

New Song:  
Worship, Witness and Offering

Psalm 96:1-9

Praise him  
Praise him  
Praise him in the morning  
Praise him in the noon time  
Praise him  
Praise him when the sun goes down!

Praise God with a new song. This past week Leroy and I got to worship by visiting and touring in Alaska everything we saw and experienced was praise to God! Psalm 96 is one of a group of psalms called enthronement psalms, because they celebrate YHWH's enthronement over the people of Israel and the nations. The ancient Near Eastern background to these psalms comes from the yearly celebration of the enthronement of the highest god in a given locale and, more specifically, the annual enthronement ceremony of the king god of Babylon, which the Babylonian exiles would have witnessed every year.

Praise God with a new song. The first three verses contain three calls to "sing to the LORD," followed by instructions to bless, proclaim, and declare. These verses focus on the worshiper's actions of praise. The worshipers comprise not just Israel, but "all the earth" (v. 1). Those who are called are called not only to praise God, but also to proclaim God's praise to the rest of creation (vv. 2b-3). The rabbinic midrash (a kind of commentary) on the Psalms suggests that the first three calls to sing correspond to the three daily times for prayer: "Sing to the LORD a new song" for the morning prayer; "Sing to the LORD, all the earth" for the afternoon prayer; and "Sing to the LORD, bless his name" for the evening prayer.

Praise God with a new song. Verses 4-6 give the reasons for praise, all of which are stated as known facts, and all of which raise the Lord above other gods: that God is great and held in reverence above all other gods (v. 4); that the other gods are mere idols (lit.

"worthless things" in the Heb.), whereas *YHWH* is the creator God (v. 5); and that God's attributes are majesty, honor, strength, and beauty (v. 6).

Praise God with a new song. Verses 7-9 return to calls to praise: "Ascribe to the LORD" followed by "lift up," "worship," and "tremble." The first "ascribe" or attribute (v. 7) is addressed to those being called to praise, which again include not just Israel, but a much wider group: "clans and peoples." Verses 8b and 9a discuss what is being ascribed: glory and strength (v. 7) and God's "glorious name" (v. 8).

Praise God with a new song. Verse 9 contains two calls to those who are coming to worship or present tribute: the first is usually translated "worship," but literally means "bow down." This bowing down is a posture of prayer or kneeling to pay tribute. The final imperative can be translated "tremble" or "dance." (**Mary E. Shields**)

Praise God with a new song. The Psalm presents worship as a celebration of God's creative activity in the world. The people are to praise the God who creates the world. God's praise extends beyond the human community into all of creation. God is ever up to creating something new. As each morning dawns anew, it brings fresh prospects for God's salvific activity in the world.

Praise God with a new song. Music in worship is powerfully important; it is not just what we do in the worship service to make it a full hour. More important than the style of music or selections is the One to whom we sing. We sing to the Lord. We praise God's name. We are secondary in worship. When we come together to worship, we do it to praise God. The psalmist encourages us to sing to the Lord, not about ourselves. Regardless of the type of music we employ in worship, the psalmist challenges each of us to sing to the Lord a new song.

Praise God with a new song. Each of us is to notice and name both where and how God is currently acting in our lives, our congregation and in the world. Our worship and witness are serious business, not because we are important persons, but because we are speaking on behalf of the God who created the heavens and the earth. We do not worship the earth, but we worship and proclaim the One who created the earth. We proclaim the Lord who made the

heavens (v. 5), even as our message becomes more and more radical in a culture that worships the creation rather than the Creator.

Praise God with a new song. This creator God possesses splendor and majesty, yet chose to become a human who was born in a cow stall in an obscure Jewish village. "Strength and beauty are in God's sanctuary" (v. 6), yet God took on human form as a helpless infant in a smelly, dark place. This God is unpredictable and beyond control. We must sing a new song if we are to stay current with what this creative God continues to do. God is never stagnant.

**(Jon Burnham)**

Praise God with a new song. This psalm reminds us about the centrality of *witness* by instructing us to sing and to declare the glory of the Lord among all people. Because we Christians are God's people, mission and witness are vital components of our Christian faith. The mission of the church has been interpreted in a variety of ways. It has been envisioned as a mission to save individual souls from eternal damnation. It has been defined as the growth of the kingdom of God through the geographical expansion of the church. It has been interpreted as a cultural mission to introduce persons to the philosophical and economic practices, and cultural developments of the Christian West.

