

PSALM 20: WE TRUST IN THE NAME OF THE LORD

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Introduction

It is my pleasure to be here tonight. When I spoke with Pastor Dax a few months back about the summer of Psalms, I had no idea that I'd be one of the folks doing some teaching. Like many, I find myself in the New Testament more often than the Old Testament. But I've had portions of Psalm 20 in my mind for a long time (years and years), and after talking with Pastor Dax, talking with my wife, and praying about it, I felt I should study the Psalm a little bit more and teach on it for one of the "Summer of Psalms" Sundays.

I should begin by saying that I'm one of those weird people who is fascinated by language, grammar and syntax. My primary interest is in Hellenistic Greek (the Greek of the New Testament) and unfortunately I've had little opportunity to look at the grammar and structure of Hebrew. But after spending some time looking at Psalm 20, I can only say that the poetry and structure of the Hebrew of Psalm 20 is a beautiful thing. I have a newfound appreciation of Hebrew poetry, and it has helped my understanding of Psalm 20 so much that it will play a major part in my talk here tonight.

But that's OK, we won't be diagramming sentences or parsing verbs. But tonight we will spend our time by doing a walk-through of the basic structure of Psalm 20. This will help us understand what the psalmist (here David) is trying to communicate in this psalm.

We'll also look at some other portions of the Old Testament. We'll do some responsive reading. And we're even going to sing. That's right, we'll have syntax, grammar, responsive reading, and singing all in the same service, right during the teaching.

I figure I'd better pack it all in just in case Pastor Dax decides to not let me up here again.

Scripture

Take your Bibles (or the pew Bible) and open up to Psalm 20. In the pew Bible it's on page ## in the Old Testament section. Follow along as I read.

[Pause while folks find the psalm]

For the choir director. A Psalm of David.

¹ May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble!
May the name of the God of Jacob set you securely on high!

² May He send you help from the sanctuary
And support you from Zion!

³ May He remember all your meal offerings
And find your burnt offering acceptable! *Selah.*

⁴ May He grant you your heart's desire
And fulfill all your counsel!

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

⁷ Some boast in chariots and some in horses,
But we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God.

⁸ They have bowed down and fallen,
But we have risen and stood upright.

⁹ Save, O Lord;
May the King answer us in the day we call.

The Setting

Most commentators agree that, like Psalm 2, Psalm 20 “was composed for the ceremonies and services concerned with the king’s office as a military leader and defender of the nation”¹ It acknowledges that the king leads the nation into war and by its very structure implies a ceremony of sorts for such occasions. The text can be broken up as follows:

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vv. 1-5: The people intercede for the king.

vv. 1-3: requests for his safety and status before God
vv. 4-5: fulfilled requests and rejoicing.

vv. 6-8: The king (the Lord’s anointed) anticipates victory

v. 6: declare trust in the Lord
vv. 7-8: reasons for trust in the Lord

v. 9: Concluding prayer, putting trust of victory in the Lord.

Responsive Reading

Now, I want to try something a little different than we normally do here at Silver Beach. I want to read the Psalm like the Israelites may have read it prior to battle, when the battle was consecrated to the Lord. We know that offerings were made prior to battle; First Samuel 13.8-12 tells us:

⁸ Now he [Saul] waited seven days, according to the appointed time set by Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattering from him. ⁹ So Saul said, “Bring to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings.” And he offered the burnt offering. ¹⁰ As soon as he finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him and to greet him. ¹¹ But Samuel said, “What have you done?” And Saul said, “Because I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the appointed days, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash, ¹² therefore I said, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favor of the Lord.’ So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering.” (1Sa 13.8-12)

¹Mays, J. L. (1994). *Psalms*. Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching (100). Louisville: John Knox Press.

We know from vv. 13ff that Saul didn't do the right thing. He should have waited for Samuel. But we can also see that making an offering to procure the Lord's blessing was an important thing. The Israelites approached God prior to battle. And part of that approaching God, many scholars think, involved a ceremony like that of Psalm 20. As can be seen just by looking at the pronouns in Psalm 20, the first section—verses 1-5—was recited by the people. The second section—verses 6-8—was recited by a priest or perhaps even the king himself. And the third section—verse 9—was recited by everybody, including the king.

