

January 8

Lesson 6

PRAISE GOD

WITH A NEW SONG

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 Chronicles 16:23, 24

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 96

PSALM 96

- ¹ Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- ² Sing to the LORD, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.
- ³ Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.
- ⁴ For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.
- ⁵ For all the gods of the nations are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.
- ⁶ Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and glory are in his sanctuary.
- ⁷ Ascribe to the LORD, all you families of nations,
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 his holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth.
- ¹⁰ Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns."
The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity.
- ¹¹ Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
let the sea resound, and all that is in it.
- ¹² Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;
let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.
- ¹³ Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes,
he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples in his faithfulness.



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KEY VERSE

Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.—Psalm 96:1

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the implications of believing in one Creator God.
2. Explain the relationship between creation and worship.
3. Recount an experience when he or she was overawed by the majesty of God's good creation.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. God's Awesome Creation
- B. Lesson Background

I. Necessary Praise ([Psalm 96:1-6](#))

- A. What to Do ([vv. 1-3](#))
The Power of Song
- B. Why to Do It ([vv. 4-6](#))
The One Above All

II. Informed Worship ([Psalm 96:7-9](#))

- A. Glory and Strength ([vv. 7, 8a](#))
- B. Bring and Come ([v. 8b](#))
- C. Holiness and Fear ([v. 9](#))

III. Ruling Lord ([Psalm 96:10-13](#))

- A. What to Say ([v. 10](#))
- B. What Must Happen ([vv. 11, 12](#))
- C. Why It Must Happen ([v. 13](#))

Conclusion

- A. All Creation Praise the Lord!
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. God's Awesome Creation

In the summer of 2014, my wife and I decided to go to Yellowstone National Park for a vacation and to celebrate our wedding anniversary. Many friends had recommended the trip, so we took a flight and rented a car.

After seeing several geysers and enjoying the burst of Old Faithful, we left the park and went south toward the Tetons. As we emerged from the high country and forest, a blue silvery lake appeared in the valley as anticipated. But we were not expecting the sudden view of the series of mountains that seemed to jut straight up from the western edge of the lake.

The view was overwhelming. To see the beauty of the Tetons from different angles and various locations around a series of lakes borders on being indescribable. At one point while taking in the view, my wife exclaimed, "This makes me want to sing 'How Great Is Our God' or 'How Great Thou Art!'" We wanted to praise God with all our might at that moment. The beauty of creation reminded us to praise the Creator.

B. Lesson Background

The Bible's collection of 150 psalms is commonly seen in terms of five "books." You can see these book divisions listed just before [Psalms 1, 42, 73, 90, and 107](#) in your Bible. [Psalm 96](#) falls in Book IV, where it is part of a subgroup called "enthronement psalms" ([Psalms 93, 96-99](#)).

The enthronement psalms are seen to provide an answer to the question concerning the downfall of David's throne, as recounted in Book III ([Psalm 89](#) in particular). The problem was that the Davidic dynasty had been suspended, if not outright destroyed, in the defeat that resulted in the Babylonian exile (see [Psalm 89:38-51](#)). To this the psalmist cried out, "How long, Lord?" ([89:46](#)). The enthronement psalms that follow in Book IV provide the answer: "The Lord reigns" ([Psalms 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1](#)).

We can note in passing that [Psalm 96](#) is reproduced, with slight variations and transposition of lines, in [1 Chronicles 16:23-33](#). Also there is [Psalm 105:1-15](#) ([1 Chronicles 16:8-22](#)) and [Psalm 106:47, 48](#) ([1 Chronicles 16:35, 36](#)). These are presented as typical psalms sung for the accompanying of the ark into Jerusalem by David ([1 Chronicles 15; 2 Samuel 6](#)). This is in line with the old Greek version (Septuagint), which adds this as the psalm's title: "When the house was built after the captivity; a song of David." However, [Psalm 96](#) bears no statement of authorship in the Hebrew, so its author is unknown to us. (See discussion of superscriptions in last week's Lesson Background.)

[Psalm 96](#) divides itself into three parts. The thrice-repeated imperative *sing* marks the beginning of the first part ([vv. 1, 2](#)), while the similarly

constructed *ascribe* marks the beginning of the second (vv. 7, 8). The third part breaks this pattern by beginning with the once-used *say* (v. 10). For this reason, some commentators propose that [verse 10](#) ends the second part rather than beginning the third (see commentary on this below).

