



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 99

Metropolitan Youssef



Introduction

- This Psalm is without title in the Hebrew text; therefore, there is no any indication to date or authorship
- Some attribute it to David but without any evidence
- This is one of the enthronement Psalms (93, 95-99)
- Enthronement Psalms celebrate God as King and affirm His Lordship over all creation
- The Psalm naturally divides into three sections, each ending with exaltation of the King and an affirmation of His holiness
- It is a triple proclamation of God's holiness, verses 3,5, and 9 which may be pointing to the Holy Trinity



Introduction

- This threefold repetition of God's holiness reminds us of the angelic refrain in Isaiah's vision of God (Isaiah 6:3), "*Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.*"
- The refrain in these 3 verses, 3,5, and 9 may possibly have been intended to be sung as a liturgical response
- The character of Psalm 99 is one of reverence and yet intimacy: He is the Lord *our* God (5,8-9)
- And the awesomeness and holiness of God implies that we must bow in submission and obedience before Him
- We are encouraged to see God rightly, to stand in awe of His holiness and majesty



Introduction

- This Psalm is one of three Psalms begins with *The Lord reigns* with some differences
- In Psalm 93, it came as: *The Lord reigns; He is clothed with majesty*
- In Psalm 97, it came as: *The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice*
- In Psalm 99, it came as: *The Lord reigns, let the people tremble*
- This Psalm is one of the Nineth Hour Psalms of the Agpeya, the Prayer Book of the Hours



Introduction

- St. Augustine says, “as sons of the Church, and well instructed in the school of Christ through all the books of our ancient fathers, who wrote the words of God and the great things of God, that their wish was to consult for our good, who were to live at this period, believers in Christ; who, at a seasonable time came unto us, the first time, in humility; at the second, destined to come in exaltation...Now, therefore, our whole design is, when we hear a Psalm, a Prophet, or the Law, all of which was written before our Lord Jesus Christ came in the flesh, to see Christ there, to understand Christ there. Attend therefore, beloved, to this Psalm, with me, and let us herein seek Christ.”



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- The Greatness of God 99:1-3
- The Righteous Character of His Rule 99:4-5
- God Revealed in Forgiveness and Holiness 99:6-9



The Greatness of God 99:1-3

- The overthrow of the reign of evil and the establishment of God's Kingdom of goodness, justice, and truth, is worthy to be celebrated and praised again and again
- For the third time, a Psalm begins with this phrase (Psalm 93:1,97:1)
- When God manifests His sovereignty, the nations must tremble with awe (Isaiah 64:2), and all the earth must confess His majesty (Psalm 77:18)
- The Creator and Savior in His greatness, holiness and mercy, is above every earthly reality



The Greatness of God 99:1-3

- The Lord, enthroned in heavenly glory before all the peoples and the earth, worth of all praise
- God is enthroned in His sanctuary
- Perhaps the psalmist had in mind the heavenly sanctuary of God or the earthly representation of it (the tabernacle or temple); both are true and either one fits
- And we, if we wish to become a throne for God, we are committed to have our souls filled with the true spiritual knowledge, or the heavenly wisdom
- According to St. Augustine, if there is love in the heart, God will dwell in it

The Greatness of God 99:1-3



- His own people will rejoice before Him with trembling, Psalm 2:11
- Or it may be understood of the people that are enemies to Christ, who would not have Him to reign, though He shall whether they will or not; and who will sooner or later tremble for fear of Him, and His righteous judgment
- The holiness of God's name makes it truly great to His people and terrible to His enemies
- He will establish His kingdom in spite of His enemies; let those who oppose Him tremble for the consequences



The Greatness of God 99:1-3

- God is present in heaven and in all the earth, but He has special regard for *Zion*, the city of Jerusalem
- Primarily great among His faithful ones
- It is among His own believers and those who worship Him, His church, the spiritual Zion, embraces and sanctifies them
- He has manifested His power and glory in an especial manner
- *And He is high above all the peoples*, Secondly great, or *high*, among the nations which do not acknowledge Him, but are forced to tremble before Him
- To the other peoples, who are proud before Him, He is High above them, and they will never encounter Him, unless they humble themselves



The Greatness of God 99:1-3

- The God who rules in Zion also rules all the nations of the earth
- St. Augustine comments on Zion and says, “But, now that it is clear that Zion is the city of God; what is the city of God, but the Holy Church? For men who love one another, and who love their God who dwells in them, constitute a city unto God. Because a city is held together by some law; their very law is Love; and that very Love is God: for openly it is written, ‘God is Love.’ He therefore who is full of Love, is full of God; and many, full of love, constitute a city full of God. That city of God is called Zion; the Church therefore is Zion. In it God is great....”

