

# No Battle Lost

Psalm 20

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**Main point:** God delivers His king and His people by the strength of His hand so that no battle is lost.

May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble!  
May the name of the God of Jacob set you *securely* on high!  
<sup>2</sup> May He send you help from the sanctuary  
And support you from Zion!  
<sup>3</sup> May He remember all your meal offerings  
And find your burnt offering acceptable! *Selah*.  
<sup>4</sup> May He grant you your heart's desire  
And fulfill all your counsel!  
<sup>5</sup> We 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.  
<sup>6</sup> 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.  
<sup>7</sup> Some *boast* in chariots and some in horses,  
But we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God.  
<sup>8</sup> They have bowed down and fallen,  
But we have risen and stood upright.  
<sup>9</sup> Save, O LORD;  
May the King answer us in the day we call.

## Introduction:

We have one lesson to learn this morning: *No battle ever needs to be lost.* The background of this psalm is very straightforward. We see an army on the field. It is a rather large army, and David is the king and the captain. The enemy is on the field as well, and the battle is about to begin. Sacrifices and offerings have been made to God, and now they advance toward the moment of conflict. In the first five verses, we hear **the army speaking to God on behalf of David**. They are expressing their prayer on behalf of the king. If David goes down, they go down. If David succeeds, they succeed. The welfare of the people rested on the success of the king. And, so does ours.

Then in verses 6-8, **David speaks solo**. Then in verse 9, there is a great chorus of David and the soldiers **as the king and the army speak together**. That's the structure and skeleton of this psalm. Now, what does it mean, and how does it apply to us? What is the connection between a battle on ancient Palestinian soil 3000 years ago and you or us today?

Let me remind you that the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:11, "*These things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*" There is something for us to learn from this short royal psalm.

- David never lost a war or even a battle. And Jesus has never lost a war or battle.
- David and his army fought historical, real events. And our battles are real events, but they are not the same kind of war.
- David and his army pictures the Messiah and His people. David was the anointed of God and the great ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here is a picture of our conflict and *what we are to do* (or *not to do*) and *expect*. As Christians, we have a conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil. But no battle need ever be lost.

## Exposition:

What do we learn from this psalm about our battles and the way to victory? The first thing we learn is that in every battle...

### A. Start with prayer. (vv.1-4)

May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble!  
May the name of the God of Jacob set you *securely* on high!  
<sup>2</sup> May He send you help from the sanctuary  
And support you from Zion!  
<sup>3</sup> May He remember all your meal offerings  
And find your burnt offering acceptable! *Selah*.  
<sup>4</sup> May He grant you your heart's desire  
And fulfill all your counsel!

The principal verb in this psalm is “**answer**” in verses 1, 6, and 9. It brackets the psalm and serves as bookends (*inclusio*) to emphasize that *the Lord answers His people*. The word “**May**” is another key term which forms a 6-link chain of fervent desires in the first five verses. “May the Lord answer you...May the name of the God of Jacob set you...May He send you help...May He remember all your meal offerings...May He grant you...May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.” We are not only to start every day which will be a battle with prayer, but continue in a spirit of Paul; for Paul instructs us to “*pray without ceasing*” (1 Thess.5:17).

Verse 1 speaks of Yahweh answering us in “**the day of trouble.**” The day of trouble is a reference to *any crisis that is too great for an individual or a community to face alone*. I’m sure that some listening to me now are facing distress that is too great to face alone. What should you do? In Psalm 50:15, God said, “*Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me.*”

In verse 9, we are told that the King—capital “K”—answers us “**in the day we call.**” Not *weeks later* or *years later*, but in the day we call. Yet, we may have wait for God’s timing. You recall how the prophet Daniel was comforted by the angel who came in response to his prayer in chapter 10:12 and said, “*Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words.*” The answer to his prayer came later, although it was heard the moment he prayed. Now we can find some assurance that this is true of us as well, for we read in 1 John 5:14-15,

- This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.  
<sup>15</sup> And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

The certainty of “hearing” is *immediate*, but the reality of “having” is in *God’s timing*.

So, whether the day when trouble meets us is *unexpected*, or we find ourselves in trouble which we *anticipated but are too weak to overcome*, there is only one way to face the battle, and it is to start and continue in prayer.

**Now, what should we expect as we pray?** There are three references to “**the name of God**” in verses 1, 5, and 7, and four references to God “**saving**” His anointed and His people (verses 5, 6, and 9). When you

place these clues together, it indicates two reasonable expectations that we can have as we pray to God in times of trouble.