So I'd like us to take our pew Bibles so we're all reading from the same edition, and open up to page ## in the Old Testament. I'd like everyone in the congregation to read verses 1-5. I'll play the part of the priest or king (not because I'm worthy, but because I'm the one standing up here!) and read verses 6-8. Then we'll all read verse 9 together. Note that there is a "Selah" on verse 3. Instead of reading it, just count to three (like "1...2...3") in your head. I'll start you on verse 1:

- ¹ May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble!
May the name of the God of Jacob set you securely on high!
- ² May He send you help from the sanctuary
And support you from Zion!
- ³ May He remember all your meal offerings
And find your burnt offering acceptable! Selah.
- ⁴ May He grant you your heart's desire
And fulfill all your counsel!
- ⁵ 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.
- ⁶ **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.**
- ⁷ **Some boast in chariots and some in horses,
But we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God.**
- ⁸ **They have bowed down and fallen,
But we have risen and stood upright.**
- ⁹ *Save, O Lord;
May the King answer us in the day we call.*

Verses 1-5: The People's Petition: Six Requests

When you read the first five verses, did you notice how the word "May ..." was repeated? There are six requests in these verses. The form is a bit different, because this doesn't initially sound like a prayer to God, it sounds like the people are affirming the king before he goes to battle. And that is what they are doing. But it is in a liturgical form, and the desires of the congregation for the king are essentially prayed while they are being stated.

We do this sort of thing all of the time. Consider a curious child and a hot stove. We can approach the situation two ways. We can say, “watch out, the stove is hot” or we could instead simply command “don’t touch the stove!” Both achieve the purpose—communicating that the stove will burn to the one who needs to know—but one does it in an almost back-handed way (“watch out!”) while the other is a fairly direct route (“don’t touch!”). Here, the “back-handed” method is taken. The congregation confesses before the Lord that they desire the Lord to assist the king in battle. This is a *de facto* prayer.

Request 1: May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble!

This is a sort of pre-emptive request on the part of the people. They are praying that the Lord will remember their king when he needs it—when he is in battle.

Request 2: May the name of the God of Jacob set you securely on high!

The “God of Jacob” is the God of Israel, the Lord. It is the name of God that will secure the king while he is in battle. As God protected Jacob, so may he protect the king. The idea behind the concept of “set you securely on high” is that of protection. Protection is done by removing one from the danger of the situation. So “set you securely on high” is a poetic way of interpreting the basic idea of the Hebrew word, which here means “to protect by making inaccessible”.² See also Ps 69.29; 91.14.

Now, remember that I told you we’d be getting into structure and syntax?

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Request 1 and Request 2 share a similar structure in the Hebrew, as is evident from the English translation with its repeated “May he ...”. Though constituent order in the English translation is *Subject-Verb-Object* (plus optional modifier that I’ve called an “adjunct”; here it is a prepositional phrase that further modifies the verb); in Hebrew the constituent order is *Verb-Object-Subject*:

Verb: May he answer

Object: you

Subject: the LORD

Adjunct: in the day of trouble

Verb: May he protect

Object: you

Subject: the Name of the God of Jacob

[SLIDE]

Let’s have some quick review of these terms. The “verb” is the action. The “object” is the thing being acted upon. The “subject” is the party doing the action. And here the “adjunct”, a prepositional phrase, provides further circumstance to the action (the “answer” is hoped to occur in the “day of trouble”).

[SLIDE]

² HALOT p. 1305

These two requests are parallel; they both make essentially the same request. “Answering (in the day of trouble)” and “protecting” (or, “setting securely on high”) are the same request. “The LORD” and “the Name of the God of Jacob” are also synonymous.

Request 3: May He send you help from the sanctuary and support you from Zion!

[SLIDE]

The structure of this request is different from the first two. Though phrased in the English as one request, there are actually two requests made. Again, here is the structure of the Hebrew:

Verb: may he send
Object: help
Adjunct: from the sanctuary

conjunction: and

Adjunct: from Zion
Verb: may he sustain
Object: you

Here again there is a parallelism between the two requests.

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If we consider the verb/object as one unit on the “outside” and the adjunct as one unit on the “inside”, with the conjunction joining the clauses, you can see the structure a little better:

may he send help
 from the sanctuary
 and
 from Zion
may he sustain you

The *Word Biblical Commentary* puts it this way:

God’s help is requested “from his sanctuary // from Zion” (v 3); that is, when the king and his people left the temple (where the liturgy took place), they would not leave alone, but with the presence of God.³

So, the king will go out, but he goes out with God, his help and his sustenance.

