

# Ps. 21, Thanksgiving for the Lord's Resurrection

## Introduction

### Historical Setting and Prophetic Message

**1 A Psalm of David.**—Such Psalms often anticipate the experiences of David’s son, the Messiah. It has a double reference. Historically, it describes David’s victory over Rabbah of the Ammonites. Prophetically, it describes our Lord’s resurrection, and future victory.

This Psalm is a sequel to Psalm 20 (chart). In 20, the people support David in prayer before battle (chart). Probably this is the battle against the Ammonites of 2 Sam. 12:26-31, part of the war that begins in 2 Sam. 10.<sup>1</sup> At the start of this war, David stayed in Jerusalem, falling into sin with Bathsheba, and it is not surprising that he would be apprehensive when, at Joab’s insistence, he finally entered the battle. In Psalm 21, after the battle, the people thank God for delivering him from death. Both are parallel to our Lord’s experience.

- 20: The night before Calvary, our Lord wanted Peter, James, and John to watch with him in prayer, Matt. 26:38. In the Garden, they should have been praying, Instead, they fell asleep.
- 21:4 makes the parallel with resurrection particularly strong: “He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him.” We cannot repair the failing of the disciples to pray. But we can and should praise God for restoring his son to life, and consider what this resurrection means to us today.

### Structure

The sections of the Psalm are marked by who is speaking to whom (Figure 1, chart). There are three participants: the People, the King, and the LORD (all caps, Jehovah).

- In 21:1-6, they speak **to** the Lord, **about** the King.
- 21:8-12 are **to** the King, **about** the Lord (v.9).
- In the middle, v.7 is **to** neither, but **about** both.
- At the end, v. 13, the people and (probably) the king praise the Lord.

1-6 and 8-12 describe two combats. 1-6 thank the LORD for victory in the first. 8-12 promise that he will give victory in the next. Verse 7 ties them together.

### 1-6, The People Thank God for a Past Victory

**The king shall joy in thy strength, O LORD; and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice!**—In the first section, the people talk to the Lord about the king. Note two parallels with our Lord’s resurrection (chart).

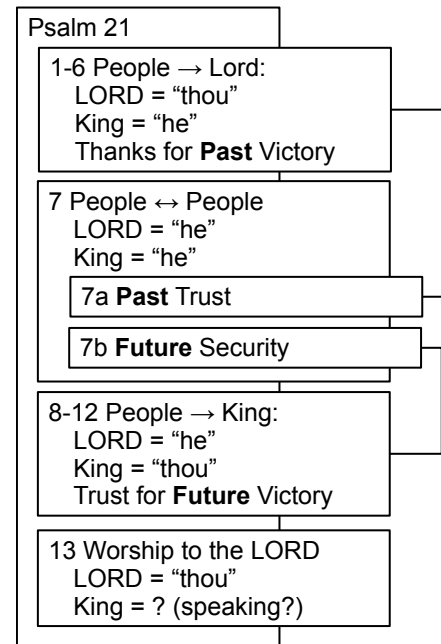


Figure 1: Structure of Psalm 21

<sup>1</sup> [https://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/special/easter/notes/90\\_PS21.pdf](https://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/special/easter/notes/90_PS21.pdf)

## Psalm 21

First, observe the joy of the risen Christ, a theme that will return in v.6, “made him glad.”

Second, this deliverance reflects God's *strength*.

Eph. 1:19 [God's] mighty power, 20 which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.

The heavens are only the work of God's fingers (Psalm 8), but defeating sin and death displays the power of his strong arm.

**2 Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips.**

**Selah.**—Before the victory, the King had some deep desires. The following four verses unfold for us those desires, by describing in more detail exactly what the Father gave the Son.<sup>2</sup>

**3 For thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness: thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head.**—The first request is for victory in the battle. The two halves of the verse remind us of two pictures from elsewhere in the OT that help us to visualize this victory.

"Prevent" here has an archaic meaning, "go out to meet someone as he comes" (*pre-venire*, come before). As he expired, our Lord commended his spirit into the Father's hands. We can imagine the joy in heaven as he dies and enters his Father's presence. The Father comes out to meet his victorious Son, and showers goodly blessings on him. We see an example of this as Abraham returned from defeating the kings who had captured Lot:

Gen 14:17 And the king of Sodom **went out to meet him** after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale. 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem **brought forth** bread and wine: ...

So as the Lord Jesus returns to heaven from defeating the Prince of this World, who had held us captive, he is met by his Father with blessings.

The gold crown reflects the historical incident in David's life, in 2 Sam. 12:26-31:

2Sa 12:29 And David gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it, and took it. 30 And he took their king's crown from off his head, the weight whereof was a **talent of gold** with the precious stones: and **it was set on David's head**.

