

Psalms 21:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The king shall joy in thy strength, O LORD; and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice!

Analysis

The king shall joy in thy strength, O LORD; and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! Psalm 21 functions as a thanksgiving companion to Psalm 20—where Psalm 20 prayed for the king before battle, Psalm 21 celebrates answered prayer after victory. The verse opens with the king's joy (yismach, יִשְׂמַח), a Hebrew word expressing exuberant gladness. This joy isn't in his own accomplishments but specifically 'in thy strength'—God's power, not human prowess, secured the victory.

The parallelism between 'strength' and 'salvation' is instructive. Hebrew poetry uses synonymous parallelism to reinforce and expand meaning. God's strength is His saving power—they're inseparable. The verb 'rejoice' (yagel, יָגֵל) in the second half intensifies beyond mere joy to exultation, triumph, and jubilation. The phrase 'how greatly' (me'od, מְאֹד) emphasizes the extremity of this rejoicing—it's not subdued gratitude but overwhelming celebration.

This psalm prefigures Christ's joy after His victory over sin and death. Hebrews 12:2 speaks of Jesus, 'who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,' and Psalm 21:1 captures that triumphant joy. Christ's strength is the Father's strength; His salvation is accomplished through divine power. For believers, our joy should likewise be rooted not in personal achievements but in God's saving acts. Paul's repeated command to 'rejoice in the Lord' (Philippians 3:1, 4:4) echoes this psalm's theology—our gladness springs from God's character and work, not from circumstances.

Historical Context

Psalm 21, like Psalm 20, is classified as a royal psalm used in temple liturgy, likely during victory celebrations after successful military campaigns. Ancient Near Eastern kings routinely held public thanksgiving ceremonies after battle, attributing victory to their patron deity. Egyptian inscriptions, Assyrian annals, and Moabite monuments (like the Mesha Stele) all follow this pattern: the king credits his god for military success.

Israel's practice was similar in form but distinct in theology. While pagan kings often claimed divine status or presented themselves as co-warriors with their gods, Israel's theology kept clear boundaries: YHWH alone achieved victory, the king merely served as instrument. This psalm's repeated emphasis on 'thy strength' and 'thy salvation' reinforces divine agency. The king's joy is subordinate and responsive, not proud or autonomous.

The psalm's structure suggests liturgical performance in the temple court. The king might have ascended to the temple to offer sacrifice (as David did after military victories, 2 Samuel 6:17-18), with the congregation singing this psalm as part of the thanksgiving ritual. This public dimension was crucial—the king's relationship with God was not private but communal, affecting the entire nation. A victorious king brought security and blessing to all Israel, so the people joined his celebration, recognizing that his triumph was their salvation.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. Is your greatest joy rooted in God's salvation or in your own accomplishments?
2. How can you cultivate a deeper sense of exultation in God's saving power?
3. What recent 'victory' in your life requires a response of thanksgiving to God?
4. How does Christ's joy in completing salvation inspire your own worship?
5. In what ways can you publicly celebrate God's work rather than keeping your faith private?

Interlinear Text

יְהוָה ה	בְּעֶזְרְךָ	יִשְׂמַח	מֶלֶךְ לְךָ	וּ בִישׁ וּפְעֻתְךָ	מֵה
O LORD	in thy strength	shall joy	The king	and in thy salvation	H4100
H3068	H5797	H8055	H4428	H3444	
יִגִּיל	מְאֹד:				
shall he rejoice	how greatly				
H1523	H3966				

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 12:2 (Kingdom): Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Psalms 62:7 (Salvation): In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.

Psalms 28:7 (References Lord): The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.

Matthew 2:2 (Kingdom): Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

Psalms 2:6 (Kingdom): Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

Psalms 95:1 (Salvation): O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.

Psalms 99:4 (Kingdom): The king's strength also loveth judgment; thou dost establish equity, thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob.

Psalms 63:11 (Kingdom): But the king shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped.

Psalms 20:9 (Salvation): Save, LORD: let the king hear us when we call.

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