Request 4: May He remember all your meal offerings and find your burnt offering acceptable

The prayer is for the LORD to remember the offerings the king makes prior to going to battle, like 1Sa 13.8-12, but, unlike Saul’s efforts, properly implemented.

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The structure is telling:

³Craigie, P. C. (2002). Vol. 19: *Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 1-50*. Word Biblical Commentary (186). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

Verb: may he remember
Object: all of your offerings

conjunction: and

Object: burnt offerings
Verb: may he regard with favor

Again, there is similarity in structure between this and the preceding requests. The request is that the offerings made by the king will be sweetly remembered while the king is in battle. The structure of the third request and fourth request are fairly much the same: two-part requests joined by “and” where each request part is an inversion and restatement of the other:

[SLIDE]

may he remember
all of your offerings
and
burnt offerings
may he regard with favor

There are a few things going on in these sorts of requests. First, with the verb for each request on the outside, the emphasis is on the action—the remembering and favoring. Secondly, the structure, in this instance, highlights the move from general information (remembering “all of your offerings”) to specific information (regarding the “burnt offerings”, the ones offered before battle, with favor).

How can you not love Hebrew poetry? Isn’t this beautiful?

[Selah]

[SLIDE]

Selah is a mystery. The word is found in the Psalms and also in Habakkuk 3. Now, I don’t know much about Biblical Hebrew; New Testament Greek is more my area. As I said, it is a bit of a mystery.⁴ We know generally it is something musical, but we can’t nail down its exact meaning and import. Thus, when reading Psalms, many interpret Selah as a pause—so it is preformed but not spoken.

Request 5: May He grant you your heart’s desire and fulfill all your counsel!

After the *selah* comes the a general petition asking that the heart’s desire of the king be granted. In other words, that the king’s battle plans be fulfilled.

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A look at the structure is telling:

Verb: may he give
Object: to you
Adjunct: according to your heart
conjunction: and

⁴ e.g. WBC19, *Psalms 1-50*, p. 76.

Object: all of your plans

Verb: may he fulfill

As you will notice, the similarity to verses two and three is telling. Each part of the request reinforces the other. The overall structure of repeating requests is also kept, reinforcing the purpose of the psalm: to petition God on behalf of the king.

People's Interlude

After the first five requests comes a short interlude, where the people promise praise to God for the action he is sure to take in providing victory in battle and safety for the king.

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The structure is much like the previous sections, with verbs surrounding the clauses:

Verb: may we shout for joy

Adjunct: over your victory (salvation)

conjunction: and

Adjunct: in the name of our God

Verb: may we set up banners

The people promise the same thing in two different ways: They will praise God and celebrate his victory. As I noted before, in structures like this the emphasis is on the verbs starting and ending the clauses. In this case, the clauses are roughly parallel—expressions of praise to the God who saves. In response to his salvation/victory, the people promise to act: to praise him by shouting for joy and setting up banners that proclaim the name of God.

Request 6: May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.

Lastly, the crowd provides a bookend to the opening single request for protection from the Lord.

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Recall that the first request was “May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble”.

Verb: May he answer

Object: you

Subject: the LORD

Adjunct: in the day of trouble

The request of verse 6 is similar:

Verb: may he fulfill

Subject: the LORD

Adjunct: all of your requests

This petition is similar to the rest; the prayer is for the Lord to lead the king in battle and provide him victory. This is what the king provided offerings for, the requests for victory (cf. v. 3) are the ones the crowd desires to be fulfilled.

Verses 6-8: The Response: Affirmation of Trust

With verse 6 comes a shift in grammatical person. No longer is it the “we” of the crowd making requests, it is “I”, who is likely the king or perhaps the priest.

Statement of Affirmation

Verse 6 begins with a transition, “Now I know”, followed by a statement: “... that the Lord saves His anointed”.

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The phrase “Now I know” occurs in a few other places in the Hebrew Bible.⁵ We’ll look at two of them, making general notes of the context in which they occur, and then consider what it might signify here in Psalm 20.

The first is in Ge 22.12. The context is that of Abraham offering his son Isaac on the altar:

¹⁰ Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ¹² He said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for *now I know* that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” (Ge 22.10-12)

Abraham’s actions made his commitment obvious. The response of “now I know” isn’t because there is new information (“wow, I didn’t know that before!”); God of course knew it. It is for the benefit of the reader (you and me); the “now I know” means that Abraham’s commitment—which hasn’t changed at all—is, given the circumstance of his willingness to sacrifice his own son, patently obvious to the reader. It reinforces what was already known, providing that last piece of information so that even the most obtuse reader of this account—such as myself—knows that Abraham does, in fact, fear God.