So our Lord, by his victory, has won dominion over all that Satan previously controlled.

**4 He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever.**—

David's second request was for life. This was also our Lord's request in the garden,

Mat 26:39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, **let this cup pass from me**: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

This verse is often understood as a prayer that he would not have to die, a prayer that the Father did not grant. But Hebrews tells us that his request was heard:

Heb 5:7 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;

He did not pray that the cup would pass *by* him, but that it would pass *from* him, after he drank of it. And God honored that request in the resurrection.

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<sup>2</sup> Thus the *selah* at the end of v.2 marks a significant structural break.

**5 His glory is great in thy salvation: honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him.**—the Father also fulfilled the Son's request by giving him glory, honor, and majesty. Each of these words describes the splendor of God, and by extension is applied to kings. But they occur together in only one other text, and there God, not just an earthly king, is in view (chart):

Ps. 145:1 I will extol thee, my God, O king; ... 5 I will speak of the **glorious honour** of thy **majesty** [literally, the glory of the honor of thy majesty]

In John 17:5, the Lord had prayed, "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." In response,

Phil. 2:9 ... God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; 11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The Lord gave his king victory, resurrection, and divine glory. But the next verse emphasizes that he came, and suffered, for something more than his own prestige.

**6 For thou hast made him most blessed for ever:**—Literally, "Thou has made him blessings for ever" (see note). The point is not that he receives blessings, but that he becomes a blessing to others. The promise is like that to Abraham,

Gen 12:2 ... thou shalt be a blessing: 3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

The result obtained by our Lord is even stronger: he is made, not just a blessing (singular), but blessings (plural). This is what brings him the joy mentioned in v. 1.

**thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance.**—Our Savior's joy was to bless the flock the Father had given him. He came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). The thought of saving them was the "joy that was set before him," Heb. 12:2.

Isa. 53:10,11 When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.

## 7, The People Discuss Victories Past and Future

Now the LORD is no longer addressed, but named in the third person, along with the king. It appears that the people are here speaking among themselves. This verse is the transition between the victory past in 2-6 and the victory to come in 8-12.

**7 For the king trusteth [participle] in the LORD,**—The king received the blessings just described because he "trusteth in the LORD." He expressed that trust in prayer, and the four aspects of his victory are all fulfillments of those requests.

**and through the mercy of the most High he shall not be moved [future].**—His future reign will be secure, not due to his own might, but through the Father's mercy, *xesed*, covenant-love .

## 8-12, The People Assure the King of Future Victory

Now the people speak to the king, about the Lord.

The verbs in this section may be read either as future indicatives, "Thou shalt ...," or as jussives, "May thou ... ." They all anticipate a conflict yet future, and each verse describes the defeat of the enemy from a slightly different point of view.

Though the cross and the resurrection defeated Satan, he is still alive. He cannot win, but he can fight, and our lives as believers are constantly occupied with battling against him. This portion of the Psalm assures us that our King will bring us victory in this current battle.

**8 Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies: thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee.**—"hand shall find out" = they will not be able to escape from you; if they run, you will overtake them; if they hide, you will discover them. Jonathan uses the idiom to describe what Saul was never able to do to David:

1 Sam. 23:17 And he said unto him, Fear not: for **the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee.**

As a result, no matter how hard Saul tried, David was always one step ahead of him. When the Lord comes after his enemies, just the opposite will be true; they will never be able to escape.

**9 Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger: the LORD shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them.**—Note how closely the King is linked with the Lord here. The King's fiery anger is the Lord's burning wrath, the fire of judgment.

Two details here recall 2 Sam. 12, and anticipate our Lord's return.

First, 2 Sam. 12:31 recalls that David made the defenders of Rabbah "pass through the brick-kiln" (better, "brick-mold"). The sense is obscure, but may mean that he burned them. The judgment the Lord Jesus will bring on his adversaries at the time of his return will be "in flaming fire," 2 Thess. 1.

Second, "in the time of thine anger" is literally "at the time of your face," "when you appear." In 2 Samuel, David was not with the army when siege of Rabbah began, but came for the final attack and victory. The Psalmist anticipates that this future victory will be of the same sort. As Joab and the army of Israel were fighting Ammon, we are fighting Satan's hosts. We have our Lord's promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against us, but we cannot win the final victory until he appears in person. Then his fiery judgment will bring an end to the conflict.

**10 Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth, and their seed from among the children of men.**—Not only they, but their descendants will be wiped out. After this coming victory, no more evildoers will arise.

