

Psalms 20 — Some Trust in Chariots — A Nation Prays for Its King on the Day of Battle

Psalm 20: a royal psalm of David, sung by the assembled congregation as intercession for the anointed king before he rides out to war — the people's ninefold blessing (vv. 1–5), the turning-point confidence 'now know I' (v. 6), the great contrast between horses and the name of the LORD (vv. 7–8), and the closing cry 'Save, LORD' (v. 9). Temple-era liturgy, attributed to David, c. 1000 BC.

Picture the scene the psalm assumes but never quite describes. The king is about to go to war. The army is mustered, the chariots of the enemy are already counted and feared, and before a single sword is drawn the whole congregation gathers at the sanctuary and does the one thing Israel believed could actually decide a battle: it prays. Psalm 20 is that prayer — not a private devotion but a *public liturgy*, the voice of an assembled people lifted for the one man whose success or failure will fall on all of them. Read it aloud and you can almost hear the antiphony: a congregation blessing the king in the second person ("The LORD hear *thee*... defend *thee*... strengthen *thee*"), then a single confident voice answering ("Now know I..."), then the whole body landing together on the sentence everyone remembers.

Hebrew Word Studies

shem (H8034) (שֵׁם) — **name — and by extension reputation, character, authority, presence vv. 1, 5, 7.** This is the word the psalm keeps returning to, and in Hebrew a *shem* is far more than a label. A name is the compressed presence of the one who bears it — his character, his authority, his reputation for acting. To do something "in the name of" God is to act on his authority and stake yourself on his record. So watch what the name does across these nine verses: it *defends* the king (v. 1), it is what the banners are raised in (v. 5), and it is the thing Israel *remembers* instead of chariots (v. 7). The name is doing the work an army is supposed to do. This is the same theology behind God putting "his name" in the sanctuary the psalm prays toward (Deut. 12:5), behind "the name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe" (Prov. 18:10), and behind the third commandment's fierce guarding of that name (Ex. 20:7). The Book of Mormon turns the same conviction into a covenant: to be baptized is to "take upon you the name of Christ" (Mosiah 5:8; cf. 3 Ne. 27:5–9), and King Benjamin's people, like David's congregation, become a people defined by the name they call on. Trace *shem* through Psalm 20 and you find the whole argument in one word: the nation's security is not in its numbers but in a name.

degel (H1713) (דָּגֶל) — **banner, standard, flag — the rally-point of an army v. 5.** "In the name of our God we will set up our banners." *Degel* is the military standard — the pole and emblem a tribe or division mustered around, so that in the chaos of a march or a battle every soldier knew where his own people were. In the wilderness Israel had literally camped and moved by *degel*: "every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard" (Num. 2:2). It is the rally-point, the visible center of gravity for a whole company of people. So the congregation's promise in verse 5 is quietly daring: when the victory comes, the standard they raise will not bear the king's crest or the army's insignia — it will be raised "in the name of our God." Their true center of gravity, the thing they gather around, is not a flag but a name. There is a tender echo of the same image in the Song of Songs, where the beloved says of her lover, "his banner (*degel*) over me was love" (Song 2:4) — the standard you rally to is the one whose love claims you. And it points forward to the great ensign of the last days that Isaiah saw, when the Lord "shall set up an ensign for the nations" (Isa. 11:12) — the standard the whole world would finally gather to. A banner tells scattered people where to run. Psalm 20 raises theirs in the name.

zakar (H2142) (זָכַר) — **to remember — and by extension, to act on what is remembered vv. 3, 7.** The verb that answers the chariots is not "we will *fight*" but "we will *remember*" (v. 7). In Hebrew, *zakar* is never merely mental recall; to remember is to bring the past to bear on the present and act on it. When God "remembers" his covenant he *does* something about it — he remembers Noah and the flood recedes (Gen. 8:1), he remembers Rachel and she conceives (Gen. 30:22). So this is the same verb, cutting two directions in one psalm. In verse 3 the people ask God to "*remember* all thy offerings" — to let the king's past worship count on the day of battle. And in verse 7 they promise the answering movement: "we will *remember* the name of the LORD." Over against an enemy busy *counting* chariots, Israel's defense is a deliberate act of memory — recalling who God is and what he has done, and staking the battle on it. This is exactly why the sacrament asks us to do the same thing with the same verb: we eat and drink "in remembrance" so "that they may always *remember* him" (Moro. 4:3), and the promise attached is that his Spirit will be with us — the New Testament's day-of-trouble defense. To remember the name is not nostalgia. It is the act of trust itself.

yasha / *yeshuah* / *yesha* (H3467 / H3444 / H3468) (עָשָׂה / הַעֲרֹשׁ / עֲשֵׂה) — **to save, deliver, rescue / salvation, deliverance / saving help, victory vv. 5, 6, 9.** One root threads the whole psalm together — the root *yasha*■, "to save," which means at its core to be brought into a wide-open, unconstricted space, out from wherever you were hemmed in. The people rejoice in the king's *yeshuah* (salvation, v. 5); the LORD *saveth* (*yasha*■, v. 6) his anointed "with the saving strength [*yesha*■, v. 6] of his right hand"; and the final cry is the bare imperative *hōshî*■ — "Save!" (v. 9). Deliverance is the psalm's beginning, middle, and end. And here is the thing every Christian reader eventually notices: this root is the name. "Joshua," "Jehoshua," *Yehoshua* — "the LORD is salvation" — is the Hebrew name behind the Greek *Iēsous*, behind *Jesus*. Matthew makes the etymology explicit: "thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). So when Psalm 20 pleads its congregation from "we will rejoice in thy salvation" all the way to a plain shout of "Save!", it is spelling, one syllable at a time, the name that would finally answer it. The Book of Mormon says the same directly: "there shall be no other name given nor any other way... whereby salvation can come" (Mosiah 3:17). The psalm asks; the name is the answer.

From the Chapter's Architecture

*The engine underneath all of this is Hebrew **parallelism** — the verse form that says a thing, then says it again from a slightly different angle. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses" (v. 7) is one line answering itself; "They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright" (v. 8) is antithetical parallelism at its sharpest, the two halves set against each other like a balance tipping. The poetry is not decoration. The parallelism is the argument — every idea weighed against its opposite until the reader has to choose a side.*