Another example of “now I know” is found in Ex 18.11. The context is that of Moses meeting his father-in-law Jethro after the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt.

⁸ Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel’s sake, all the hardship that had befallen them on the journey, and how the Lord had delivered them. ⁹ Jethro rejoiced over all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel, in delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians. ¹⁰ So Jethro said, “Blessed be the Lord who delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. ¹¹ “*Now I know* that the Lord is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people.” ¹² Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses’ father-in-law before God. (Ex 18.8-12)

Back in Exodus 4, Moses had left his father-in-law to return to the Israelites in Egypt. This was after the incident with the burning bush, in Exodus 3. Now Moses has been reunited with Jethro, and Jethro can see evidence that Moses’ reasoning for leaving wasn’t wacko. Even Jethro, who knew of Moses’ reasoning for leaving but was far removed from the actual events, could see the power and might of the Most High God.

⁵ The insight, references, and gist of argument regarding “Now I know” are from Steven Runge. I’m indebted to his insight.

In these two instances, the phrase “Now I know” represents the inclusion of information that makes the point clearly evident. A friend of mine contrasted them this way. “This isn’t like an ‘I could’ve had a V-8!’ moment. This isn’t a sudden flash of insight. It is that last piece of information that makes the situation overwhelmingly obvious.”⁶

How does this affect our examination of Psalm 20.6? Recall the setting; these are the king’s (or priest’s) first words in response to the congregation. The people have made various requests for the Lord to preserve the king, to remember his sacrifices, and to provide victory for him. They have promised to rejoice with all get-out upon the event of the victory.

Then the king responds, “Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed ...”. Again, this isn’t a sudden realization of the king. “Gee whiz, God really will save me!” Instead, it is a statement of the king’s belief, and an indication that everyone (congregation and priests included) is well aware that the Lord will preserve his anointed king.

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The word “saves” in this verse could also be translated as “delivers” or “gives victory to”. This salvation or victory is further described in the following clause:

Verb: He [the Lord] will answer

Object: him [the Lord’s anointed]

Adjunct: from His [the Lord’s] holy heaven

Adjunct: with the saving strength of His [the Lord’s] right hand (though “saving strength” could also be translated “mighty victories” [NRSV, HCSB])

The adjuncts are prepositional phrases detailing how the Lord’s answer will take place. The Lord will support and will reach down from heaven to provide victory.

The Lesson from History

Verses 7 and 8 provide a summary statement of confidence in the Lord’s ability to save the King and provide victory to his people. Verse 7, in particular, is the primary statement of the lesson learned: “Some boast in chariots and some in horses, But we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God.”

[SLIDE]

The structure in the Hebrew is noteworthy as it is a series of three clauses, each relying on the same verb:

Clause 1

Subject: These (or “some”)

Adjunct: in chariots

Clause 2

Subject: Those (or “some”)

Adjunct: in horses

⁶ This is a paraphrase, not an actual conversation or quote. The friend is Steven Runge, as mentioned earlier.

Clause 3

Subject: We

Adjunct: in the name of the Lord our God

Verb: trust

Here are three clauses, each describing an object of trust. The idea is that the Israelites trust in the name of the Lord in battle; others rely on military strength and might. The verb “trust” at the end, while it is rightly part of the third clause by grammatical person and number, is also the implied verb of the previous two clauses. To make it work in English, we supply a word like “trust” or “boast” to the first clause (so, NASB has “Some *boast* in chariots and some in horses, But we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God.”).

But the way it reads originally, the verb is unknown until the end of the verse. This provides a bit of suspense, serving to highlight the verb “trust” (or “boast” as the NASB translates) as very important.

[SLIDE]

Hear the first two clauses without the word “trust” supplied:

“Some in chariots”

“Some in horses”

And here’s the final clause:

“We, in the name of the Lord our God,”

and here’s the verb, the last word in the verse:

“trust”

Do you feel the suspense as the clauses are repeated without the verb? What about those with chariots? What about those with horses? And what does the name of God have to do with it? The structure shows that people-groups and the things they place their trust in are being highlighted. It all makes sense when we hear “trust” at the end.

I’ve mentioned that I think Psalm 20 is beautiful; can’t you see it now too?

