

Psalm 20:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee;

Analysis

The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee. This opening verse establishes Psalm 20 as a royal intercessory prayer, likely sung by priests or the congregation on behalf of the king before battle. The Hebrew word for 'hear' (ya'anekha, יָעַנְךָ) carries the sense of answering or responding, not merely passive listening—it's a prayer for divine intervention. The 'day of trouble' (yom tsarah, יוֹם צָרָה) refers to times of crisis, particularly military conflicts that threatened Israel's security and the Davidic covenant.

The 'name of the God of Jacob' is significant—it invokes the covenant faithfulness God demonstrated to the patriarchs. Jacob's own life was marked by divine deliverance in moments of crisis (Genesis 32:24-30), and calling upon 'the God of Jacob' recalls God's track record of protecting His covenant people. 'Defend thee' translates the Hebrew yesaggevka (ישַׁגְּבָךְ), meaning to set on high, to make inaccessible to enemies—like placing someone on a fortified height where they cannot be reached.

This verse anticipates Christ, the ultimate King, who in His day of trouble cried out to the Father (Matthew 26:39). Yet unlike earthly kings, Jesus is also the Name above all names (Philippians 2:9-10), the very presence of God who defends His people. Christians invoke this same divine protection, not for military conquest, but in spiritual warfare against principalities and powers (Ephesians 6:12).

Historical Context

Psalm 20 is classified as a royal psalm, composed for liturgical use when Israel's king faced military threats. Scholars generally attribute it to the Davidic period (10th century BC) or the subsequent monarchy, when the Davidic covenant theology was central to Israel's national identity. The psalm would have been sung in the temple or at a sanctuary before the king departed for battle, with the priests interceding for divine favor and military success.

Ancient Near Eastern warfare was understood in theological terms—victories demonstrated a god's power, while defeats suggested divine abandonment. Israel's unique theology inverted this: YHWH alone determined outcomes, regardless of military strength. This psalm reflects that theology, emphasizing trust in God's name rather than military might (verse 7). Archaeological evidence from Iron Age Israel shows that kings regularly consulted prophets and priests before battle, and religious rituals preceded military campaigns.

The 'God of Jacob' language situates the psalm within Israel's covenantal history. Jacob received the covenant promises passed from Abraham and Isaac, and his descendants became the twelve tribes. Invoking Jacob reminded Israel that their security rested not in their own strength but in God's faithfulness to ancestral promises, particularly the promise that David's dynasty would endure (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What 'day of trouble' are you currently facing where you need God's defense?
2. How does remembering God's faithfulness to previous generations strengthen your own faith?

3. In what ways do you need to be 'set on high' and made inaccessible to spiritual enemies?
4. How can you invoke 'the name of the LORD' as your primary defense rather than human solutions?
5. What parallels do you see between Israel's dependence on God and the church's spiritual warfare?

Interlinear Text

אֱלֹהִים	יְשָׁמֵחַ	יְמִינְךָ	בְּיַמִּים	אֶת־הַ	אֶת־תְּבִעַת	יְמִינְךָ	יְמִינְךָ	אֶת־הַ	אֶת־תְּבִעַת
hear	The LORD	thee in the day	of trouble	defend	the name	of the God			
H6030	H3068	H3117	H6869	H7682	H8034	H430			
יְמִינְךָ:									
of Jacob									
H3290									

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 18:10 (References Lord): The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.

Psalms 138:7 (Parallel theme): Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me.

Hebrews 5:7 (Parallel theme): Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;

Psalms 46:11 (References God): The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

Isaiah 50:10 (References God): Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God.

Psalms 83:18 (Parallel theme): That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth.

Psalms 46:1 (References God): God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Jeremiah 30:7 (Parallel theme): Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.

Psalms 60:11 (Parallel theme): Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man.

Psalms 114:2 (Parallel theme): Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion.

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