the dwelling-place of God, and it is there that He hears and answers our prayers
- *With the saving strength*, The answer to the prayer will be manifest in the strength or power put forth by Him to save
- *His right hand*, His almighty power
- It is also the King who is seated at the “*saving ... right hand*” of God and is interceding for us (Romans 8:34)

Unwavering Confidence in God

20:5-7



- David knew what kings and their people usually trusted in – human strength and the ways it is often expressed *in chariots and in horses*
- David drew a strong contrast, “They trust in those things, *but* our trust is in God and *we will remember the name of the LORD our God*”
- He acknowledges how easy it is to forget and it is illogical to not to trust in God
- In the spiritual war, in which we are all engaged, the first and necessary step to victory is, to renounce all confidence in our own wisdom and understanding or in the wisdom the world
- And to remember, that we can do nothing without God and put all our trust in Him

The Triumph of Those Who Trust in the Lord 20:8-9



- Confident of the result, David represents it as already achieved
- He sees the enemy those who trusted in *chariots and horses have bowed down and fallen*
- Those who remembered the name of the LORD the host of Israel *have risen and stand upright*
- How different it is the end of those who trust from those who do not
- The rescue David confidently sang of had not completely come
- He still needed to cry out, *Save, LORD!*
- He still had his trust in the anticipated *answer* of the Lord

The Triumph of Those Who Trust in the Lord 20:8-9



- The victory of Jesus is the inheritance of His people
- The world, death, Satan, and sin, shall all be trampled beneath the feet of the champions of faith; while those who rely upon their own power shall be defeated forever
- The Scholar Trillian says, “When your Lord wished to enter Jerusalem victoriously, He did not even own a colt, as mentioned in the gospels. These have chariots and those came on horses, but in the name of the Lord our God we find our strength.”
- Verse 9 was spoken by all the congregation and was the chorus and conclusion of the Psalm

The Triumph of Those Who Trust in the Lord 20:8-9



- David is concluding the psalm by our victory in Him and our uprightness through His righteousness
- *Save, LORD!* This is still an earnest prayer
- Confident as they are of success and triumph, yet they do not forget their dependence on God
- They do not forget that victory must come from His hand
- *May the King*, Some believe that God is spoken of here as the Great King
- A king going forth to war implores the protection of a greater king than himself - the King of all nations

The Triumph of Those Who Trust in the Lord 20:8-9



- And others think that it is not God the Father is here meant, though He is an everlasting King, the King of kings; and who hears His people, when they call upon Him, and while they are calling
- Yet He is rarely, if ever, called "the King", without any other additional description; whereas the Messiah often is, as in the next psalm, Psalm 20:1; and prayer is made to Him, and He hears and receives the prayers of His people; and, as Mediator, presents them to His Father fragrant with his much incense; for He is a Priest as well as a King

The Triumph of Those Who Trust in the Lord 20:8-9



- It means that Jesus might Himself be delivered, and might then, as our King, hear us when we call and come to us according to the promise
- Let Him, as the great Master of requests, receive all our petitions and present them to the Father
- *answer us*, In the beginning Psalm 20:1-4 there is an earnest “desire” that God would hear the suppliant in the day of trouble
- In the close there is an earnest “prayer” to Him from all the people that He “would” thus hear

The Triumph of Those Who Trust in the Lord 20:8-9



- The whole psalm, therefore, is an expression of a strong confidence in God; of a sense of the most complete dependence on Him; and of that assurance of success which often comes into the soul when we have committed the whole cause to God



Discussion

- Psalm 20 is a royal Psalm. What are some characteristics of royal Psalms? It also has a liturgical structure. What does this mean?
- Describe the noble focus that David has in this psalm.
- Walk through each line of verses 1-5. What general encouragement would each of these blessings offer to someone who is experiencing distress?
- Who is the Right Hand of God?



Discussion

- What does it mean to pray for someone else? According to 1 Timothy 2:1, who should we be praying for?
- The name of the LORD is referred to three times in this Psalm (v. 1,5,7). Why is this significant?
- How does this psalm point to Jesus Christ and his kingdom?