Now, I’m going to do something just a little different. Well, I suppose I’ve already done a few things differently: first, we did a responsive reading, and second, I’m focusing on clause structure in Hebrew poetry. But I’m going to do a third thing differently as well.

I’m going to sing.

Not because I think my voice is great—it isn’t—but because when I read this verse, a certain song always rings in my head. I’m not exactly sure where I picked this song up. It was either as a praise chorus in the church I grew up in, or it was at a church camp where I served as a counselor during my college years. Either way, it doesn’t matter. The words to the song are the words of verse 7, only it uses “trust” (like the ESV and NIV) instead of the NASB’s “boast”.

The tune may or may not be familiar. Chances are some of you know it too. I sang the song to Amy, and she said she knew a song with the same words and a different tune. Since I’m up here tonight, we use my tune (though Amy’s voice is surely sweeter than mine!)

I’ll sing it first.

[SLIDE]

Some trust in chariots
Some in horses
But we trust in the name of the Lord our God

Pretty simple words, pretty simple tune. I'll sing it one more time:

Some trust in chariots
Some in horses
But we trust in the name of the Lord our God

Now it's your turn. Sing with me:

Some trust in chariots
Some in horses
But we trust in the name of the Lord our God

Remember the song. We'll come back to it.

Leaving the verb "trust" to the end of the verse makes sense because it is really a summation of how the Israelites were set free from slavery in Egypt, and how the promised land itself was conquered. This is recalled in Deuteronomy 11. Follow along in your Bibles; grab one from the pew if you don't have yours with you. I'll read verses 2-7; pay particular attention to verse 4:

² "Know this day that I am not speaking with your sons who have not known and who have not seen the discipline of the Lord your God—His greatness, His mighty hand and His outstretched arm, ³ and His signs and His works which He did in the midst of Egypt to Pharaoh the king of Egypt and to all his land; ⁴ *and what He did to Egypt's army, to its horses and its chariots, when He made the water of the Red Sea to engulf them while they were pursuing you, and the Lord completely destroyed them;* ⁵ and what He did to you in the wilderness until you came to this place; ⁶ and what He did to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben, when the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, their households, their tents, and every living thing that followed them, among all Israel— ⁷ but your own eyes have seen all the great work of the Lord which He did. (De 11.2-7)

Can you hear Psalm 20 in this, with the Red Sea engulfing the horses and chariots of the Egyptian army? Sing it with me.

*Some trust in chariots
Some in horses
But we trust in the name of the Lord our God*

As Psalm 20 recalls, the Lord provided salvation to his people by destroying the horses and chariots of Egypt. Pharaoh trusted in military power and strength, but it wasn't enough—the Lord saved his people. Trust in the Lord was proper, right and good. Those who trusted in horses and chariots on that day were sorely disappointed.

Deuteronomy 17.15-20 lists some guidelines for kings over Israel. Kings are to be native, and, as verse 16 notes, kings shall not amass scores of horses as a display of military might:

¹⁶ "Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the Lord has said to you, 'You shall never again return that way.' (De 17.16)

In other words, the kings of Israel should not depend on military might for their protection. God delivered them from the mightiest military might, that of Egypt, when they were nothing but slaves. As one commentator puts it, “Ultimately, the strength of the king was the strength of God, not that of a horse”.⁷

Psalm 20.7 rings in my mind when I read and consider this. Again, sing it with me:

*Some trust in chariots
Some in horses
But we trust in the name of the Lord our God*

Deuteronomy 20 also recalls the Lord’s saving action in battle. Again, follow along in your Bibles. I’ll read verses 1-4:

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. ²“When you are approaching the battle, the priest shall come near and speak to the people. ³“He shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or tremble before them, ⁴for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.’ (De 20.1-4)

In the light of Deuteronomy 11, which we just read, can’t you see the reference to “the Lord your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt” as a reminder to the people that God has vanquished massive armies filled with horses and chariots before, and he will do so again?

And can’t you just hear Psalm 20 in this?