The Greatness of God 99:1-3



- *He is holy*, This is a fundamental attribute of God that we need to understand
- The word means, primarily, *to be separated*
- It describes someone, or something, which is set apart from other people or things
- An object can be holy if it is set apart for sacred service
- A person is holy if he is set apart for God's will and purpose
- But the holiness of God refers to His absolute purity
- He is completely without sin and apart from it, "*God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all*" (1 John 1:5)



The Greatness of God 99:1-3

- *“Therefore, listen to me, you men of understanding: Far be it from God to do wickedness, And from the Almighty to commit iniquity”* (Job 34:10)
- *“Are You not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One?... You are of purer eyes than to behold evil.”* (Habakkuk 1:12-13)
- God was revealed as separated from everything unjust, untrue, evil, in His character, and therefore in all His dealings with men
- God’s holiness is part of everything He is and does
- If we get a glimpse of God as holy, our only response can be to worship Him with reverence
- He rightfully receives praise because *He is holy*

The Righteous Character of His Rule 99:4-5



- God is strong, but He also loves justice; He rules with, *equity*, fairness, justice, and righteousness
- It is comforting to know that God is just and impartial
- His power is perfectly balanced with His justice and righteousness
- His rule is incomparable, and He is always righteous and fair, *“And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist.”* (Isaiah 11:3-5)

The Righteous Character of His Rule 99:4-5



- An important implication of God's justice is that as a just judge He cannot overlook sin: sin must be punished
- For those who are made right before God through Jesus, they celebrate the justice of God, but those who remain in sin should fear the justice of God (Romans 3:21-26)
- The psalmist used *Jacob* as a representation of the nation of Israel which is common in the Psalms
- However, the use of *Jacob* here may denote something else
- *Jacob* was known as a deceiver; but by way of contrast, God has *executed justice and righteousness*

The Righteous Character of His Rule 99:4-5



- The earth is called the *footstool* of God (Isaiah 66:1; Matthew 5:35)
- In other places the expression is used of the sanctuary (Psalm 132:7; Isaiah 60:13; Lamentations 2:1)
- In 1 Chronicles 28:2 it seems to refer to the ark
- But *footstool* pictures bowing before the throne of a king, in total submission
- Because our King is the righteous Judge of all, we must submit our hearts completely to Him, so that we worship Him in sincerity and truth

The Righteous Character of His Rule 99:4-5



- Because God has *executed justice and righteousness*, the psalmist ends this part with these intensifying words, *Exalt the Lord our God, And worship at His footstool— He is holy*
- St. Augustine says, “Magnify Him truly, magnify Him well. Let us praise Him, let us magnify Him who has wrought the very righteousness which we have; who wrought it in us, Himself. For who but He who justified us, wrought righteousness in us? For of Christ it is said, “who justifies the ungodly.”
- Understanding the power, holiness, and goodness of God should lead us to *exalt* Him and to humbly *worship* Him

The Righteous Character of His Rule 99:4-5



- This view of God's justice is meant to show His holiness and lead His people to worship
- He is the Holy Judge and He is worthy of all praise and exaltation
- When we draw near to God to worship Him, our hearts ought to be filled with high thoughts of Him, and we ought to exalt Him in our souls
- We ought to be in awe of His holiness should , as the Seraphim themselves, Isaiah 6:2-3

God Revealed in Forgiveness and Holiness 99:6-9



- After standing in awe of God as the Holy King and Judge this third section is remarkable
- Here we see that the same God who reigns over all, also enters into fellowship with His people, He is called *our God*
- The psalmist uses Moses, Aaron and Samuel as representative examples
- It was the office of the priests to intercede between God and man
- Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, were intercessors in past time
- Moses and Aaron led Israelites out of Egypt and established national worship through the tabernacle

God Revealed in Forgiveness and Holiness 99:6-9



- Samuel came later, as the last of Israel's judges who anointed the first king, Saul, and later, David
- Moses, though not called a priest, performed many priestly acts, such as sprinkling the blood of the covenant at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:6-8), setting in order the tabernacle (Exodus 40:18-33), consecrating Aaron and his sons (Leviticus 8:6-30)
- Moses exercised this priestly function, when Israel was fighting with Amalek (Exodus 17:11)
- When they sinned by worshipping the calf (Exodus 32:30; Deuteronomy 9:18)

God Revealed in Forgiveness and Holiness 99:6-9



- And when they murmured on the return of the spies (Numbers 14:13)
- Samuel was not a priest, but a Levite (1 Chronicles 6:16-28)
- He was, however, a powerful intercessor with God, a righteous man whose fervent prayer availed much, 1 Samuel 7:8-9, 12:16 and Sirach 46:16
- These were ones who prayed, *called upon His name*, and God revealed Himself, *He answered them*
- In the first verses the psalmist attributes sacred titles to God: He is king, great, supreme, high, awesome, holy, powerful, and just

