

PSALMS

Chapter 96

Worship in the Splendor of Holiness

Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! 2 Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. 3 Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! 4 For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. 5 For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens. 6 Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. 7 Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! 8 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! 9 Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth! 10 Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.” 11 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; 12 let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy 13 before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.

Ps 96 A call to all nations to praise the Lord as the only God and to proclaim the glory of his reign throughout the world—an OT anticipation of the world mission of the NT people of God (see Mt 28:16–20). (See introductions to Ps 93; 95.) This psalm appears in slightly altered form in 1Ch 16:23–33. The psalm is composed of two parts: (1) a call to all nations to sing the praise of the Lord (vv. 1–6); (2) a call to all nations to worship the Lord and to hail throughout the world the glory of his righteous rule (vv. 7–13). Each part has two subdivisions, the last of which forms the climax to the whole psalm. Cf. the structure of Ps 95. (CSB)

A psalm for two joyous occasions. In 1Ch 16:23–34, David uses this song of praise as he brings the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem in victory. Also, the LXX titles this psalm as the one used when the temple was rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity. God is the King who reigns, and His glorious victories call for all nations, indeed all creation, to join in the joyful exaltation of His holy name. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–6, praise for God’s greatness; vv 7–10, call for all nations to worship at the temple; vv 11–13, call for all creation to worship. (TLSB)

Psalms 96-98 are very closely related. They express the joy that the Lord’s rule brings to the whole earth. Our Christmas hymn, “Joy to the World,” is based on the message of these psalms. This psalm, together with portions of Psalms 105 and 106, was delivered when David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 16). (PBC)

96:1–3 The call to all the earth to sing the praise of the Lord among the nations. Triple repetition (“Sing ... sing ... Sing”) was a common feature in OT liturgical calls to worship. (CSB)

96:1 *new song*. Spreading the message of salvation requires a new song because we are announcing God’s new covenant, established by Christ’s blood, which was given and shed for us. This song remains ever new because we never outgrow our need for it, nor should we ever grow tired of it. There should be nothing lifeless or stale about our worship. (PBC)

The reason the psalms frequently call for a new song to be sung is that God's faithfulness is new every day, making praise for him inexhaustible. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

all the earth. See v. 9; or "all the land," in which case the call is addressed to all Israel. However, the worldwide perspective of this psalm (see especially v. 7) suggests that here the psalmist has in view broader horizons. (CSB)

The intended audience for this call would be believers; but if others now acknowledged the greatness of the Lord and sang praises to him, they would also be numbered among the believers. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

96:2 *tell of his salvation.* Proclaim that deliverance comes from the Lord (see 3:8; see also 85:9). (CSB)

Psalmist first directs our singing to God, then has us speak to others. Evangelism is proclaiming to others this message of grace: God shows His glory through His wonderful deeds of salvation on behalf of all people (cf Ac 2:11). Chemnitz: "These passages ... unquestionably foretell the future preaching in the era of the new covenant" (*LTh* 2:446). (TLSB)

People are to "proclaim" or "publish" his salvation, meaning they are to tell the good news about it. A noun related to this verb means "messenger" in 1 Samuel 4:17; people who tell of the Lord's wonderful works are like messengers who bring the good report. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

96:3 *glory.* Wherever God's saving power is displayed, his glory is revealed. (CSB)

marvelous works. God's "mighty (marvelous) acts" in behalf of his people are expressions of his righteousness; thus they can also be called his "righteous acts." (CSB)

96:4–6 Why "all the earth" is to praise the Lord: He alone is God (see Ps 115). (CSB)

96:5 *worthless idols.* Contempt for the unreal gods made by human hands. How useless to worship some element of creation, when the Creator God is alone worthy of all adoration and praise! (TLSB)

made the heavens. As the Maker of the heavenly realm, in pagan eyes the abode of the gods, the Lord is greater than all the gods (see 97:7). (CSB)

96:6 *Splendor and majesty ... strength and beauty.* Two pairs of divine attributes personified as throne attendants whose presence before the Lord heralds the exalted nature of the one, universal King. For similar personifications. (CSB)

beauty. The Hebrew for this word here connotes radiant beauty. (CSB)