1. The first expectation is that God hears us at the throne. The armies speak of Yahweh as “**the God of Jacob**” (v.1). This reference takes us back to Genesis 28, where we see God’s plan unfolding for Jacob’s life. God had a plan for Jacob that would be *unhindered* by the actions of those around him. And nothing will hinder God’s plans for your life as well. God’s plans would be *uninfluenced* by the cleverness and craft of Jacob’s own life. Listen, God’s plans will not be derailed by our manipulation or sidetracked by our inventions. No one or nothing will stop it, “*for the Lord will accomplish what concerns us*” (Ps.138:8). He will not leave His work unfinished. It was at Bethel that God would begin to shape and mold Jacob. As guilty as Jacob had been, God, in His grace, deals with Jacob at a particular place and time in a vision or dream. Sometimes this is the case with us. What happened?

- **Genesis 28:12**—He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven, and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

What did that mean? The interpretation and fulfillment of this dream was given by Jesus Himself in John 1:51, when He said to Nathanael, “*Truly, truly I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.*” Jesus is the ladder or the link between heaven and earth (1 Tim.2:5; Act 4:12; 1 Pet.3:18). He is the One who, by means of His sacrifice, reconciles God and man. But the promise concerning Jacob is found in Genesis 28:13-15.

- **Genesis 28:13-15**—And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. <sup>14</sup>Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. <sup>15</sup>Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

God made this unilateral promise to Jacob that *He would not only be with him but would keep him and fulfill His promise to Jacob*. This is what the armies have in mind as they pray to Yahweh. You answered Jacob, may You answer us. It was such an astounding promise that Jacob surrendered his life to God! Seven chapters later, Jacob found himself in a new situation of danger and spoke to his clan about going back to Bethel and making an altar to God, and then Jacob added these words: “*who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone*” (Gen.35:3). By selecting this background, the psalmist reminds us that *the God of Jacob* is also *the God of David*, and just as He kept His promise to *Jacob* and to *David*, He will keep His promise to you. When we pray, we pray to God who is “*the same yesterday and today and forever*” (Heb.13:8). And the God of Jacob and David, is your God, if you trust Him (Heb.7:25).

2. The second expectation is that God defends us from the throne. Notice in verse 2, the army asks Yahweh to send help “**from the sanctuary...**” that is, from the place where supplications were made, “**... and support from Zion,**” which is a reference to His presence. In verse 6, David is confident that God will “**answer him from His holy heaven...and with the saving strength of His right hand.**” All these statements are meant to show us that our help, our rescue, our answer, our deliverance comes from God alone.

- **Psalm 68:19-20**—Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burden,  
The God *who* is our salvation. *Selah*.  
<sup>20</sup> God is to us a God of deliverances;  
And to God the Lord belong escapes from death.

Notice the emphasis on *what God is*. God is our salvation. God is a God of deliverances. To Him belongs escapes of death. This is all David's way of indicating that God is not fighting for victory, the victory is already His. And if we belong to Him, the victory is ours as well, although we might still have to fight.

Now the *way* that God delivers us may not be what you planned. But He will grant your heart's desire if it be in line with His will.

- <sup>4</sup> May He grant you your heart's desire  
And fulfill all your counsel!

There are a million ways that God can deliver us in the battle, and the way He chooses to is always *perfect* (1 Cor.10:13). Please keep in mind that God's deliverance is not based upon our *righteousness* or our *history of service in the church*, but it is connected to *trust in His provisions*. This is why the army prays in verse 3, "**May He remember all your meal offerings and find your burnt offering acceptable! *Selah*."** A snow globe moment is called for. Pause and meditate. Stop and ponder. Be still and know. What are we supposed to think about?

I believe it is this: Kings played an essential role in *spiritual preparation*. Saul offered sacrifices in preparation for battle (1 Sam.13:8-10). David and Solomon both played a part in spiritual preparation through worship and sacrifice (2 Sam.6; 24:18-25; 1 Kings 3, 8:62-63). Here in this psalm, we see the people wanting God to "*remember*" (v.3) and "*accept*" (v.3) the king's offerings for sin so that no barrier prevents divine support for his activities.

The army knows it will not win if God rejects the king, or if the king does not meet the divine obligations. And if David, represents the Messiah, perhaps this is teaching us that Jesus meets the divine requirements and secures our victory.

