

PSALMS

Chapter 99

The LORD Our God Is Holy

The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake! 2 The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples. 3 Let them praise your great and awesome name! Holy is he! 4 The King in his might loves justice. You have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. 5 Exalt the LORD our God; worship at his footstool! Holy is he! 6 Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called upon his name. They called to the LORD, and he answered them. 7 In the pillar of the cloud he spoke to them; they kept his testimonies and the statute that he gave them. 8 O LORD our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings. 9 Exalt The LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy!

Ps 99 A hymn celebrating the Lord as the great and holy King in Zion. In developing his theme, the poet makes striking use of the symbolic significance (completeness) of the number seven: Seven times he speaks of the “LORD,” and seven times he refers to him by means of independent personal pronouns (Hebrew). (See introduction to Ps 93.) The form is symmetrical, with four stanzas of three (Hebrew) poetic lines and with each of the two main divisions concluded by the major refrain (vv. 5, 9). The lesser refrain, “he is holy” (vv. 3, 5, and expanded in v. 9), probably reflects a traditional threefold liturgical rubric (see Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8; see also Ps 96:1–3, 7–9 and notes for further evidence of a liturgical penchant for triple repetition). The second half of the psalm develops the theme introduced in the second stanza. (CSB)

Like Ps 93 and 97, this psalm begins with “The LORD reigns.” It proclaims Him King over all creation; it highlights God’s holiness, which evokes awe, reverence, even fear. He alone is worthy of worship, prayer, and devotion. Although Moses, Aaron, and Samuel are mentioned, the psalm cannot be dated or identified with any particular historical event. These men represent the priestly and prophetic offices of ancient Israel and demonstrate both God’s justice and forgiveness for His people. (TLSB)

Format: Three sections correspond to “holy”; vv 1–3, God’s holiness in all the earth; vv 4–5, His holiness in His justice; vv 6–9, His holiness in restoring His people. (TLSB)

Psalm 99 is closely related to the three psalms which precede it. Although the judgment of Israel’s enemies is still mentioned here, the focus has shifted to God’s gracious dealings with his people. (PBC)

99:1–3 The God enthroned in Zion is ruler over all the nations—let them acknowledge him. (CSB)

The holiness of God is mentioned three times in this psalm. God dwells in unapproachable majesty. The holiness and majesty of God terrify sinner. Even the cherubim, the angels who are merely servants who wait around God’s throne, are so awesome that they strike terror into man. However, this holy God has made it possible for sinners to be restored to his presence. (PBC)

99:1 *tremble*. In reverent awe before God. (CSB)

cherubim. In Ps 18:7–15, the sight of these beings is fearful and majestic. The awesome power and mobility of God’s rule makes people, indeed, all creation. (TLSB)

The Bible pictures cherubin as winged, heavenly beings with the faces of men and the bodies of lions. Ezekiel describes them as four-winged and four-faced (Ezek. 1:5-12; 10:1-22). (Lutheran Bible Companion – Volume 2)

When God drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, He put cherubin at the entrance of Eden to guard it (Gen. 3:24). To adorn the ark of the covenant, craftsmen made two golden cherubin and placed them on top of it (Ex. 25:18-22; 37:7-9; Heb. 9:5). Cherubin were also embroidered on the curtain and veil of the tabernacle (Ex. 26:1,31). Solomon placed two cherubin in the Most Holy Place in the temple (1 Kg. 6:23-28; 8:7). (Lutheran Bible Companion – Volume 2)

The Bible pictures the Lord as living between cherubin and as riding on them (Num. 7:89; 2 Sam. 22:11; Ps. 18:10; 80:1). (Lutheran Bible Companion – Volume 2)

99:2 *Zion...all the peoples* – God is exalted, supreme, not only over Jerusalem (and all those who are His people) but over the whole world. (TLSB)

99:3 *Let them praise*. As the Great King, he ought to be shown the fear (v. 1) and honor that are his due. (CSB)

holy. God’s holiness is His essential difference from the created realm. He is unique, totally unlike anything else that has been made. He is pure; we are not. Cf Is 6:3–5. (TLSB)

99:4–5 The Lord has shown the quality of his rule by what he has done for Israel. (CSB)

