INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND KEY VERSE OF THE LESSON

Key Verse: Ps 96:1

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary
Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

NEW SONG ABOUT GOD’S GLORY (PS 96:1-3)

Glory of His salvation (1-2)
- A salvation that brings joy (Ps 51:10-12)
- A salvation that should be responded to by rejoicing and glorifying God (Luke 1:46-48)
- A salvation that produces perseverance and hope (Rom 5:1-5)
- A salvation that is waited on patiently (Rom 8:23-25)
- A salvation that gives us an inheritance (1 Peter 1:3-4)
- A salvation that purifies (1 John 3:2-3)

Glory of His wonders (3)
- Wonders by God like no other (Exodus 15:11)
- Wonders that cannot be fathomed (Job 9:10)
- Wonders that are marvelous (Ps 72:18)
- Wonders that are miraculous (Dan 4:2-3)
- Wonders done in heaven and on earth (Dan 6:27)

NEW SONG ABOUT GOD’S GREATNESS (PS 96:4-6)

Greatness to be feared (4)
- Greatness feared because who can stand before God (Ps 76:7)
- Greatness feared because God is awesome (Ps 89:7)
- Greatness feared because God can kill the body and soul (Matt 10:28)
- Greatness feared because judgment is coming (Rev 14:7)

Greatness of the Creator (5)
- Creator of things both visible and invisible (Col 1:16)
- Creator who has always been the Word (John 1:1-3)
- Creator through whom all things consist (1 Cor 8:6)
- Creator through whom all things were made (Heb 1:2)
- Creator who built everything (Heb 3:3-4)

Greatness in His strength (6)
- Strength to protect us from Satan (2 Thess 3:3)
- Strength to keep us blameless (1 Cor 1:8)
- Strength to stand firm (2 Cor 1:21)
- Strength from One who is faithful (Heb 10:23)
- Strength that restores (1 Peter 5:10)

NEW SONG ABOUT WORSHIPPING GOD (PS 96:7-9)

Worship of God’s glory (7)
- Worship God’s glory because He is our only Savior (Jude 24-25)
- Worship God’s glory because He is our King (Rev 5:13)
- Worship God’s glory because of His strength (Ps 29:1)
- Worship God’s glory because of His blessings on us (Luke 2:14)

Worship giving offerings (8)
- An offering beyond ability (2 Cor 8:3)
- An offering that could be all one has (Mark 12:43-44)
- An offering that is given, even though it is the last (1 Kings 17:8-13)
- An offering of a life of service that is almost to death (Phil 2:29-30)

Worship of God’s holiness (9)
God is Holy because His glory fills the earth (Isa 6:3)
God is majestic in His Holiness (Exodus 15:11)
The heavens declare the Holiness of God (Ps 19:1)
God is Holy because He is Almighty and Everlasting (Rev 4:8)
God is perfect in His Holiness (Matt 5:48)

NEW SONG ABOUT GOD’S JUDGMENT (Ps 96:10-13)

Judgment with righteousness (10)
- Judgment with righteousness because it is based on truth (Rom 2:2)
- Judgment with righteousness because God judges with justice (Ps 9:7-8)
- Judgment with righteousness because God is righteous in all His ways (Ps 145:17)
- Judgment with righteousness because it is right (2 Thess 1:5)

Judgment rejoiced by nature (11-12)
- Nature rejoices because God reigns (Ps 97:1)
- Nature rejoices because God populates and covers it (Ps 65:12-13)
- Nature rejoices because it is at peace (Isa 14:7)
- Nature rejoices because God comforts His people (Isa 49:13)

Judgment with truth (13)
- Judgment with truth because God judges with equity (Ps 98:9)
- Judgment with truth because with God there are no distinctions (Col 3:11)
- Judgment with truth because with God there is no favoritism (James 2:1)
- Judgment with truth because God does not judge by human standards (John 8:15-16)
- Judgment with truth because God accepts all men who fear Him and do right (Acts 10:34-35)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