From a military perspective, battles required *careful planning, well-trained troops, superior military resources* to those of the enemy, and *courage to fight*. But with the Hebrews, success in battle was dependent primarily upon God. So, before a campaign could commence, there must first be a retreat to the temple. The king would offer sacrifice to show that He was unworthy on the one hand and that he needed God on the other hand. All the people then joined in that prayer for assistance, and then all shared in the joyful anticipation of victory. God's relationship to us is dependent upon His *sacrifice*, not ours. His *provision*, not our plans. His *atonement*, not our activity. When we start with prayer, we are saying, "God prepare me, cleanse me, keep me, deliver me, I am depending on You, not on myself."

## B. Add in praise. (v.5a)

<sup>5</sup>We will sing for joy over your victory,

These words *spring* from the hearts of the army. The term “**victory**” can be translated *salvation*—as you see in the margins of the NASB. Biblical prayer should always be mixed with *praise*. Their knees may be *knocking*, their heart may be *pounding*, their adrenaline no doubt is *racing* through their veins, but they are confident about one thing: victory is sure because of the promise and power of God.

Leon Morris, the New Testament commentator, tells of contralto, Marian Anderson. A contralto is a type of classical female singing voice whose vocal range is the lowest female voice type. Toscanini, the famous conductor, told her that she had the voice of the century. She was a sensation throughout Europe. She was asked to give a concert at the White House for the Roosevelts and the king and queen of England. On Easter Day, she sang beneath the Lincoln Memorial to a crowd of over 75,000.

When a reporter asked her what the greatest moment of her life was, she had many to choose from. Her choice? She said, “The day when I went home and told my mother she needn’t take in washing anymore.” That was the day that changed everything. She had earned enough to take care of her mother for the rest of her life.

There was a day like that in our history. It was the day that Jesus paid our account in full; He then rose from the grave and ascended to heaven and began to reign. Now for us, we celebrate His victory, but we do not pray for it. We pray that He would manifest, display, make open and public His victory, or that He would impose it on others who think they can resist it. But we pray and praise God because the victory is already won. This is why we can add “*praise*” to our prayer—because we fight from a *position of victory*.

**Why are they singing in verse 5, and the battle has not even started?** Because they know that victory is theirs. Do you see how this should make all the difference in the world in the battles you and I face?

How many of the soldiers in David’s army are just like us today? They faced a day of distress and trouble. They were desperate for help from heaven. Some of you are facing a similar day of trouble in your life. As I scan your faces, there is distress in some of your eyes. I know that there is pain in some of your bodies and trouble in your homes. Rebellion in your kids. Worry in your thoughts over financial matters. The battle is real. It is a day of trouble. How can you praise God in a day of trouble? You can praise God because *the victory is already won!*

If you were to go into some Presbyterian churches, you might hear the minister conclude the service with these words,

- May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble!  
May the name of the God of Jacob set you *securely* on high!  
<sup>2</sup> May He send you help from the sanctuary  
And support you from Zion!

This great blessing provokes *praise* from our lips and a quiet “amen” in our heart because *Jesus reigns on high, and He has won the battle*. The King’s victory is the ground of our rejoicing.

- Start in prayer.
- Add in praise.

### C. Continue with preparation. (v.5b)

And in the name of our God we will set up our banners.

**Preparation for war** was two-fold. First, *there must be spiritual preparation, which was the formal act of worship spoken of prior to battle*. This act of obedience to God would affect and influence their actions on the battlefield. Second, *there would be practical and military preparation*—for never do you find God’s people called to sit back and wait for a miracle to happen. Oliver Cromwell once said, “Trust in the Lord and keep your powder dry.” In other words, there was a balance between *faith* and *works*, *spiritual expectancy* and *personal responsibility*.

The “**banner**” was a rallying standard around which the troops gathered in battle. To unfurl your banner would be to say to everyone *this is where my allegiance lies*. But to set up your flags also meant *displaying the emblems of victory as a signal of the triumph confidently expected*. The sense of this was “we will take the field against our enemies, in full reliance upon God’s assistance.”<sup>1</sup>

There is no need to push this picture too far, but I think we can sense that there is *a confident preparation going on*, although offerings have been made, and plans have been drawn.