*Some trust in chariots
Some in horses
But we trust in the name of the Lord our God*

But that is not all; horses and chariots play a prominent role in Joshua’s conquest of the land. Here’s Joshua 11; first we’ll look at verses 1-5:

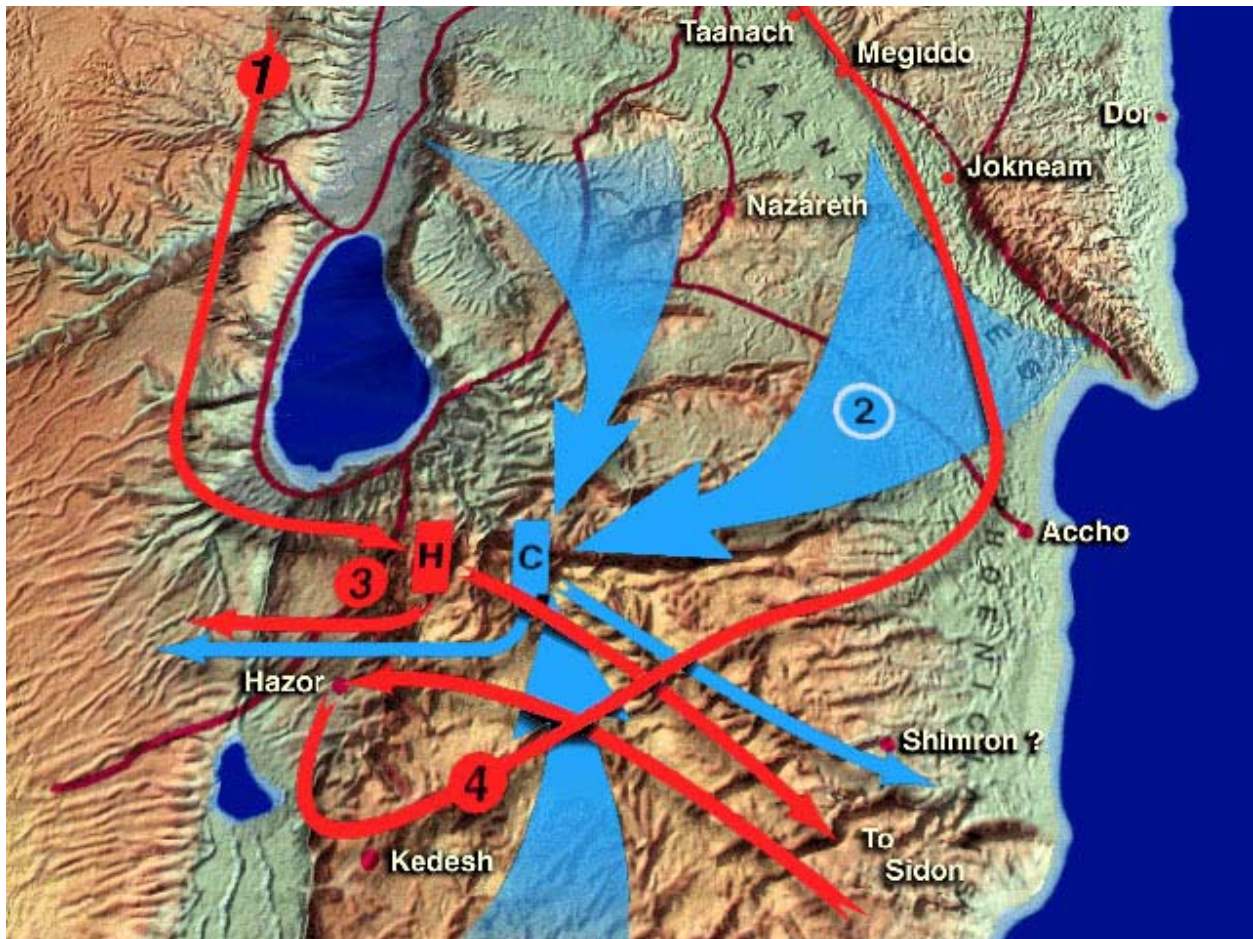
¹Then it came about, when Jabin king of Hazor heard of it, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon and to the king of Shimron and to the king of Achshaph, ²and to the kings who were of the north in the hill country, and in the Arabah—south of Chinneroth and in the lowland and on the heights of Dor on the west— ³to the Canaanite on the east and on the west, and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Jebusite in the hill country, and the Hivite at the foot of Hermon in the land of Mizpeh. ⁴They came out, they and all their armies with them, as many people as the sand that is on the seashore, with very many horses and chariots.

The Israelites, because of the Lord’s blessing and leadership, were having great successes in their conquest of the land west of the Jordan. This news traveled throughout the region, and the remaining unconquered kings decided that the old Arabic (or Chinese?) proverb “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” held water. So they all put aside their differences and joined forces to oppose and annihilate this pesky band of upstart Israelites that was wreaking havoc in their lands.