I. Necessary Praise

(PSALM 96:1-6)

A. What to Do (vv. 1-3)

**1, 2a. Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Sing to the LORD, praise his name;**

The author uses numerous imperatives (or words that have the force of imperatives) to stress what must be done. He first implores the reader to *sing*. This isn't merely a desire on the part of the psalmist; it's a command! Urgency presents itself in the threefold repetition. The Hebrew Old Testament features 14 imperatives to sing, and three occur right here. Singing is important!

The phrase *new song* is found in eight other passages: [Psalms 33:3](#); [40:3](#); [98:1](#); [144:9](#); [149:1](#); [Isaiah 42:10](#); and [Revelation 5:9](#); [14:3](#). Their common element is an accompanying redemptive act. From the discussion of [Psalm 33:3](#) (last week's lesson), we recall that the new song in view doesn't necessarily mean a newly composed tune, but a song that is fresh and renewing. On the other hand, some students believe that the new song that *all the earth* is exhorted to sing is [Psalm 96](#) itself—a new composition.

HOW TO SAY IT

Babylonian Bab-ih-*low*-nee-un.

Davidic Duh-*vid*-ick.

Septuagint Sep-*too*-ih-jent.

Yahweh (*Hebrew*) Yah-weh.

What Do You Think?

If you were to pick a positive title for a "new song" regarding a redemptive act, what would that title be?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding God's help for your church
- Regarding God's help for you personally

The one to receive the earth's new song is, of course, *the Lord*. The reason your Bible renders this with small capitals, as *LORD*, is to indicate that the underlying Hebrew is *Yahweh*. That is God's personal name, as distinguished from other names for him. This feature is explained more fully in the front matter of many Bibles.

The third exhortation to sing has the added imperative *praise his name*. To determine most closely what praise involves for the ancient writer, we should examine contexts of praise in psalms similar to the one at hand. In the clearest parallels, we see encouragements to make one's voice of praise heard ([Psalm 66:8](#)), to be thankful ([100:4](#)), and to lift hands in the sanctuary ([134:2](#)). Thus the requirement to praise speaks of a need to worship. (See discussion of parallelism in last week's lesson.)

2b. proclaim his salvation day after day.

To *proclaim his salvation* is to be the bearer of "good news" ([Isaiah 40:9](#); [41:27](#); [61:1](#)). The good news is that of God's deliverance, although the nature of the salvation in view is not stated. But however much the mandate of this half verse applies to the ancient Israelites' rescue from earthly enemies, it must apply to an immeasurably greater degree to salvation from eternal death! The message all the earth is to proclaim is also the message the earth is to receive (see [Matthew 28:19, 20](#); [Luke 1:19](#); [2:10](#); [Romans 10:15](#); [Revelation 14:6](#); etc.). The news of God's redemptive acts must go forth *day after day*, never ceasing.

What Do You Think?

How can a church avoid the danger of allowing impersonal methods of proclaiming the gospel to replace personal contacts?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Things to begin doing

Things to stop doing

**3. Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.**

Parallelism presents itself twice in this verse, with the pair *his glory* and *his marvelous deeds* as the first instance (compare [1 Chronicles 16:24](#)). Although God's glory and deeds are not the same thing, he often reveals his glory by doing things only he can do (example: [Psalm 19:1](#)).

We see the second parallel in the phrases *among the nations* and *among all peoples*. The references reflect one another in stressing that humanity is to be made aware of God's glory and deeds. But the phrases are not quite identical in meaning, since *all peoples* includes both those of the covenant and those who are not, while *the nations* refers only to those outside the covenant ([2 Kings 17:15](#); etc.).

If the imperatives that open the first three verses of [Psalm 96](#) are parallel with one another, then the reader is to declare the things of God through songs of praise. See further discussion below.

THE POWER OF SONG

The fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s resulted in a flood of missionaries to Ukraine and other former Soviet republics. On arrival, the missionaries found churches that had met secretly during the Communist era, when being caught at such gatherings or even talking about the gospel could land one in a Siberian work camp.

As a result, the Ukrainian Christians did not have much experience in evangelism. To compound the problem, many of the short-term missionaries did not speak much Russian and therefore had trouble communicating the gospel in depth.

Ukrainian church leaders suggested a solution: public singing by the Americans to draw attention. Finding the idea agreeable, the missionaries learned Russian words to familiar praise songs and proceeded to sing them in public. The Ukrainian Christians who accompanied the singers talked with the curious and invited them to church services. Many attended revival meetings because of the Americans' public songs of praise!