The holiness of God is a comfort to his people who are repentant. They are twice invited to come and worship the holy God. They can come with confidence because of God’s attribute of justice; he will be faithful to his promise to provide forgiveness and salvation. (PBC)

99:4 *his might loves justice*. Two chief characteristics of God’s reign. (CSB)

established equity. Poetic repetition of nearly synonymous words emphasizes that God’s justice will be done. His laws are for the good of all, and He orders the social world so the needs of everyone are protected. He wants people to do what is right according to His wisdom and revelation. (TLSB)

Jacob. A synonym for Israel (see Ge 32:28). (CSB)

Refers to Israel the nation, God’s chosen people. (TLSB)

Justice and righteousness. Though even the heavens proclaim God’s righteousness, it is in the whole complex of his saving acts in and for Israel that the “righteousness” of God’s reign is especially disclosed. (CSB)

God established and sustained a just and righteous order for his people; therefore, his people should not only live by it but champion it as the only solution to a fallen world. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

99:5 *footstool*. God's royal footstool (see 2Ch 9:18), here a metaphor linking the heavenly throne with the earthly; when God sits on his heavenly throne, his earthly throne is his footstool (here "his holy mountain," v. 9; see 132:7; 1Ch 28:2; La 2:1). (CSB)

Could refer to the temple or to the ark of the covenant. As a king would sit on his throne and have a footstool for his feet, so God's reign was symbolized by the ark as His earthly throne or the footstool to His throne. (TLSB)

99:6–7 In Israel the Lord provided priestly intermediaries, who (1) were appointed to intercede with him on behalf of his faltering people (v. 6), and (2) were given knowledge of his will so they could instruct Israel. (CSB)

99:6 *Moses ... Aaron ... Samuel*. These three no doubt serve here as representatives of all those the Lord used as intermediaries with his people in times of great crises. (CSB)

priests ... who called upon his name. The priestly function of intercession is highlighted (see Ex 17:11; Nu 14:13–19; 21:7; 1Sa 7:5, 8–9; 12:19, 23; Jer 15:1). (CSB)

Moses, Aaron, and Samuel interceded for the people. In a time of national crisis, 90:16), the psalm recalls God's powerful answers to their prayers for help. (TLSB)

answered them. See v. 8; see also the Lord's responses to the intercessions referred to in note on vv. 6–7. (CSB)

99:7 *in pillar of the cloud he spoke to them*. Though reference may be to all Israel ("them"), more likely the hymn recalls God's speaking with Moses (see Ex 33:9) and Aaron (see Nu 12:5–6). But that special mode of revelation in the desert may also be generalized here to include God's revelations to Samuel, who was called to his prophetic ministry at the sanctuary, "where the ark of God was" (1Sa 3:3; see also 1Sa 12:23). (CSB)

Cf Ex 33:9; Nu 12:5. Showed God's presence among His people in the wilderness. (TLSB)

they kept. However imperfectly, it was in Israel that God's righteous statutes and decrees were kept because only in Israel had they been made known (see 147:19–20; Dt 4:5–8). (CSB)

Held on in faith to His salvation and, consequently, responded in obedience because of God's forgiveness. (TLSB)

99:8–9 The justice and righteousness of God's rule in Israel (see v. 4) have been especially shown in the manner in which he has dealt with their sins (see Ex 34:6–7). (CSB)

Even Moses, Aaron, and Samuel had sinned before God. The distance sin brings between God and His creation is bridged only by His justice (sin is taken seriously and must be punished) and forgiveness (that sin is taken away by someone else bearing the punishment). God's justice and forgiveness merge in the death of the Savior, Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

99:9 *holy mountain*. Site of the temple. Cf 2:6. (TLSB)

He restored them to the joy of serving at his holy mountain. (PBC)

the LORD our God is holy. Climactic expansion of the secondary refrain. (CSB)

Climactic praise confesses “our” God is holy, asserting the close relationship between the holy Lord and His people. (TLSB)

Ps 99 Despite the psalmist’s confidence that God in all His holiness reigns, we see an ordinary world ruled by powers and people who are too often distant from God’s ways and words. Yet the holy Savior is present just as He was in the Most Holy Place when we, His people, gather together to praise His holy name. • O Lord, You tabernacle in ordinary bread and wine, where Your holy body and blood are given for our forgiveness. We see God’s holiness in Jesus, the Holy One of God! Amen. (TLSB)