

Commentators believe that David wrote Psalm 20 and Psalm 21 as companion psalms in anticipation of an upcoming battle. Psalm 20 was used before the battle in order to encourage the men to trust in the LORD for victory and Psalm 21 was used afterward to celebrate the victory that the LORD provided. In this psalm, David reminds his men that victory can only come through the LORD.

This psalm is speaking to the listener/reader (David's men) and expresses the prayer that David is making for them. David wants his men to focus their confidence and trust onto the LORD for victory over their enemies. The words of this psalm should also encourage us to trust in the LORD in our time of trouble, whether it be an upcoming battle or a troublesome situation that we are ill-equipped to handle.

1 To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.

The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee;

“To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David” – The title of this psalm indicates that David was the author and he apparently wrote it with the intent of presenting it to the “chief musician” (worship leader) to be used in the worship of the LORD.

“The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee” – David uses the Hebrew poetic practice of parallelism (saying the same thing twice in a different way) to express his prayer that the LORD would help his men in their time of trouble (during battle when their enemy is trying to kill them). His prayer is that not only would the LORD “hear” (which includes the idea of responding) them when they cried to Him for help, but that the LORD, Who is the God of Jacob (Israel), would answer their prayer by actively defending them from their enemies.

2 Send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion;

David continues by praying that help would come from the sanctuary (the tabernacle/temple/place where the ark resided), that is, the presence of the LORD. In the parallel statement, David also prays that the LORD would send His strength from Zion, the mountain in Jerusalem where the tabernacle/temple/ark resided. Both of these statements speak of the LORD's answer to their prayer, responding with His help and strength.

3 Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice; Selah.

“Remember all thy offerings” – The purpose of the offerings was to seek the favor of the LORD, worshiping Him with thanksgiving and acknowledging Him as their God. David's prayer is that the LORD would remember all of the offerings that his men have made to the Him and grant them His favor.

“and accept thy burnt sacrifice” – The burnt sacrifices were for the atonement of sins and if the LORD accepted the sacrifice then it meant that their sins were forgiven. The Hebrew word translated “accept” means “to reduce to ashes” and carries the idea of fire coming down from heaven and consuming the sacrifice, thus signifying the LORD's acceptance of it. This happened at the dedication of the tabernacle (Lev. 9:24) and Solomon's temple (2 Chr. 7:1), as well as when David made sacrifices at Ornan's threshing floor (the future site of the temple) to ask forgiveness for numbering the people (1 Chr. 21:26). Each occurrence signified that the LORD had accepted the sacrifice. David's prayer in this verse is that his men would be granted full acceptance so that nothing would hinder them from receiving the LORD's help. Our sin frequently stands in the way of the LORD answering our prayers:

Isa. 59:2 *“But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.”*

Psa. 66:18 *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:”*

“Selah” – The meaning of this word is unknown, but most commentators believe that it is a musical notation instructing the performers of the psalm to briefly pause in their recitation/singing of the psalm while the instruments continued to play, allowing the listeners time to think about what they have heard.

4 Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel.

“Grant thee according to thine own heart” – David is not praying for the LORD to give his men the “blank check” of granting them anything that they desire, but that the LORD would answer their prayer for His protection. God will only answer prayers that are in accordance with His will (**1 John 5:14** *“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us”*). David's prayer should encourage us to align our heart with God's will so that He will answer our prayers.

“and fulfil all thy counsel” – Again, David is not saying that the LORD is in need of our advice, but is praying that the LORD will meet all the needs that we have expressed in prayer.

5 We will rejoice in thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up *our* banners: the LORD fulfil all thy petitions.

“We will rejoice in thy salvation [deliverance; victory]” – David is confident that the LORD will give them victory over their enemies and declares that they will celebrate when it happens. The pronoun “we” is likely referring to everyone involved (David, his men, and perhaps even all of Israel). They will rejoice and celebrate because of the salvation that the LORD will have given to the armies of Israel.

“and in the name of our God we will set up *our* banners” – These banners are the flags and banners carried by an army to declare who they are fighting for and who fights for them. David not only rejoices in the victory the LORD has given his men but also proudly aligns himself and his men with the God Who gave this victory. He is not ashamed of the name of the LORD.

“the LORD fulfil all thy petitions [requests]” – David prays once again in the confidence that the LORD will answer the requests of his men. They have been asking the LORD for victory and David is certain that the LORD will provide it.

6 Now know I that the LORD saveth his anointed; he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand.

“Now know I that the LORD saveth [to rescue; to deliver] his anointed” – “His anointed” is an expression used frequently in the OT when referring to the man that the LORD has anointed to be king of Israel. Both Samuel and David used it when speaking of Saul and here David is using it to refer to himself. David had seen the LORD give him victory after victory as king of Israel and he expresses his confidence that as long as he remains faithful to the LORD then the LORD would be faithful to him, protecting him and giving him victory over his enemies.

“he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand” – In David’s day, referring to someone’s “right hand” was a reference to their strength and power. David is confident that the LORD will hear his prayer and respond with His strong right hand that has saved him in the past and will continue to save him going forward.

7 Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.

“Some trust in chariots, and some in horses” – David points to Israel’s true source of victory in battle. He points out that other soldiers trust in the traditional means of victory in battle and try to utilize as many of these as possible. All other things being equal, the army with the most chariots and horses had an advantage over their enemy. However, David declares that those who trust in these material things for victory have placed their trust in the wrong thing.

“but we will remember [to call to mind; to think about] the name of the LORD our God” – Israel has a superior source of victory. They will remember that the LORD is their God, Who gives them an advantage far superior to having thousands of chariots and horses. By remembering the name of the LORD, they are focusing their trust on Him for victory instead of the material things that other armies believe will give them victory. Chariots can wear out or become damaged; horses can be wounded, become sick or die. But the LORD, Who is eternal and supreme in power and strength, will never fail.

8 They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright.

“They are brought down and fallen” – Those who trust in chariots and horses will fall from their chariots and off the backs of their horses and will be brought down to the ground in the midst of battle. These things cannot give them victory over an army that trusts in the LORD.

“but we are risen, and stand upright” – Because the army of Israel trusts in the LORD, they have risen above their enemies and are still standing after battle. The enemy has been brought down and Israel’s army has risen up because they have trusted in the LORD.

9 Save, LORD: let the king hear us when we call.

“Save, LORD” – David acknowledges that it will not be his leadership skills nor his skills as a warrior in battle that will gain the victory. David’s request is straight and to the point: “Save, LORD,” knowing that only the LORD can give them victory in battle. The size of their army and the number of swords, spears, chariots, horses, etc. that they have are irrelevant. The LORD gave Gideon victory over countless thousands of Midianites with only 300 men (Judges 7:7, 12), and He could give David victory as well, regardless of the numbers.

“let the king hear us when we call” – David looks to the LORD, or perhaps more particularly to the Messiah, as “the king.” David realizes that he is just a mortal man and appeals to the One that is the true King over Israel, trusting that He will hear and respond when Israel calls on Him.