Think about it: songs sung in imperfect Russian by Americans who barely knew that language sparked a harvest for Christ and his kingdom! The lesson to be learned is ... what?—L. M. W.

B. Why to Do It (vv. 4-6)

**4. For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.**

Now we are given reasons why all the earth should worship God: *great is the Lord!* Declarations of people to be great leaders, statesmen, athletes, entertainers, etc., are comparatively rare. And even those who may deserve such an accolade in an earthly sense are not great all the time. But God is!

Only he is worthy of worshipful praise ([Revelation 19:4, 5, 10](#)) and reverent fear ([Matthew 10:28](#)). Our English Bible has the word *gods* (plural and lowercase *g*) more than 240 times. But none of those instances imply that such deities actually exist as supernatural beings. Rather, the word *gods* is used hypothetically (compare [Jeremiah 2:11](#)) to demonstrate the worthless nature of idols in contrast with the only true God ([Exodus 12:12](#); [18:11](#); [Galatians 4:8, 9](#)). Such idols might not have a physical representation (example: [Ezekiel 14:3, 4, 7](#)), but usually do.

**5. For all the gods of the nations are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.**

The word translated *gods* here and in [verse 4](#) above occurs more than 2,600 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. It is used to refer to "the Lord God" (example: [Genesis 2:15](#)), "angels" (example: [Psalm 8:5](#)), fictitious deities (example: [Isaiah 37:19](#)), and others. Context determines the proper translation.

The word in the original language is plural in form and can convey a sense of power, as in "mighty ones." But the mighty ones here, namely *the gods of the nations*, are nothing but *idols*. As such, they are nonentities—useless and insignificant fiction (compare [Isaiah 44:9-20](#)). There is irony here in that the so-called mighty ones are anything but! By contrast, the real and ultimate mighty one *made the heavens*.

THE ONE ABOVE ALL

Pagans observe solstices and perform rituals in worship of the gods of nature; pilgrimages to Stonehenge still witness to such practices. Cities in India feature shrines dedicated to Hindu deities, the number of which seems uncountable. Many Japanese practice the rituals of Shinto, Japan's dominant religion, which also reveres a multitude of gods.

All this is nothing new (see [Acts 17:16](#)). Indeed, humans seem to have an innate drive to worship (compare [Acts 14:11-13](#)). In Western culture today, many seem less inclined to worship nature spirits, etc., and more inclined to pursue self-fulfillment via fame and fortune as their personal god. But this too is nothing new; Paul in his day noted those for whom "their god is their stomach" ([Philippians 3:19](#)).

The need to worship something seems inescapable. Today's text points us to the only valid worship there is or can be: worship of the one true God. "For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise" ([Psalm 96:4](#)).—L. M. W.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to point out the idols of secular culture to unbelievers? to believers?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding idolatrous things
- Regarding idolatrous attitudes
- Regarding idolized people
- Other

**6. Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and glory are in his sanctuary.**

This verse reinforces the reasons to worship God as the psalmist lists attributes of *splendor*, *majesty*, *strength*, and *glory*. The implication is that these personified attributes are always in God's presence, surrounding his throne in Heaven (compare [1 Chronicles 16:27](#)). Such attributes are to be spoken of (see [Psalm 145:5](#)).

II. Informed Worship

([PSALM 96:7-9](#))

A. Glory and Strength ([vv. 7, 8a](#))

**7, 8a. Ascribe to the LORD, all you families of nations,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;**

The tripled imperative that characterizes the beginning of this psalm is now duplicated, but with *ascribe* instead of *sing*. The word *ascribe* is almost never used in everyday conversation, so its meaning may be unclear. It has the sense of "lay something to the account of a person"; a shorter version of that is "attribute to."

Attributing to God *glory and strength* is something all *families of nations* who inhabit the world can and should do (compare [Revelation 5:9](#)). [Psalm 29:1, 2](#) features an almost exact replication of the triple imperative *ascribe* as used here, except that the ones being addressed there are angels or heavenly beings.

B. Bring and Come ([v. 8b](#))

8b. bring an offering and come into his courts.

Words of praise are to be backed up with *an offering*. Under the old covenant, this refers to sacrifices God has specified (see [Psalm 20:3](#); compare [Leviticus 1-7](#)). Eventually, only one offering is to be acceptable to God: the sacrifice of his Son (see [Psalm 40:6](#); [Hebrews 10:5-10](#)), provided by God himself.