⁷ Craigie, P. C. (2002). *Vol. 19: Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 1-50*. Word Biblical Commentary (187). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

[SLIDE]

This map⁸ gives an idea of what's going on:



First, note that the bottom of the map is north, and the top of the map is south. Why the map makers did it that way, I don't know, but they did. The red is Joshua and the Israelites; the blue represents the armies of the kings of the land united under Jabin, King of Hazor. Joshua's armies pushed Jabin and the rest of the lot northwest, out to the coast, and then came back through and destroyed Kedesh, Hazor and a bunch of other cities (this is all detailed in Josh. 12.10-23).

But how would Joshua do this? The Lord provided guidance to him. Here's Joshua 11.5-6:

⁵ So all of these kings having agreed to meet, came and encamped together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel. ⁶ Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid because of them, for tomorrow at this time I will deliver all of them slain before Israel; you shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire." (Joshua 11.5-6)

The Lord gave Joshua a battle plan—hamstringing the horses and burn the chariots—and went before them into battle. Hamstringing is essentially crippling the horses, making them ineffective for war.⁹ The

⁸ Norris, D. Thaine. *Logos Deluxe Map Set*. "Israel's Last Campaign West of the Jordan". Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. 1997.

Israelites were to go on the offensive and attack one of their enemies' primary sources of military power: the war horses and the chariots. So that's what they did. Here's Joshua 11.7-9:

⁷ So Joshua and all the people of war with him came upon them suddenly by the waters of Merom, and attacked them. ⁸ The Lord delivered them into the hand of Israel, so that they defeated them, and pursued them as far as Great Sidon and Misrephoth-maim and the valley of Mizpeh to the east; and they struck them until no survivor was left to them. ⁹ Joshua did to them as the Lord had told him; he hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots with fire. (Joshua 11.7-9)

Verse nine is the summary of the important part of the battle: "Joshua did to them as the Lord had told him; he hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots with fire". The force of the battle was to render the military might of the enemy ineffective, and focus upon the power of the Lord as truly effective. Trust in the Lord is not unfounded trust.

When I read this account in Joshua, Psalm 20 rings in my head.

[SLIDE]

*Some trust in chariots
Some in horses
But we trust in the name of the Lord our God*

Summary of the Lesson from History

After stating the lesson, to trust in the Lord, David summarizes and reiterates the lesson in verse 8.

[SLIDE]

This verse is a series of four short clauses, the first two and the second two are related to each other, while both groups are parallel to each other.

Subject: they

Verb: collapse

conj: and

Verb: fall

conj: and

Subject: we

Verb: rise

conj: and

Verb: stand firm

There are two groups; "they" and "we". These refer back to verse seven.

"They" are the ones who trust in chariots and horses. Their power, as mighty as it may seem, is fleeting. Horses can be crippled and/or killed, and chariots can be destroyed—just as Joshua, by the power of the Lord, did to the armies of Jabin camped at Hazor.

⁹ See ISBE, Revised 2:608 for more explanation.

“We” are the ones who trust in the name of the Lord. This power cannot be overcome. It cannot be vanquished, it cannot be defeated. It stands firm throughout the ages. It is, in every sense of the word, trustworthy. This emphasizes the futility of trusting in military might when trust in the Lord is what is required to stand firm. Trusting in one thing—military might—dooms one to collapse and failure; trusting in the other—the name of the Lord—promises a firm foundation with no retreat. The demise of the king’s opponents (the opponents of the Lord) is sure. One commentary puts it this way:

The enemy, now standing in their arrogance and might, would bow down and fall (v 9), whereas the king and his people, now bowed down in the worship of God, would ultimately stand upright in victory.¹⁰

Again, this makes me think back to verse 7.

[SLIDE]

*Some trust in chariots
Some in horses
But we trust in the name of the Lord our God*

Verse 9: Concluding Prayer

The concluding verse is a prayer offered by the entire grouping of people: the king, the priest(s), and the assembled congregation. It is a final plea for God to provide safety and triumph for the king.

The first clause is a cry to the Lord (Yahweh) to “save”. This, in two words, is the substance of the entire psalm. It recalls the entirety of all of the requests and petitions of the first eight verses. It summarizes the action of the Lord in saving his people, and justifies the people’s trust in the Lord instead of trust in military might.