**11 For they intended evil against thee: they imagined a mischievous device, which they are not able to perform.**—Not only they and their lineage, but even their purposes, their plans, will vanish from the earth. Their cause will be forgotten. When the Lord Jesus returns, he will inaugurate a world without sin.

**12 Therefore shalt thou make them turn their back, when thou shalt make ready thine arrows upon thy strings against the face of them.**—The rendering in the AV is problematic.

- "Arrows" is not in the Hebrew.
- The word "strings" in the OT does not describe bowstrings, but tent ropes.
- If the enemy has "turned their back," how can the King shoot his arrows "against their face"?

A carving of Pharaoh Sety 1 from the temple of Karnak in Egypt may hold the clue (Figure 2, chart)<sup>3</sup>. Captives stand shoulder to shoulder, as the king holds the ropes that bind them, and offers them to his gods.

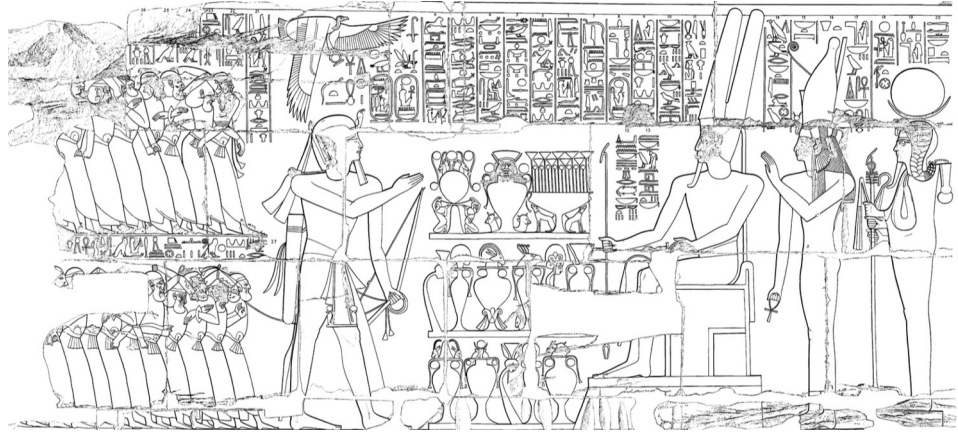


Figure 2: Pharaoh Sety 1 presenting captives to the gods Amun, Mut, and Khonsu. Plate 14, U Chicago Oriental Inst. Pub. 107, *The Battle Reliefs of King Sety 1*. <https://isac.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/shared/docs/oip107.pdf>

"Back" in our verse is literally "shoulder," and we can read the verse, "You shall line them up shoulder to

shoulder; with your ropes shall you stand before them." It describes the final victory, with the victor leading the surviving enemy on leashes like a pack of dogs. Thus Paul writes of our Lord,

1Co 15:24 Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

## 13, The People Worship the Lord

In v. 1, the king rejoiced in his past victory. Here, the people offer their worship for his past and future triumph. With this great prospect in view, the people add their praise to that of their King.

**13 Be thou exalted, LORD, in thine own strength: so will we sing and praise thy power.**— Their focus is not on the King's strength, but on the power of the Lord who has given him the victory, both initially and throughout the war.

So we ought to praise God, not only for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but for the victory in our daily lives that is ours through the same God who raised him from the dead, and for the sure hope that one day the Lord Jesus will return and completely defeat every foe.

**To the chief Musician upon Aijeleth Shahar**—The expression means "Hind [female deer] of the morning." The sun ascends into the heavens with the surefootedness of the young antelope (cf. 18:33). After the darkness of David's sin, this victory is like the sun rising over him.

<sup>3</sup> Plate 14, <https://isac.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/shared/docs/oip107.pdf>, discussed at p.41. Photos are available at [https://www.memphis.edu/hypostyle/tour\\_hall/](https://www.memphis.edu/hypostyle/tour_hall/).

## Notes

### הו + שית + noun

Psa. 21:7: כִּי־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה בְּרִכּוֹת לְעַד תִּחַדְדֶהוּ בְשִׁמְחָה אֶת־פְּנֵיהֶּ:ּ

Psa. 84:7: עֲבְרֵי בְּעֵמֶק הַבְּכָא מֵעֵין יְשִׁיתוּהוּ גַם־בְּרִכּוֹת יַעֲטֶה מוֹרֶה:ּ

Jer. 22:6 For thus saith the LORD unto the king's house of Judah; Thou art Gilead unto me, and the head of Lebanon: yet surely **I will make thee a wilderness**, and cities which are not inhabited.

Is. 5:6 And **I will lay it waste**: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

Psa. 88:8 Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; **thou hast made me an abomination** unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth.