

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Sunday School
Placerita Baptist Church
2007

by
William D. Barrick, Th.D.
Professor of OT, The Master's Seminary



Psalm 99 — Holy, Holy, Holy

1.0 Introducing Psalm 99

- When Mary Slessor (Scottish missionary to Nigeria) “was dying, she would say severely to herself: ‘Why do you worry? Is not God fit to take care of His own universe and purpose?’ She always fell back on the thought, ‘The LORD reigneth,’ as a soft pillow, and rested there.”—W. Graham Scroggie, *The Psalms* (reprint; Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1973), 297.
- This is the third and final psalm to begin with the proclamation, “The LORD reigns” (Psalms 93; 97; and 99; cp. 96:10).
- Psalm 99 is the next to the last of the theocratic psalms (Psalms 93–100).
- Triplets are characteristic of Psalm 99:
 - ✓ 3x “exalt” (verses 2, 5, 9)
 - ✓ 3x “He is holy” (verses 3, 5, 9; cp. Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8)
 - ✓ 3 stanzas each ending with a declaration of divine holiness.
 - ✓ Last six verses contain three lines of poetry each (verses 4-9), comprising three sets of two verses each.
- Although Psalms 97 and 99 have a higher number of specific associations, Psalms 98 and 99 also share many common elements.

2.0 Reading Psalm 99 (NAU)

- 99:1** The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble;
He is enthroned *above* the cherubim, let the earth shake!
- 99:2** The LORD is great in Zion,
And He is exalted above all the peoples.
- 99:3** Let them praise Your great and awesome name;
Holy is He.

- 99:4** The strength of the King loves justice;
You have established equity;
You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.
- 99:5** Exalt the LORD our God
And worship at His footstool;
Holy is He.
- 99:6** Moses and Aaron were among His priests,
And Samuel was among those who called on His name;
They called upon the LORD and He answered them.
- 99:7** He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud;
They kept His testimonies
And the statute that He gave them.
- 99:8** O LORD our God, You answered them;
You were a forgiving God to them,
And yet an avenger of their *evil* deeds.
- 99:9** Exalt the LORD our God
And worship at His holy hill,
For **holy is the LORD our God.**

3.0 Understanding Psalm 99

3.1 Outline

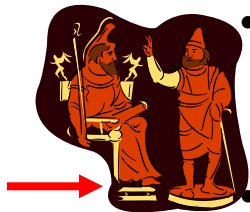
- I. The LORD Is Holy in His Exaltation of Being (vv. 1-3)
- II. The LORD Is Holy in His Execution of Justice (vv. 4-5)
- III. The LORD Is Holy in His Expression of Forgiveness (vv. 6-9)



3.2 Notes

- **v. 1** “let the peoples tremble”
 - See Psalm 96:9.
- **v. 2** “Zion”
 - Mentioned also in Psalm 97:8 only within the theocratic psalms.
 - Jeremiah 3:15-18 prophesies that the Lord will bring all the tribes of Israel together to Zion where His throne will attract all the nations.
- **v. 3** “Let them praise Your great and awesome name”
 - The content of praise is the holiness of God—His great and awesome holiness that characterizes Him.
 - Verses 3 and 6 refer to God’s “name.” “Name” is one of the ties between Psalms 99 and 100.
 - “As holy (cf. 105:3; 106:47; 111:9; 145:21), Yhwh’s name represents the very being of the holy one and thus points to God’s awesomeness (cf. 86:11; 99:3; 102:15[16]).”—John Goldingay, *Psalms*, 3 vols., Baker Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006-), 1:472 (re: Ps 33:22).

- **v. 3 “Holy is He”**
 - God is holy. Psalm 99 celebrates His holiness, because His kingship and His kingdom are holy—without sin or unrighteousness.
 - The theme of Psalm 99 is summed up by the phrase “majestic in holiness” (Exodus 15:11).
 - The third occurrence is expanded, because it is the climax of the psalm.
- **v. 4 “The strength of the King loves justice”**
 - The translation of this line is difficult and can be taken a number of ways:
 - ✓ “Indeed, the Victorious One is King! He loves justice!”
 - ✓ “Indeed, the Protector is King, he loves justice.”
 - ✓ NIV: “The King is mighty, he loves justice.”
 - ✓ REB: “The King in his might loves justice.”
 - The King (the LORD Himself) has power and uses it in order to bring justice, which He loves. The rest of the verse brings out the focus on justice.
- **v. 4 “You”**
 - Both occurrences of this pronoun in this verse are emphatic: “You Yourself” (= You alone, or You personally).
- **vv. 5, 9 Refrain**
 - As the greater refrain, these verses are nearly identical.
 - “Exalt” occurs parallel to “worship” (literally, “be prostrate/bowed down”). Exalting God correlates with a willingness to lower oneself.
- **v. 5 “His footstool”**
 - The ark of the covenant is called God’s footstool (1 Chronicles 28:2).
 - Worship at God’s footstool reflects the common ancient near eastern practice of bowing at the feet of a king on his throne.