**What implications can be lifted from this for us?** Like the army in Nehemiah’s day, in chapter 4, we discover some practical principles for preparing for battle. After Nehemiah had prayed (*Neh.4:9a*), he did five things:

1. He assembled the family together (*v.14*)—Fight for the future, not just for the present.
  2. He assigned each one a task (*vv.15-16*)—Ministry is a mercy to keep you focused, not a burden to keep you busy.
  3. He armed the workers (*vv.17-18*)—Because enemies are on the field, we must be prepared to fight spiritually.
  4. He administered an alarm system (*vv.19-20*)—Who do you call upon when you have been ambushed, or you have sabotaged your spiritual position?
  5. He tightened up the night-time security (*vv.21-23*)—Nighttime can be the most vulnerable time spiritually. How are you guarding the most fragile aspect of your walk?
- Start with prayer.
  - Add in praise.
  - Continue with preparation.

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<sup>1</sup> William S. Plumer, *Psalms*, p.269

#### D. Go forward in faith. (vv.6-9)

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Some *boast* in chariots and some in horses,  
But we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God.

<sup>8</sup> They have bowed down and fallen,  
But we have risen and stood upright.

<sup>9</sup> Save, O LORD;  
May the King answer us in the day we call.

David seems to be galvanized with spiritual confidence. "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." Eugene Peterson captures the idea in his paraphrase in this way (MSG):

- "That clinches it—help's coming, an answer is on the way, everything's going to work out."

Does God give assurance once we've *prayed, praised, and prepared*? Well, think about it. When we *implore the name of God*—which means that we remember who He is and all that He has declared Himself to be—and we *call* upon Him, *trust* Him, and *lean* upon Him, what do you think your posture would be?

David does not leave the answer to a pop quiz at the end of class. He answers it for us by huddling us together and pointing to the enemies on the opposite side of the battlefield. And he says in essence, "*See those people over there polishing their chariots, and those others grooming their horses? They think they have a fighting edge.*"

In that ancient day and time, the "**chariot**" and the "**horse**" were the most fearsome military instruments available. As such, they could either be the cause of fear if one was opposed by them, or the creator of false confidence if one was supported by them. But Israel was neither to *fear* the horse or the chariot.

- **Deuteronomy 20:1**—When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots *and* people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, is with you.

We are to *fear and trust in the Lord*, whose deliverance does not come by means of a horse or chariot! The unbelieving world doesn't recognize that chariots break down and rust. *Horses* come up lame, and their legs break, but we, the people of God, at the end of the day, will be standing on our feet—and **boasting in the name of the Lord our God!**

- **Jeremiah 9:23-24**—Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; <sup>24</sup> but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.

- **1 Corinthians 1:30-31**—But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,<sup>31</sup> so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”
- **Galatians 6:14**—But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

What are you boasting in today? Perhaps you’ve been distracted by the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. Remember, our King said, “*for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions*” (Luke 12:15).

But you say, “I been enchanted with the world, how do I break the spell so that I see that Christ alone is enough?” Well, let me invite you to do what the hymnwriter did.

When I survey the wondrous cross  
 On which the Prince of Glory died  
 My richest gain I count but loss  
 And pour contempt on all my pride.  
 See from His head, His hands, His feet  
 Sorrow and love flow mingled down.  
 Did e'er such love and sorrow meet  
 Or thorns compose so rich a crown?  
 Were the whole realm of nature mine  
 That were a present far too small.  
 Love so amazing, so divine  
 Demands my soul, my life, my all.<sup>2</sup>

In the day of distress, in the day of trouble, in the time of battle, the people of God are charged to not place our trust in artificial means—which collapse and fail. This includes *your job, your skills, or even your family*. Chariots are fragile man-made things. Horses are flawed God-made creatures.

- **Proverbs 18:10**—The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe.

## Conclusion:

The psalm *ends* where it *started*.

<sup>9</sup> Save, O LORD;  
 May the King answer us in the day we call.

It starts with a *petition*, then moves forward to *trust*, and then moves backward again from a trust to a petition. What does all this mean for us? The Christian life is a life of battle which starts in prayer, adds in praise, continues in preparation, and goes forward in faith. “*Without faith it is impossible to please God, for the one who comes to God must believe that He is, and He is the rewarder of those who seek Him*” (Heb. 11:6). The battle is fought from an “already-and-not-yet” mindset. The victory is already won by Jesus, and yet, the battle rages. We know that God delivers. He will deliver. Even so, we pray, “grant deliverance.”

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<sup>2</sup> Isaac Watts, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*



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