His sanctuary. The temple in ancient Jerusalem was an earthly copy, a shadow, of the heavenly temple (Heb 8:5). The psalm could refer to both temples, because God's presence is both on earth and in heaven. The description of God depicts His attributes as King. (TLSB)

96:7–9 The call to all nations to worship the Lord. The two half-sentences of 29:2 have been expanded in this psalm. The threefold “ascribe” here balances the threefold “sing” of vv. 1–2. (CSB)

96:8 *bring an offering, and come into His courts.* It could be any type of offering given in the open areas of the temple. With songs and prayers, an offering gives glory to God. (TLSB)

courts. Of the temple (see 84:2, 10; 2Ki 21:5; 23:11–12). (CSB)

96:9 *splendor of holiness.* Three possible meanings: the temple’s beauty, the worshipers’ and priests’ garb, or God’s radiant glory. Cf 29:2. (TLSB)

tremble. In reverent awe, equivalent to “fear” (see v. 4). (CSB)

Not so much physical shaking as an attitude of awe and reverence similar to “feared” in v 4. (TLSB)

96:10–13 The call to all nations to proclaim among the nations the righteous reign of the Lord. (CSB)

96:10 *never be moved.* God set the earth in motion at creation, and nothing can stop His rule over all that He has made. (TLSB)

The nations ... with equity. In OT perspective, the world order is one, embracing both its physical and moral aspects because both have been established by God as aspects of his one kingdom and both are upheld by his one rule. Therefore God’s rule over creation and over the affairs of men (also his acts of creation and redemption) is often spoken of in one breath, and “righteousness,” “faithfulness” and “love” are equally ascribable to both. And since the creation order is secure in its “goodness” (see Ge 1), it often serves in OT poetry (as it does here) as a manifest assurance that God’s rule over the affairs of men will also be “with equity,” “in righteousness” and “in ... truth” (v. 13; see 11:3; 33:4–11; 36:5–9; 57:10; 65:6–7; 71:19; 74:13–14, 16–17; 75:3; 82:5; 93:3–4). (CSB)

96:11–12 Because God’s kingdom is one (see v. 10 and note), all his creatures will rejoice when God’s rule over mankind brings righteousness to full expression in his cosmic kingdom. For the present state of the creation as it awaits the fullness of redemption. (CSB)

Psalmist calls creation to join in the praise and exultation along with all the nations. Rm 8:19 says all creation waits for the final day of redemption. When the Lord returns on the Last Day, all effects of sin will be gone, and the created realm will enjoy the new heavens and earth. (TLSB)

Even the created world praises the Lord for his acts of salvation. Nature did not sin, nor is it capable of sinning. But when man sinned, the whole created world came under the curse of sin. Animals suffer and die. Plants suffer from disease and drought. Nature is wracked by storms and earthquakes. But when Christ returns and restores peace and harmony to God’s creation, the natural world will be free from the effects of sin. (PBC)

96:13 *comes ... comes ... will judge.* Because God reigns over all things and is the Lord of history, Israel lived in hope (as the prophets announced) of the “coming” of God—his future acts by which he would decisively deal with all wickedness and establish his righteousness in the earth. (CSB)

On Judgment Day. The Lord certainly reigns now, but a day will come when He will decisively judge the unbelievers in equity, righteousness, and faithfulness. It will be a day of joy for God's chosen people. (TLSB)

Ps 96 Proclaim the marvelous deeds of God's salvation to all nations! In our world, too many people see faith in God as a relic of the past with little to say about life today. People turn away from the true God in idolatrous pursuits of money and success; they trust in technology or revel in pleasure. Do we give up? No! First, sing to the Lord. Join with others in worshiping the splendor and majesty of the Creator. Then, speak of His salvation in Jesus day after day, until the resurrected Savior returns to judge all nations in faithfulness. • The Lord still reigns! O Lord, through us proclaim Your glory. Amen. (TLSB)