

## The Book of Psalms

### Psalm 20

#### Opening Prayer

#### ***Read Psalm 20***

#### Overview

Psalm 20 is a royal psalm, but it is really a royal psalm of battle. It is almost a liturgy around the battle and victory of the king and his people. We see a similar type of “battle liturgy” in **2 Chronicles 20:5-22**. In that passage the liturgy might be broken down like this:

1. Jehoshaphat’s prayer – 20:5-13
2. Jahaziel, the Levite answers – 20:14-17
3. All the people praise the Lord – 20:18-19
4. Jehoshaphat’s prebattle words – 20:20
5. A chorus of praise – 20:21-22

As we move toward the outline and structure of this psalm, you will see that it may also be divided up as a “battle liturgy”.

#### Structure/Outline

This simple battle liturgy may be divided up like this:

1. The people bless the king – 20:1-5
2. The prophet or priest affirms God’s answer – 20:6
3. The congregation affirms God’s faithful response – 20:7-8
4. The congregation prays for the king – 20:9

#### The People Bless the King – 20:1-5

- :1 - The psalm begins with a future hope – “*May the Lord answer*”. This really sets the stage for the entire psalm and places it historically, given its content, as a prayer or liturgy spoken before battle. Even the second sentence of verse 1 carries with it battle overtones. Asking God to set the king “*securely on high*” carries with it the recognition that the advantage in battle comes from having the high ground.
- :2-3 - As the king and his people prepare for battle, they call on God to be with them. They ask for the help that would come from the sanctuary and from Zion, that is the place of God’s dwelling. They also ask that God would remember their “meal offering” and “burnt offering”.

- a. **Meal offering** – This is the same as the grain offering, whose giving is detailed in *Leviticus 2:1-16; 6:19-23*. The grain offering could be in one of three forms:
1. Fine flour with oil
  2. Unleavened grits
  3. Cakes
- The purpose of the grain offering was to give thanks to God for the blessings of the harvest. In fact “in any new year, no new grain could be eaten by the Jews until the barley first-fruit had been offered to God by the priests.”<sup>1</sup>
- b. **Burnt offering** – The details of the burnt offering can be found in *Leviticus 1*. The purpose of the burnt offering was to show complete dedication to God. Since none of the burnt offering was saved or even set apart for the priest as other offerings were. By burning the complete animal one demonstrated their complete dedication to God.

*So why then are these two sacrifices set apart for God’s remembrance as the king and his people prepare for battle?*

*How do we demonstrate our thankfulness to God for the fruits of the earth similarly to the “grain/meal offering”?*

*In what way do we demonstrate our dedication to God like the burnt offering? **Read Romans 12:1-2***

- :4-5 - The series of future prayers continues from verses 1-5 marked by the “*may*”, which in the Hebrew is an imperfect denoting future considerations.
- “banners” – Banners were flags marking a territory or people as belonging to someone. Thus when the psalm says “*in the name of our God we will set up our banners*”, they were marking themselves and the king’s army as belonging to God. A banner lifted over an area then would mark that area as conquered by the one depicted on the banner. The hymn “The Royal Banners Forward Go” (Lutheran Service Book # 455) ties the raising of the banner to the death of Christ on the cross.

The Prophet or Priest Affirms the King’s Answer – 20:6

- :6 - There is the possibility that this isn’t a priest or prophet affirming the king’s answer, but the king himself. The “I” in the verse lends itself to this interpretation. Yet since it is a liturgy it would be more natural for the priest or prophet to be the respondent. In the end, the speaker doesn’t change the

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<sup>1</sup> Eating God’s Sacrifice, Daniel Brege, page 336

message. The message is this – God will answer with the strength of His arm for those who rely upon Him.

### The Congregation Affirms God’s Faithful Response – 20:7-8

:7-8 - Many of the enemies of Israel relied upon the strength of their armies, thus accumulating vast amounts of chariots and horses, but Israel and her kings were not supposed to do that. **Read Deuteronomy 17:14-16; 20:1-4**

*Why did God not want Israel to amass horses and chariots?*

- Solomon violated this command of God. **Read 1 Kings 10:26-29.**

Instead of chariots and horses they were to “boast” or “trust” in the “name of the Lord, our God.” **Read 1 Samuel 17:45**

**Read Acts 4:12.** *What does the name of the Lord now do?*

### The Congregation Prays for the King – 20:9

:9 - Some English translations capitalize “King” in this verse suggesting that it is a reference to God. Yet, the context suggests that the king mentioned is Israel’s king and most likely David. The prayer is for the king to save them, but their appeal is made to God – “Save, O Lord”.

*What does this practice tell us about what we should do for our leaders?*

*Why are we sometimes negligent in praying for them?*

### Summary

Psalm 20 is a psalm preparing the king and his people for battle. They rely upon God to deliver them in the battle to come. This psalm would be wonderful for those of us facing difficult times to come. It calls upon us to remember that our strength doesn’t reside in what we can muster up, “our own horses and chariots”, but that our strength resides in the Lord whose name we call upon.

### Closing Prayer