

PSALM 20

Read Psalm 20 two times. 1) _____ 2) _____

1. As you prepare to meet the Lord in His Word, *ask* Him to direct and teach, to give you "a new song, even praise to our God."

As this psalm of David opens, Israel is facing "the day of trouble" (literal meaning behind the NIV's word *distress* in verse 1). Battle looms against an enemy of apparently superior strength. King David's role and present task have been laid on him by God: the welfare and survival of the entire nation is dependent on his victory. Before going out to engage the enemy the king gathers the congregation, priests, and fighting men at the place of worship, the tabernacle (lit. *dwelling place*), to make special offerings to God.

2. What are some of the purely human ways people might react or speak when faced with times of real distress and trouble like this?

To short-circuit these tendencies David first brings them all to the Lord's altar. Then he hands out divinely-inspired sheet music so the people will be guided in saying to him what they *all* need to hear.

3. a. As you re-read verses 1-5 you'll see David continually directed to one Source, in confidence and expectation. How many times is God referred to in this section (by name or by the pronoun *He*)?

b. Every aspect of David's present need is linked to God's activity. In verses 1-5, what action words do you find concerning Him? (e.g. answer you, protect you in verse 1)

This section contains special terms, recalling specific truths. The first is the name LORD which always means God's true name, Jehovah. This name presents Him as a Person - it reminds them that He is a God of relationship and is the eternally sufficient One.

4. The next special term is *the God of Jacob* (verse 1). From Genesis 28:10-17 jot down the encouraging truths that would be linked with this title in their minds.

Jacob's very name meant deceiver. He desired God's blessing (already freely promised him). But instead of trusting and waiting for God's sure work, he resorted to conniving, trying to make things happen. The result was grief for his family and future generations. Even through all of this the God of the Promise fulfilled His promises. He stayed with his man unwaveringly, with infinite long-suffering and mercy. He drew near, working great transformation both in Jacob (renamed Israel) and in his sons. Harry Ironside notes, "*once we read 'the God of Isaac,' twice 'the God of Abraham,' but 22 times, 'the God of Jacob.' Why does He call Himself the God of Jacob? [Perhaps] because He's the God the poor sinner needs, the God who is interested in poor sinners. And 'the God of Jacob' suggests the God of the individual. God singles people out. 'I am that man's God.' He singled you and me out—and we can look up into His face and say, Thou art my God.*"

5. "May the name of the God of Jacob protect you (lit. *set you securely on high*)."
Tell what you particularly want to remember, especially in any day of trouble, from this closer look at the great God of Jacob.

Re-read verse 2 where David uses two more special terms, anchors of assurance in trying times. The *sanctuary* was the holiest place in the tabernacle, the location of the mercy seat. *Zion*, the name for the king's seat of power in Jerusalem, typifies God's eternal throne.

6. Exodus 25:8, 22 and Psalm 9:7-11 tell more about both terms. What eternal truths about God do you see pictured?
7. Count the times David uses *you, your* in Psalm 20:1-5____. David's song isn't just meant to point out God's connection with himself; he's demonstrating the reality of God's intimate care and response to each one He has made. This means you, beloved of God. As you go through each day this week, recall that His help from the sanctuary and almighty support from Zion are aimed straight at you.

Re-read verse 3 which refers to ways God provided to draw near to Him. Sacrifices and offerings were given to atone for sins and give thanks for God's gracious provision. They were also ways to seek His help and devote (give) themselves and their concerns to Him.

8. These words may be pointing out that God looks behind the action to the true intent of the heart. They urge David to do *inwardly* what his sacrifices picture outwardly - and he is. What insight do Hebrews 4:16 and Romans 12:1-2 add for you?

The word *Selah* after verse 3 “may mean Pause, Crescendo or Musical Interlude” (NAS Bible.)

This may be the time of the actual offerings—but it certainly also emphasizes that the song is now building toward a great climax.

Re-read verse 4. It’s clear that David’s desires and plans, like our own, weren’t always on track. But the ones in view here are those that were most honest and deep, that God Himself had implanted. Many of these arose from the time God sent the prophet Samuel to bring this youngest son of Jesse in from shepherding his father’s sheep to anoint him as Israel’s king.

9. a. What promises did God give to David after his coronation in II Samuel 7:8-17?

b. As his rule and the land seem threatened, how might the words of Psalm 20:4-5 renew David’s faith and confidence?

As we know the Lord more and more we find that our deepest desires are met only - and perfectly - in Him. We also discover that He understands all about us and can be trusted with our longings and plans. He calls us to place them completely in His mighty hands (remember, David did this in his sacrifices). He may bring them about in His own perfect time; He may replace them with something far more blessed and eternal. As one author has put it, we can fully rely on “the prayer that never fails—*Thy will be done.*”

Re-read verses 6-8. Verse 6 is now a solo voice, a song of testimony straight from David’s heart.

10. David knows well his own need. But how would you describe his understanding or frame of mind in this verse?

11. a. Look at verses 7 and 8, which are the army and/or the entire congregation speaking. What resources do armies typically rely upon to help insure victory?

b. In contrast, what is the confidence proclaimed in verse 7b? (This is based on all that has been declared earlier in the psalm.)

c. Is there a comforting truth hidden in those words for you as you consider your challenges and apparent personal resources?

d. What outcome do they anticipate? (verse 8)

David looks back to the day when God showed His love by giving His sure, wonderful promises. That remembrance caused hope, courage, and praise to fill his own heart, and to spill out to the hearts of his people.

12. We personally can look back on the same things: God's mighty acts and promises of Scripture, and His faithful deliverance and care for us down through the years. But the memory that is our surest anchor at any time is found in Romans 5:8 and Galatians 2:20. Why can looking back at Calvary lead you to wholeheartedly rely on God alone to meet your deepest needs today?

13. Re-read verse 9 where the congregation sings once more in closing. As they leave the tabernacle for what lies ahead, what attitude of David's has been transplanted and "encouraged into" their own lives?

14. God has turned a time of trouble into a time of assurance! Tell one or two ways this passage has specifically encouraged you.

15. What have you learned about encouraging others from David's example?

As we close, there's one last great thing to notice about this passage. It is messianic; that is, it has Jesus Christ in view. (Its "partner psalm" is Psalm 21.) Imagine how this 20th psalm blessed Jesus, as He meditated upon it during His earthly life. You can picture the heavenly host singing this to the Son. And the Father *did* send Him help and support, His magnificent sacrifice *was* fully acceptable and all of His glorious plans *will* succeed. Hallelujah! Now we all look forward to the day when all things will be placed under His feet. "We will shout for joy when You are victorious and will lift up our banners in the name of our God!" Amen.

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