

## COMMENTARY - Psalms - Waltner

James H. Waltner. Believers Church Bible Commentary: *PSALMS* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006),

### HOLINESS, HOLY

Reference to something as "holy" usually means it is set apart as belonging to God. It is sacred instead of profane. However, there are deeper meanings to "holiness." The word refers to the very nature and being of God. Thus, "holiness" and "holy" refer to the numinous (divine spirit), the imponderable and incomprehensible, a potent power removed and distant, yet at the same time near and present, the *mysterium tremendum*.<sup>1</sup>

The main Hebrew word denoting holiness is *qados*, "to be holy, sanctify," which appears as a verb, noun, or adjective over 800 times in the OT. Although one strong idea behind the root *qds* is "apart" or "separate" more central is the notion of purity and cleanness. Holiness has to do with wholeness and completeness and with a way of being. Holiness is the "goodness of God."<sup>2</sup>

The OT portrays God as holy, with the title *the Holy One of Israel* reflecting his supremacy (Ps. 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Isa. 1:4 and thirty occurrences in Isaiah; Jer. 50:29; 51:5). God is the source of holiness for creation. God sustains and displays his sanctity through miraculous acts and judgments (Ps. 111:9; Isa 5:16; Ezek 28:22, 25; 38:23; 39:7, 25-27). Glory, the phenomenon of light that streams out as the majesty of God, is the manifestation of the Lord's holiness (Pss 19:1; 29:1-2, 9; Isa 6:3).<sup>3</sup>

The Lord's designation as holy is seen most clearly in Psalm 99. Holiness is his royal perfection as King worthy of adoration, with a divine power that permeates the word (99:1,3,5, 9). The Lord is a God of justice and not only a deity of being (99:4). The holiness of Israel's God is the power that makes justice and righteousness prevail (see comments on 99). Holy is a statement about the Lord's name (33:21; 103:1; 111:9; 145:21), about his word (105:42). Thus, God is not simply "wholly other," but also persistent in self-expression.<sup>4</sup>

God as holy is eternal, above any competitors, and is to be the sole object of Israel's devotion (Ex. 15:11; 1Sam 2:2; Pss 77:13; 89:6-8; 95:3; Isa 40:25; 57:15; Hos 11:9). The people are charged to emulate God's holiness by keeping the commandments (Lev 11:44-45; 20: 26; Pss 16:3; 34:9). The biblical ideal is that all Israel shall be " a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6). Thus, for Israel "holy" means more than that which unapproachable. It becomes a goal associated with God's nature and his desire for humans and so the basis for action: "You shall be holy; for I ..... am holy" (Lev 19:2). A series of ethical and ritual commands follow, with the commandment to love all persons (19:18), including aliens (19: 34). Such love must be concretely expressed in deeds (19:9-10; Num 35:15; Pss 145:10-17; 146: 5-9). God's people are to act a certain way because they are set apart.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James H. Waltner. Believers Church Bible Commentary: *PSALMS* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), 753.

<sup>2</sup> James H. Waltner. Believers Church Bible Commentary: *PSALMS* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), 754.

<sup>3</sup> James H. Waltner. Believers Church Bible Commentary: *PSALMS* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), 754.

<sup>4</sup> James H. Waltner. Believers Church Bible Commentary: *PSALMS* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), 754.

<sup>5</sup> James H. Waltner. Believers Church Bible Commentary: *PSALMS* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), 754.

More broadly, in addition to the holiness of God, the OT touches on holiness for humans (priests, Israelites, Levites, and prophets), objects (offerings, sanctuary furniture, priestly clothing, real estate, money, oil, incense, and water), places (sanctuaries, sites of theophany, land, heaven), and time (Sabbath, holidays, jubilee, and sabbatical year), as well as covenant and war. However, it is not by cult, ritual, observance or ceremony that holiness is imparted. All holiness derives from the personal God who is holy.<sup>6</sup>

The NT borrows and reworks the material relating to God's holiness and that of his people. In the Gospels and Acts, the term "holy" is used to describe the Spirit of God at work in and through those who believe. In the Pauline writings, addressed to those "called to be saints," the status of God's people as holy is established more systematically. As Hebrew makes clear, it is by means of the holiness of Christ that the people of God are made holy (Heb 9:11-12). The final book of the NT pictures them at home in the worship of the holy God, fully belonging with him in the final fulfillment of the promise made through Moses at Sinai in Exodus 19:5-6 (Rev 4:8; 15:3-4).

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<sup>6</sup> James H. Waltner. *Believers Church Bible Commentary: PSALMS* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), 754.

<sup>7</sup> James H. Waltner. *Believers Church Bible Commentary: PSALMS* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), 754.