God Revealed in Forgiveness and Holiness 99:6-9



- *He is holy* is repeated three times
- In biblical language this term indicates His Divinity above all
- God is superior to us, and He is infinitely above everyone of His creatures
- This Superiority, however, does not make Him an impassive and distant God: when He is called upon, He responds
- After contemplating the absolute perfection of the Lord, the psalmist reminds us that God was in constant touch with His people through Moses and Aaron, His mediators, and through Samuel, His prophet

God Revealed in Forgiveness and Holiness 99:6-9



- He spoke and was heard, He punished offenses but also forgave
- God is Divine but His people can have a personal relationship with Him
- *He spoke to them in the cloudy pillar*, Referring to Israel's experience at Sinai where they wandered in the wilderness and where God gave His Law
- The pillar of cloud was the physical representation of God's presence with them
- *They kept His testimonies*, The psalmist noted the general obedience of *Moses, Aaron, and Samuel*

God Revealed in Forgiveness and Holiness 99:6-9



- They kept, though not perfectly, yet sincerely, from a principle of love, and with a view to the glory of God
- Moses was known as "*the servant of the Lord*" (Deuteronomy 34:5; Joshua 1:1-2)
- He was "*faithful in all his house, as a servant*" (Hebrews 3:5)
- Aaron was "the saint of the Lord" (Psalm 106:16)
- This is added, not only for their praise, but for the instruction of the Israelites, to teach them that God would not hear the prayers of them who did not keep His commandments

God Revealed in Forgiveness and Holiness 99:6-9



- *God-Who-Forgive*, It isn't clear if the ones referred to here are the *priests* mentioned, (Moses, Aaron, and Samuel) or if it is referring to the people they prayed for (Israel as a whole)
- Most commentators regard *their deeds* as referring to Israel's deeds
- In other words, through their intercession, God's forgiveness extended to the nation, although the Lord still imposed penalties for national disobedience
- But it is also true that Moses, Aaron, and Samuel were each disciplined by God in some way

God Revealed in Forgiveness and Holiness 99:6-9



- Both Moses and Aaron angered God at the waters of Meribah (Psalm 106:32; Numbers 20:12-13)
- Aaron angered God by sanctioning the idolatry of the golden calf (Exodus 32:1-24)
- God forgave both of them, these and other sins, but not without inflicting punishment for the sins
- This verse shows the balance between God's faithfulness in answering prayer, His mercy in forgiving sin, and His righteousness in His punishment for sin, so that we do not take His mercy lightly

God Revealed in Forgiveness and Holiness 99:6-9



- This is the lesson which its history has taught it concerning God's character
- Through all the history of His people He has been faithful, both in forgiveness and in vengeance, and that because He is holy
- St. Augustine says, "Consider, my brethren, what he has taught us here: attend. God is angry with him whom, when he sins, He scourges not: for unto him to whom He is truly forgiving, He not only remits sins, that they may not injure him in a future life; but also chastens him, that he delight not in continual sin."

God Revealed in Forgiveness and Holiness 99:6-9



- The psalmist repeats the refrain (3, 5) and God's holiness is proclaimed, *Exalt the Lord our God, And worship at His holy hill; For the Lord our God is holy*
- Later, in heavenly visions, the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 6:3) and the Apostle John (Revelation 4:8) would hear this three-time declaration of holiness combined into a single sentence
- His nature is holy, and He is glorious in the perfection of His holiness, and therefore to be praised and exalted
- His name is holy, and so reverend; therefore, to be worshipped
- The repetition was with some slight variations

God Revealed in Forgiveness and Holiness 99:6-9



- Instead of *worship at His footstool* (v. 5), he says, *worship at His holy hill*
- Instead of *He is holy*, he gives a more intimate appeal, *For the Lord our God is holy*
- Or, in the words of Hebrews 12:22-24, which contrast the experience of Israel at Mount Sinai with our privileges, “*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.*”

God Revealed in Forgiveness and Holiness 99:6-9



- The clearest Epiphany of Christ's glory was on Mount Calvary, which some scholars identify as Mount Zion
- God came among us above all in His Son, who became one of us, to instill in us His life and His holiness
- This is why we now approach God with confidence not fear
- Indeed, in Christ we have the High Priest, holy, innocent and unblemished
- He *"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them"* (Hebrews 7:25)



Discussion

- How should the world respond to God's holy reign?
- Why should people praise and honor the Lord?
- How does this Psalm describe the quality of God's reign?
- Why did the psalmist refer to God's "footstool"?
- Who communicated with God?



Discussion

- Whom did the Lord choose to be His representatives?
- What kind of relationship did Moses, Aaron, and Samuel have with the Lord?
- What does God's treatment of Israel reveal about His character?
- Describe the feelings and thoughts you get when you picture God on His throne as this Psalm portrays Him. Why can you approach God's throne "with confidence" (Hebrews 4:16)?