

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 2: Psalm 96

The Lord Reigns!

Stay on the Path ~

Psalm 96 presents the reader with both the invitation and the inspiration to worship the God of all creation. “Oh sing, sing, sing” the Scripture says, but why should we sing and what are we to sing about? Why can’t we just verbally utter our words of praise and leave it at that? Could it be that God knows how often our words become automatic and meaningless when instead they should overflow with heartfelt emotion and expression? When set to harmonic melodies and instruments of praise, songs have a way of lifting our eyes toward heaven and touching the innermost parts of our being. And the more we express our feelings and emotions in song, the more our hearts open wide to the Lord!

Statistics have shown that for most people the act of standing on a stage in front of an audience with a microphone in hand is the most terrifying thought they can imagine. For the believer, it can be the most exhilarating experience to realize that we sing for an audience of one—the One—and all we have to do is *give a joyful noise unto the Lord!* The question becomes: do I really believe what I am singing? Consider that as you work your way through Psalm 96 and remember that Creator God—the Maker of heaven and earth—has summoned *you* to come before Him and *sing—to Him, about Him, and for Him!*

Did you know ~

The worship psalms were known as the “songs of Zion.” They were used primarily for the pilgrimage up to the Temple in Jerusalem and temple worship. These particular psalms tell of God’s presence dwelling among His people. References to His visible presence can be found throughout the Old Testament as being represented in the form of *light*—known in the Hebrew by the word *shekinah*—or “glory.” This helps the reader to understand the importance these worship songs played in the daily service of worship.

Psalm 96

A Song of Praise to God Coming in Judgment

- 1 Oh, sing to the Lord a new song!
Sing to the Lord, all the earth.
- 2 Sing to the Lord, bless His name;
proclaim the good news of
His salvation from day to day.
- 3 Declare His glory among the nations,
His wonders among all peoples.
- 4 For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised;
He is to be feared above all gods.
- 5 For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the Lord made the heavens.
- 6 Honor and majesty are before Him;
strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.
- 7 Give to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
give to the Lord glory and strength.
- 8 Give to the Lord the glory due His name;
bring an offering, and come into His courts.
- 9 Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!
Tremble before Him, all the earth.
- 10 Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns;
the world also is firmly established,
it shall not be moved;
He shall judge the peoples righteously."
- 11 Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
let the sea roar, and all its fullness;
- 12 Let the field be joyful, and all that is in it.
Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the Lord.
- 13 For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth.
He shall judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with His truth.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 96:1-13.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of the psalm? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

What motivates *you* to worship the Lord?

What type of worship songs do *you* most enjoy singing?

Put a psalm in your heart ~ (Memory verse) **Psalm 96:2**

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

*Sing to the Lord, bless His name; proclaim the good news of
His salvation from day to day.*

Learn the lessons of the psalm ~

Selah (Think about): *How* and *why* God's people are to praise Him; what prompts the believer's worship; the potential influence or impact of worship on the world.

I. His good news is salvation ~ vv. 1–3

The three-fold call to “sing to the Lord” is in direct symmetry with three commands found in these opening verses: “praise” (literally to “bless”), “proclaim” (literally “good news”), and “declare” (to “tell”).

1. According to vv. 1–3, what do God's people have to sing about?
 - a. “Sing to the Lord” –
 - b. “Proclaim” –
 - c. “Declare” –

Whenever God does a work on behalf of His children, there is reason to bless His name. The “new song” refers to a new work or fresh blessing of God's grace. Scholars believe that Psalm 96 was sung during the dedication of the second temple when the Jews returned to Jerusalem from their exile and captivity in Babylon. As the people took a look back at their deliverance and new life, they found reason to sing.

Touchpoint ~

When was the last time you thanked God for His saving grace on your behalf—your *new life* in Christ? Has He opened a *new door* of opportunity for you? Have you received a *new beginning* of some sort; perhaps a new blessing? Please acknowledge it in the space below and take a moment to thank Him.

II. *He is great* ~ vv. 4–6

The psalmist now sets forth the explicit reasons God is to be praised.

