

MOUNT SINAI MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

MONDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY

Psalm 20

The Battle Belongs to the Lord

Quote

“One Almighty is more than all mighties.”

William Gurnall

I. Introduction

Only the Lord can lead his people into victory, and this he grants when prayer is offered to him, expressing total reliance on him. Thus, believers must always look to the Lord when they are confronted with conflict. The battle belongs to the Lord. In this psalm King David, the commanding general of Israel’s military forces, was preparing to lead his armies into battle. To seek the Lord’s favor, the people gathered in a holy convocation to pray for their leader. The people acknowledged their dependence on God, petitioning him for the victory. Such a public gathering involved prayer offered for David, their king-general (vv. 1–5), an expression of confidence in God (vv. 6–8), and a reaffirmation of their reliance on him (v. 9).

This psalm is “a psalm of David,” written “for the director of music.” Psalm 21 that follows is a celebration *after* the battle, as Israel rejoiced in the victory given by God. Psalm 20 may have

been connected to Psalm 21 (see Introduction to Psalm 21). Of one thing they were sure: victory belonged to the Lord.

II. Commentary

MAIN IDEA

David describes the prayer for military victory offered for him by the people before he leads the armies of Israel into battle.

A the Petitions for the King (20:1–5)

20:1. As David, Israel's king and commanding general, prepared to go into battle, the congregation of Israel, probably the national leaders, gathered to pray for him. Approaching God in prayer, they asked, May the Lord answer you when you are in distress, meaning, "May God hear your prayers for victory in the distress of battle." Throughout this prayer, *you* refers to the anointed King David. Likewise, may the name of the God of Jacob protect you was a request that the king's physical safety be preserved by divine providence and power.

20:2. Furthermore, they prayed, May he send you help from the sanctuary and from Zion. This aspect of their intercession acknowledged God's symbolic presence in the ark that David had recaptured and installed in the tabernacle (sanctuary) in Jerusalem (Zion). The people prayed for God's power to uphold, support, and sustain the king by granting him powers of leadership, character, reasoning, and decision making as the battle progressed.

20:3. Likewise, they prayed, May he remember all your sacrifices and accept your burnt offerings. They requested that David's offerings would be acceptable to God, a reflection that his spiritual life was strong. If the king's leadership in battle was to be strong, his spiritual life must be strong. So the people prayed for the spiritual well-being of their commander.

20:4. In addition, they prayed, May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed. Since David was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22), they assumed he would be seeking what God desired. In this sense they asked God to grant the desires of his heart, knowing that his ambitions were holy aspirations for God's kingdom.

20:5. Concluding this prayer, the assembly prayed, We will shout for joy when you are victorious. They anticipated shouting for joy over his triumph in battle when they would lift up ... banners in the name of our God. These banners were the troop standards around which their units rallied in battle. Repeating their prayer, they interceded, May the Lord grant all your requests.

B the Prayer of the King (20:6–8)

20:6. David announced with inner assurance that their prayers on his behalf had surely been heard and would be answered: Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed. In other words, God would surely grant military victory to David, who had been anointed years before to rule in the divine name (1 Sam. 2:4;

16:13; 2 Sam. 5:3). The word *anointed* was used by David of Saul and now of himself as king (1 Sam 24:6, 10; 26:9, 11, 16, 23; 2 Sam. 1:14). Victory over foreign armies was assured because God answered him in prayer with the saving power of his right hand. This was an expression of divine omnipotence.

20:7–8. On behalf of the nation, David confessed his trust in God: Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. David realized that, ultimately, “the battle is not yours, but God’s” (2 Chr. 20:15). Those who trusted in their weapons instead of God would be brought to their knees and fall in defeat (cp. Ps. 33:16–17). But those who trusted in God would rise up against the enemy and stand firm in victory.

C the Pleadings for the King (20:9)

20:9. In a final reaffirmation the congregation interceded for David, their king-general, petitioning, O Lord, save the king! One last time, they asked God to bestow military victory on David as he went into battle.

III. Conclusion

Napoleon Bonaparte, the famed French military leader, was once asked, “Is God on the side of France?” Intoxicated with the power of his own success, he retorted, “God is on the side that has the heaviest artillery.” Later this diminutive dictator boasted, “I make circumstances.” But that was before the battle of Waterloo. In 1815, Napoleon’s army advanced across Europe

into Belgium to face the armies of Britain and Russia where, in spite of his superior weaponry, he lost both the battle *and* his empire. This humbled dictator was unseated from his throne and was exiled to the barren island of St. Helena. Napoleon changed his perspective about God and history. Quoting the words of Thomas à Kempis, this once-proud man acknowledged, “Man proposes, but God disposes.”

Napoleon’s fall is a valuable lesson for everyone. God is sovereign, and he rules over the affairs of all people, from the greatest to the least. This is the lesson that all of us must learn. God controls human history and destinies, and he is guiding them to their appointed end. God’s sovereignty must be the confidence of all believers when faced with the opposition of spiritual forces. God is God, and victory belongs to him.