[SLIDE]

The second clause is the final request and can be seen as an *inclusio*, mirroring the initial request of the psalm. Here’s the first clause of the first verse:

May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble! (Ps 20.1a)

And here’s the last clause of the last verse:

May the King answer us in the day we call. (Ps 20.9b)

There are two things, structurally, to note. The first is the *style* of the request. It is like the previous requests, “May [he]”, and it uses the same verb as verse 1, “answer”. In verse 1, the request is for the Lord to hear and answer the request of the king as he goes to battle. In verse 9, the request is that the people be answered in the day of their need.

This brings up the second note, and that is the use of “in the day”. Verse 1 requests the answer of the Lord “in the day of trouble”; verse 9 requests the answer, literally, “in the day of our calling”. The psalm begins and ends in the same basic way.

[SLIDE]

¹⁰Craigie, P. C. (2002). Vol. 19: Word Biblical Commentary : Psalms 1-50. Word Biblical Commentary (187). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

This can be represented as follows:

Verb: may he answer

Object: you

Subject: the LORD

Adjunct: in the day of trouble

...

Subject: the king

Verb: may he answer

Object: us

Adjunct: in the day of our calling

The requests, as you can see, are similar. Each of the requests of the first five verses, however, listed the verb first. That's not quite true; the compound requests—requests 3, 4 and 5—form little *inclusios* of their own; with the first clause verb-initial, and the second clause ending with the verb. Those structures are embedded in this larger structure. Remove the adjuncts (which serve to modify the clausal verb), and you'll see the basic inversion of structure: Verb-Object/Subject ... Subject/Verb-Object.

[SLIDE]

may he answer you

the LORD

(in the day of trouble)

...

the king

may he answer us

(in the day of our calling)

What might this mean? In the people's requests, the requests themselves are the important part. They are making requests of the Lord regarding the safety of their king. With the last request, however, the focus is on the king, not specifically the request.

Now, the question: Which "king" is this? Is it the human king of Israel, or is it the Lord? The answer lies in understanding what the "king" in this verse is doing. In this verse, the "king" is the one answering the calls of help from the people. While this could conceivably be the earthly king, it is much more likely to be the true King of Israel protecting his people. One commentary further notes:

The Hebrew reads, "O Lord, grant victory! May the king [i.e., God] answer us when we call" (so NJPS). This reading emphasizes that the Lord is the true king.¹¹

Thus the psalm ends looking to the Lord for salvation (or "victory"), and relying upon Him as the true King of Israel. This trust is not misplaced.

Earthly kings trust in earthly things, like horses and chariots.

¹¹Mays, J. L. (1994). *Psalms*. Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching (102). Louisville: John Knox Press.

The one true King, however, has no need of such things. Nor do his people. We need only trust in his name for salvation and deliverance.

[SLIDE]

So let's sing, one more time:

Some trust in chariots

Some in horses

But we trust in the name of the Lord our God

Thanks. I appreciate your time and patience; hopefully the stuff we've gone through tonight has been helpful in thinking more about Psalm 20.

[SLIDE]

APPENDIX: PSALM 20

The below is a hasty attempt at a translation, based on the structure displayed by the *Andersen-Forbes Phrase Marker Analysis*, the glosses of the *Lexham Hebrew Interlinear* and the text of the *New American Standard Bible*, largely respective of my own understanding of the underlying structure and Hebrew word order. Any mistakes or shortcomings are my own. This is largely intended as a supplement to the structures discussed above. The versification is representative of the versification in modern English translations of the psalm.

To the director
a psalm of David

¹ May he answer you
Yahweh
in a day of trouble

May he protect you
the name of the God of Jacob

² May he send help to you
from the sanctuary
and
from Zion
may he sustain you

³ May he remember
all of your offerings
and
your burnt offering
may he regard with favor

[*selah*]

⁴ May he give to you
according to your heart
and
all of your plans
may he fulfill

⁵ May we shout for joy
over your victory
and
in the name of our God
may we set up banners

May he fulfill
Yahweh
all of your requests

⁶ Now I know
that
he helps
Yahweh
his anointed one

He will answer him
from the heavens of his holiness
with the saving strength of his right hand

⁷ These
in chariots

Those
in horses

We
in the name of Yahweh our God
trust

⁸ They collapse
and
they fall

and

We rise
and
we stand firm

⁹ Yahweh
save!

The king
may he answer us
on the day of our calling