C. Holiness and Fear ([v. 9](#))

**9. Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth.**

The mandate to *worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness* has more than one possible meaning. One is that the word *holiness* refers to the dispositions of those who approach God in worship. In other words, worshippers having holy lives are the ones to approach God (see [Psalm 24:3-6](#)).

Other students think, however, that it is God's own holiness that is in view. This proposal is supported by the old Greek version of the Old Testament, which has "his holy court." Either view could be the intended interpretation. It is impossible for God not to be holy, and his holiness is a model for our own ([1 Peter 1:15, 16](#)).

What Do You Think?

What can you do this week to understand better the relevance of God's holiness in worship?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Scriptures you will read
- Prayers you will pray
- Mentors you will consult
- Other

The phrase *all the earth* is an identical twin to the one at the beginning of this psalm. It is as if these twins serve as bookends for [verses 1-9](#), locking them together. Indeed they are, for their theme is the proper worship of the one who has created all the earth.

III. Ruling Lord

(PSALM 96:10-13)

A. What to Say (v. 10)

**10. Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns.”
The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity.**

We have moved from singing a new song to attribute to God glory as offerings are brought, to now exulting in the fact that the Lord is the one who is ruling. The context of the psalmist’s instruction to exult in the fact that *the Lord reigns* has been debated. Essentially, there are three time-based perspectives that are proposed for the ancient Israelite who sings this psalm in worship.

The past perspective sees this psalm as having been composed and sung in remembrance of a historical triumph, such as return from the Babylonian captivity. [Isaiah 42:10](#) is thought to support this viewpoint as it enjoins the reader to “sing to the Lord a new song” in response to deliverance (compare [Psalm 96:1](#)).

The present perspective sees this psalm as being sung on a regular basis (at least annually) as a reminder to worshippers of the ongoing reality of God’s reign. Thought to support this viewpoint is the fact that [Psalm 96](#) also appears, with some variations, in [1 Chronicles 16:23-33](#), which recounts David’s celebration of bringing the ark to Jerusalem. The supposition here is that an annual festival of some kind is in view, a festival where worshippers proclaim again their recognition of God’s continuing reign.

The future perspective sees the praise mostly focused on what God is going to do later. Support for this is seen in the future orientation of the phrase *he will judge* in both the verse before us and [verse 13](#) (below). The stress is that everyone, all *peoples*, should be aware of the judgment to come. Unrighteous *nations* and individuals perish under God’s righteous judgment ([Jeremiah 18:7-10](#); [Hosea 10:8](#); [Revelation 6:15-17](#); etc.). But what will cause many to fear will ultimately be the reason for universal celebration (next verse).

The three perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Elements of each may be intended.

What Do You Think?

Which Scriptures do you find helpful for needed reminders that God is still in control? Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In good times (productive witness, job promotion, etc.)

In bad times (failed witness, job loss, etc.)

B. What Must Happen (vv. 11, 12)

**11, 12. Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
let the sea resound, and all that is in it.
Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;
let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.**

Although the four verbs *let ... rejoice / be glad / resound / be jubilant* are technically not stated as imperatives in the original language, they nonetheless express the psalmist’s desire. The entirety of the universe is in view, given the tandem pairing of *the heavens* and *the earth* ([Genesis 1:1-2:1](#)).

The references to various features of the earth solidify the completeness of the picture: the entirety of personified creation rejoices because the Lord reigns. Although not mentioned specifically, animals are in view as well, since the phrasing *the fields ...* and *everything in them* logically includes livestock and wildlife.

Animals, trees, etc., suffer because of human unrighteousness, an unrighteousness that God judges (compare [Deuteronomy 20:19](#); [Isaiah 24](#); [Jeremiah 6:6](#); [Zechariah 11:2](#); [Romans 8:22](#); etc.). But the judgment to come is a cause for celebration! The reason why was mentioned in [Psalm 96:10](#); it is reemphasized in our next verse.

C. Why It Must Happen (v. 13)

**13. Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes,
he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples in his faithfulness.**

The double *he comes* is a literary device to underline the Lord’s intent *to judge*. Although not apparent in English, the two instances of *judge*

in this verse translate a Hebrew word that is different from the one translated *judge* in [verse 10](#). This is another instance of the parallelism, and the words mean the same in this context. [Psalm 9:8](#) uses these two Hebrew words in similar fashion.