- **v. 6 “Moses and Aaron . . . And Samuel”**
 - “Lord, teach us like Moses to hold up our hands in prayer and conquer Amalek [Exodus 17:8-13], like Aaron to wave the censer between the living and the dead till the plague is stayed [Numbers 16:41-50], and like Samuel to say to a guilty people [1 Samuel 12:23], ‘God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you;’ if thou wilt make us mighty with thee in prayer, we shall also be kept faithful before thee in the service which thou hast laid upon us.”—C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols. (reprint; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 2/2:225.
 - These three interceded for the people and acted as guardians of the Lord’s statutes that they had received.
 - Compare 1 Samuel 12:6-11 and Jeremiah 15:1.

- **v. 6** “They called . . . He answered”
 - Prayer is a major theme of Psalm 99.
 - “He” is an emphatic pronoun: “They called on the LORD, and He Himself answered them.”
- **vv. 7, 8** “He spoke . . . He gave . . . You answered”
 - God’s threefold holiness is matched by His threefold revelation.
- **v. 8** “a forgiving God”
 - Only God can forgive. Only forgiveness prepares a person to pray as he or she ought.
- **v. 8** “yet an avenger of their *evil* deeds”
 - Not only does God forgive, He also executes perfect justice.
 - To whom does “their” refer? To Moses, Aaron, and Samuel? Or, to the people of Israel?
 - ✓ Kidner indicates that “Moses and Aaron are chiefly in mind here, with their tragic lapse which could be forgiven but not undone (Nu. 20:12).”—Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 355.
 - ✓ Many commentators believe that the reference is to Israel’s deeds.

4.0 Singing Psalm 99

Jehovah Reigns in Majesty (Tune: “I Sing the Mighty Power of God”)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1 Jehovah reigns in majesty,
Let all the nations quake;
He dwells between the cherubim,
Let earth’s foundations shake.
Supreme in Zion is the Lord,
Exalted gloriously,
Ye nations, praise His Name with awe,
The Holy One is He.</p> | <p>2 The mighty King loves justice well,
And equity ordains;
He rules His people righteously,
And faithfulness maintains.
O magnify the Lord our God,
Let Him exalted be;
In worship at His footstool bow,
The Holy One is He.</p> |
| <p>3 When priests and prophets called on
God,
He their petitions heard;
His cloudy pillar led them on,
And they obeyed His Word.
Though sending judgments for their sins,
He pardoned graciously;
Exalt the Lord and worship Him,
The Holy One is He.</p> |  |

— adapted by William Monk from Isaac Watts

Holy, Holy, Holy

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty;
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee.
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty;
God in three persons, blessed Trinity.

Holy, holy, holy, all the saints adore Thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea.
Cherubim and seraphim, falling down before Thee,
Which, wert and art and ever more shall be.

Holy, holy, holy, though the darkness hide Thee,
Though the eye of sinful men Thy Glory may not see.
Only Thou art holy, there is none beside Thee,
Perfect in power, in love and purity.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,
All Thy works shall praise Thy Name in earth and sky and sea.
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty;
God in three persons, blessed Trinity.

— Words and Music by John B. Dykes
©1948, H. W. Gray Company, Inc.

5.0 Praying Psalm 99

- You are holy, O Lord—therefore praise You. [v. 3]
- Enable me to worship You without reservation, Father. [v. 5]
- Teach me to pray like Moses, Aaron, and Samuel. [v. 6]
- Thank You for forgiving me, Lord. [v. 8]
-



6.0 Applying Psalm 99

- We must abandon sin, because God is holy.
- We must bring our petitions to God, because He answers prayer.
- We must exalt and worship God, because He forgives sin.

The fourth book of the Psalms (Pss 90–106) provides the answer to the problem raised in Psalm 89 regarding the apparent failure of the Davidic Covenant (in the collapse of the Davidic dynasty). That answer demonstrates that:

- (1) The LORD was King long before there was any royal dynasty in Israel—He was the Creator-King (Pss 90:2; 96:6; 104:1).
- (2) The LORD is King even now—one of the main themes of Psalms 93–100. He is still sovereign and in control in spite of what it might look like with the collapse of the Davidic dynasty.
- (3) The LORD will be King in a new advent and theophany in the future, when He comes to judge the world and to establish the Messianic Kingdom for one thousand years.