1. What are those reasons?

v. 4

v. 5

v. 6

God is to be greatly praised and feared above all other gods because He alone is great! All other man-made, so-called gods amount to no more than false idols. What is an idol? Anything that you allow to take priority in your life—anything that you allow to come in between you and your relationship with God. Idols do not have to be stone statues, they can be a love of money, a person, a habit, a job—you name it.

Touchpoint ~

Take a few minutes to meditate on Psalm 115:1–8. Read these verses through several times and let the truth sink in: *Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them* (v. 8). In other words, you become like the one you worship! Does the Lord occupy first place in your life? Do you need to do some re-arranging? If the Lord has pointed out someone or something you have set up as an idol, confess it right now.

The idols you set up in your heart only *take from you*—they do not give back to you. Remember that the next time you are tempted to give first place to anyone or anything other than your great God!

2. By comparison to the idols set up by those who do not give God His rightful place, notice the four virtues ascribed to the Lord in Psalm 96:6. Name them below. The more you worship God, the more you open up your heart to become like Him. Think about what you can do with these attributes as you take on more of the Lord's likeness. Please share your thoughts.

III. He alone is worthy ~ vv. 7–9

The invitation to worship God does not extend to the Jews alone; it goes out to the families of all peoples and nations—think about it! The Gentiles were a part of God’s original plan of salvation by grace (see Ephesians 1:4–14).

The three commands to “give to the Lord” (vv. 7–8) directly correspond to the three-fold command to “sing” (vv. 1–2) in the psalm. God’s people give Him glory because He alone is worthy. Each time we come through the doors of God’s sanctuary, we bring with us the sacrifice of praise that is so pleasing to Him.

1. There is a condition mentioned that accompanies the command to worship in verse 9. What do the words: “in the beauty of holiness” really mean?
2. How does Psalm 24:3–5 add to your understanding of this passage? Do *you* meet this condition?

Touchpoint ~

What offering does the Lord desire you to bring with you when you come to worship? A bowed head, lifted hands, a humble heart—all are acts accompanying worship, but the greatest gift you can give to the One who is worthy is that of a surrendered life! *I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God* (Romans 12:1–2).

Personal: Have *you* ever made a complete surrender to God for the gift of His Son on the cross for you? If you’d like to, you may do so right now by praying these words: “Father, I confess that I am a sinner in need of Your forgiveness today. Please wash me clean in the shed blood of Christ and fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Then I can worship You in a manner that is worthy of Your name. Amen.” (If you prayed this prayer, share it with someone and proclaim the good news that God saves!

*Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice,
‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!’*

Revelation 5:11–12

IV. He is coming to judge the earth ~ vv. 10–13

These final verses of Psalm 96 contain a passionate call for all of God's people to "say among the nations"—or "proclaim"—that He reigns and that He is coming to judge the earth. Do you really believe this truth and are you telling others about it?

1. Since the Lord sits enthroned above the earth, what do these verses say about the following:
 - a. His creation
 - b. His judgment
 - c. His truth

The psalmist looks ahead to the day when all creation will praise the Lord together. The celebration of His sovereign rule will take place when Christ returns to judge the world in righteousness. The anticipation of His coming and the reward of the righteous are the confident hope of every believer who worships Him in spirit and in truth.

Pause & ponder ~

We must differentiate between God's call upon a person's life to be an *evangelist* versus every believer's responsibility to *evangelize*. God calls some to be His spokesperson. However, every Christian walking the face of the earth is called to share God's Good News of *salvation* coupled with their own personal testimony to those within their sphere of influence. Who are the people around you that need God's saving grace right now?

God. . . commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.

Acts 17:30b–31

Live the psalm ~

Worship is not only the verbal proclamation of praising God from our lips; it is the inward transformation of God's saving grace upon our lives, bearing witness to the world! How will this realization motivate you to live in a way that glorifies God?

Pray the psalm ~

Select a verse or combination of verses from Psalm 96 and pray it back to God. Be specific in your personal request or your intercession on behalf of someone you know that needs Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Record your prayer in the space below, date it, and then wait in faith for the answer.

“Lord, help me to look up at You and beyond my circumstances today to focus on the certainty that You are returning to the earth You created. I am reminded again to thank You for the gift of my salvation. Help me to demonstrate my appreciation by obeying You and living for Your glory! Amen”

Notes