Some form of the words *righteousness*, *faithfulness*, and *judge* or the concepts they stand for are found together also in [Psalm 33:4, 5](#) (last week's lesson); [Isaiah 16:5](#); [Jeremiah 4:2](#); and [John 16:7-13](#) (contrast [Romans 1:18-25](#)). The king is responsible for bringing righteousness to the kingdom (see [Psalms 72:1, 2; 99:4](#)). Because God himself is the ultimate model of righteousness, he is able and willing to judge the world by his own moral character.

Conclusion

A. All Creation Praise the Lord!

The beauty of nature testifies to its Creator. The only appropriate response is for creation to bow in worship, awe, and wonder. Every avenue of communication must be used to attribute glory to the Creator; emotions, declarations, and songs all have a part to play.



Visual for Lessons 5 & 6. Alternative discussion: substitute “Which of these words” for “Which Scriptures” when you get to the question for [verse 10](#).

We anticipate singing a new song after Jesus returns ([Revelation 5:9; 14:3](#)). Even so, there is a sense in which we can sing that new song now, for our salvation can be said to be “now, but not yet.” Judgment Day and our final deliverance are yet to come, but come they will ([Daniel 12:2](#); [Romans 14:10](#); [1 Corinthians 15:51-57](#); [Hebrews 9:27](#); [Revelation 6:15-17](#); etc.). The church prepares for that day by inviting all to learn about and know the Creator, Jesus Christ ([John 1:3](#); [Colossians 1:15, 16](#)), the one who now reigns at the Father’s right hand ([Acts 2:32-36](#); compare [Psalm 110:1](#)).

Until Jesus returns, an important task is to “say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns’” ([Psalm 96:10](#)). That can be said to be a starting point

to fulfilling the Great Commission ([Matthew 28:19, 20](#)). May we glorify our Creator as we carry out his will and as we invite others to do so as well.

B. Prayer

O God, please remove idols from our lives so that we may see your fingerprint on all creation. Help us join all creation in proclaiming your unending reign. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Praise the Creator when you look at creation.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Into the Lesson

Before class, obtain a book of optical illusions or print out a few illusions that you discover from a search of the Internet.

Say, "In typical optical illusions, our eyes are fooled when we take only a superficial look. When we take a second look, however, we obtain a deeper understanding of what we see."

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "On Second Thought" activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work individually or in pairs. This exercise contrasts how we viewed things when we were immature compared to how we view the same things as adults.

After either activity, lead into the Bible study saying, "The important matters of life are worthy of more than just a passing glance. Today we will look at a psalm that says just that about our God. When we gain a deeper understanding of who he is, we see him in a new way and respond with a new song."

Into the Word

The key words and phrases of [Psalm 96](#) are echoed throughout the Old Testament. Divide your class into three groups. Say, "Each group will look at a portion of today's text, then look at related verses in the Old Testament that use the same key word or phrase." Prepare the group assignments before class.

Group 1—Sing a new song.

What should we be singing about and telling each other when we see God for who he is?

Compare [Psalm 96:1-6](#) with [Psalms 33:3-5](#); [40:3-5](#); [98:1-3](#).

Group 2—Surrender to God.

When we see God for who he is, what do we give/ascribe to him?

Compare [Psalm 96:7-9](#) with [Deuteronomy 32:1-4](#); [1 Chronicles 16:28-30](#); [Psalm 29:1-4](#).

Group 3—Celebrate God's presence.

Why do we rejoice when we recognize that God is present?

Compare [Psalm 96:10-13](#) with [Psalms 5:11, 12](#); [33:20-22](#); [97:10-12](#).

After groups have finished, reassemble the class and have groups report on their findings.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Words of Worship" activity from the reproducible page. Have students work in pairs to complete the matches.

Discuss either activity with questions such as these: "Which of these ideas do you most associate with the Sunday worship service? Which are part of your everyday life? What are some ways we can include the Sunday morning actions into our daily lives?"

Into Life

Ask students to tell what they think about singing new songs versus singing old songs. "Are you less likely to pay attention to what you are singing with familiar songs versus those that are new to you?"

Before class, make copies of familiar hymns that are in the public domain, such as "How Great Thou Art" or "Holy, Holy, Holy." Distribute copies to each class member. Say, "Read through the words of the hymns slowly, underlining phrases that you have overlooked or not thoroughly considered before. Be especially aware of themes common both to these hymns and to [Psalm 96](#)."

After a few minutes, ask students to tell what they underlined. Ask, "Why might these words be easily overlooked when we sing them often?"

How can singing praise while carefully giving attention to the words make an old song a new song being sung to the Lord?"
Close with a prayer asking God to help us give him a second look in all we do, never being complacent in our worship.