Praise God with a new song. In a lecture given in 1932, Karl Barth proposed that mission is the activity of *God*. He suggested that the mission of God is accomplished: "By bringing about a solidarity between the heathen within the church and the heathen outside it ... *in* the church and *with* all the world, the church can take seriously its confession of the Lord who is the Lord."

Praise God with a new song. The psalm calls for all persons to worship God (vv. 1, 7-9). This worship and witness to God's work is a summons for all persons. Rather than picturing the role of the church as conquering, converting, or arguing with the "heathen," Barth depicted the church as standing in solidarity with non-Christians and pointing to the work of God. This role as witness is no privileged religious position. Rather, it is a role of solidarity with all persons and all creation. **(Stephanie Mar Smith)**

Praise God with a new song. The breadth of the biblical witness is that *newness* is God's agenda. From the creation accounts in Genesis to "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1), God is about the business of creating, recreating, renewing, and restoring. In God's voice, Isaiah implores the people: "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a *new* thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isa. 43:18-19, emphasis added). Jesus identifies his call to the disciples that they "love one another" as "a *new* commandment" (John 13:34, emphasis added).

Praise God with a new song. We walk into church bearing all kinds of new challenges—new health scares, new disappointments, new crises. We know in our cultural life that "new and improved" are sometimes neither. So we must be discerning when we consider the "newness" of God's enterprise.

Praise God with a new song. From the psalmist's perspective, what is very new is also very fundamental. The new song suggested in Psalm 96 is really a song that reestablishes and renews. It reestablishes the primacy of God's workings among the peoples of the earth and creation itself. All peoples, all constellations of peoples, the earth itself, are to worship God. That is not a new reality, but a call to renew an affirmation of the sovereignty of God.

Praise God with a new song. The new song is not a burden to sing. It should flow from us as easily and naturally as breathing. Singing this new song does mean, however, that we must place ourselves in a posture of gratitude and awareness. The "day to day" salvation of verse 2 suggests that we are to discern daily, modest graces as well as large-scale splendors. Every gracious act, every simple beauty, every glorious moment and opportunity are not accidental or the work of another god. Rather, God's governing activity in the world includes creative acts on the grandest of scales and creative acts on the most intimate of scales. Just as God called the created order into being, so God created each one of us. Our new song—the song that is renewed every time we worship—calls us to tremble with gratitude.

Praise God with a new song. The new song of renewal can take on many forms. For an individual, it can be a new commitment of resources, whether time or energy or money. It can be a new self-discovery that leads one to a deeper connection with the spirit of God.

Praise God with a new song. An individual joins one voice with a choir that sings a new song filled with complex and beautiful harmonies. We know what that new song sounds like. It is filled with a deep reverence for God and all that God creates. It is filled with hope and joy. It is also filled with justice and mercy. It joins together commitments of piety and practice, spirituality and social responsibility. It connects the worship life of a congregation, from which all church life flows, with education and service, care and fellowship—all the things that a church does to tremble faithfully before God and to invite all creation to do the same.

Praise God with a new song. This scripture also reminds us that, at heart, biblical faith is a singing faith. From the rock bands, rappers and countless hymns and a wide array of choral works, the new song we are called to sing can find form in actual notes and rhythms.

Praise God with a new song. A consideration of this new song invites us into deeper awareness and communal discernment. The writer of Lamentations says with confidence and hope that God's steadfast love is "*new every morning*" ([Lam. 3:23](#), emphasis added). If that is the gospel truth, then, to adapt the old hymn, "how can we keep from singing?" How can that song be anything but new? (**John Wilkinson**)

Praise God with a new song. The imperative calls on those who are praising to bring gifts. As we focus on the act of worship: "bring an offering and enter his courts." We stand in God's courts of the temple and we "bring tribute and enter his courts." *YHWH* is the king to whom all nations are called to bring tribute. So part of our worship is to pay tribute by offering to God our time and our resources. (**Mary E. Shields**) Praise God with a new song. We worship the God of life-giving joy. One scholar said it this way: "Human praise energizes God. This is a virtuous cycle of invigorating energy from God to humanity and proactive praise from humanity to God. We do not come to worship empty handed. Our monetary offering is symbolic of the greater offering of ourselves on God's altar. We owe our very lives to God. We bring our very selves to sacrifice upon the altar of praise to God." (**Jon Burnham**)

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6/2/13

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