Commentary Thoughts from Steven Cole
1. Worship and witness (cycle 1): All the earth should worship God and witness of His salvation because He is the only great and glorious God (96:1-6).
   A. The call to worship and witness: All people should joyfully worship God and witness of His salvation among the nations (96:1-3).
   B. Why worship and witness: Because the Lord is the only great and glorious God (96:4-6).
2. Worship and witness (cycle 2): All the earth should worship God and witness of His salvation because He is the only great and glorious God (96:7-10).
   A. The nations should worship God because of His glory and strength (96:7-9).
   B. God’s people should witness to the nations about His sovereign rule (96:10).
3. Waiting in hope: All creation will worship God when He comes to judge the world (96:11-13).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR COMMENTARY
Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reminds us how right and good it is for all creation to Praise God with a New Song. The study's aim is to see our privileged place in praising God. The study's application is to build an attitude and habit of praising God daily.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Ps 96:1

Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord, all the earth

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

In this psalm about the reign of the Lord, the psalmist called on people everywhere and all the elements of nature to praise God because He is greater than all pagan gods and because He will reign in righteousness and truth.

96:1-3. The psalmist invited all the earth (i.e., people everywhere; cf. 97:1; 98:4; 100:1) to praise the LORD. They were to sing (cf. comments on 5:11) a new song to Him (cf. 33:3; 40:3; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). Singing a new song suggests that new mercies had been received. The people were told to announce His salvation and His deeds throughout the world, which would bring Him glory (cf. “glory” in 96:6-8).

96:4-6. The LORD is worthy of the praise called for in verses 1-3 because He is greater than all gods (cf. comments on 95:3; also note 97:9). Those gods, worshiped among the nations, are only idols. He is the One who made everything and is therefore superior. Moreover, His temple (the sanctuary) is characterized by splendor (cf. 96:9 and comments on 29:2; also called majesty and glory) and strength (cf. 96:7). In other words He is glorious and strong in the midst of His people.

96:7-9. The psalmist called for the families (lit., “tribes”) of the earth to ascribe... glory and strength (cf. v. 6) to God and worship Him. Someday every knee must bow (Phil. 2:10) before this sovereign LORD, whose holiness is awesome.

96:10. People everywhere should praise Him because He reigns (cf. 47:8; 93:1; 97:1; 99:1; 146:10). When the Lord returns to judge and reign on earth His reign will at last be established (cf. 92:1) with righteousness.

96:11-13. The psalmist called on nature to rejoice because the Lord will come to judge the world in righteousness (cf. 97:2; 98:9) and... truth. These bold personifications (of the heavens... the earth... the sea... the fields, and the trees) may indicate that all Creation will flourish when righteousness reigns on earth, when the curse is replaced by blessing. Then earth will no longer groan, waiting for the day of redemption as it is doing now (Rom. 8:20-22). Then nature will sing. Psalms such as this must have been uplifting for the psalmists as they have been for believers of all ages. Many psalms express a longing for the Lord to destroy wickedness and establish righteousness on the earth. The laments of the psalmists will no more be uttered when the Lord reigns in righteousness and truth.

Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Throughout the Psalms we find that we are to sing of God's wondrous works, triumphs in history, glorious attributes, and wonderful characteristics. God Himself is to be the focus of our singing. But this text goes so much further. Notice that it has a worldwide focus. It calls on the whole earth to join in praise to God through singing. The psalm goes on in verse 3 to mention the importance of declaring His glory among the "heathen," in fact, among "all people" (every kind of person in every place). So this is not just a text speaking about praise; it is also a text that speaks of mission. Since God is to be praised by the whole of His creation, we are given the foundation for our worship and also a solid foundation for worldwide missions and evangelism. God is to be praised by every creature in every place. Have we grasped the greatness of the scope of the doctrine of praise? It is more than singing our favorite songs in church. It is a commitment to lift up our great God's name wherever it can be taken in this wide world. The song that is to be sung is a "new" song. There is to be a fresh expression of praise permeating our testimony and witness in the wider world. This is not a command to come up with new songs for singing in our churches. It is a command to
tell the story of God's creation and salvation in a fresh way, reflecting a refreshed heart, wherever we go. Remember, the focus is worldwide. The psalm is urgently telling us that God's glory and salvation must be made known everywhere. Let us find new ways to tell the gospel and new ways to praise Him, engaging all of our faculties and creativity to reach the world with the glory of God! We know that this command that God be praised in all the earth is routinely violated by countless souls in innumerable locations around the globe. Day after day men and women in places around the world ignore the living God, believe falsehoods about Him, fight against Him, or trivialize His nature and glory. This command is testimony that God is to be worshipped by those who are currently not doing so. That is why we have missions, because God has commanded worship everywhere. Worship and praise lead to missions, seeking to bring lost men and women in “all the earth” into right relationship with Him through Christ so that they too may fulfill their proper destiny, turning with true worshipping hearts to the One who made them. When men are singing a new song unto the Lord in every place, our mission will be nearing fulfillment. Until that time we have work to do. Missions is not just about church planting or theological education or Bible translation; it is about planting the name of God where it is not known and leading others to become worshippers, filled with authentic praise. That is God's heart. Through praise we fulfill our mission. We commit ourselves to spreading the knowledge of God all over the earth and calling each person to understand why he exists and how to return praise to the living God. What an exciting adventure!

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

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. 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.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

New Song about God’s Glory (Ps 96:1-3)

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.

Glory of His salvation (1-2)

A salvation that brings joy (Ps 51:10-12)

10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
A salvation that should be responded to by rejoicing and glorifying God (Luke 1:46-48)

46 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,

A salvation that produces perseverance and hope (Rom 5:1-5)

5 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

A salvation that is waited on patiently (Rom 8:23-25)

23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

A salvation that gives us an inheritance (1 Peter 1:3-4)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you,

A salvation that purifies (1 John 3:2-3)

2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Glory of His wonders (3)

Wonders by God like no other (Exodus 15:11)

11 "Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you — majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?

Wonders that cannot be fathomed (Job 9:10)

10 He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted.

Wonders that are marvelous (Ps 72:18)

18 Praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds.

Wonders that are miraculous (Dan 4:2-3)

2 It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. 3 How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.

Wonders done in heaven and on earth (Dan 6:27)

27 He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

New Song about God’s Greatness (Ps 96:4-6)

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.
Greatness to be feared (4)

*Greatness feared because who can stand before God (Ps 76:7)*

7 You alone are to be feared. Who can stand before you when you are angry?

*Greatness feared because God is awesome (Ps 89:7)*

7 In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him.

*Greatness feared because God can kill the body and soul (Matt 10:28)*

28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

*Greatness feared because judgment is coming (Rev 14:7)*

7 He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

Greatness of the Creator (5)

*Creator of things both visible and invisible (Col 1:16)*

16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

*Creator who has always been the Word (John 1:1-3)*

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

*Creator through whom all things consist (1 Cor 8:6)*

6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

*Creator through whom all things were made (Heb 1:2)*

2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

*Creator who built everything (Heb 3:3-4)*

3 Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. 4 For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything.

Greatness in His strength (6)

*Strength to protect us from Satan (2 Thess 3:3)*

3 But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

*Strength to keep us blameless (1 Cor 1:8)*

8 He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Strength to stand firm (2 Cor 1:21)*

21 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us,

*Strength from One who is faithful (Heb 10:23)*

23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.
Strength that restores (1 Peter 5:10)
10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

New Song about Worshipping God (Ps 96:7-9)
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.

Worship of God’s glory (7)

Worship God’s glory because He is our only Savior (Jude 24-25)
24 To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!

Worship God’s glory because He is our King (Rev 5:13)
13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

Worship God’s glory because of His strength (Ps 29:1)
29 Ascribe to the Lord, O mighty ones, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

Worship God’s glory because of His blessings on us (Luke 2:14)
14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

Worship giving offerings (8)

An offering beyond ability (2 Cor 8:3)
3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,

An offering that could be all one has (Mark 12:43-44)
43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything — all she had to live on."

An offering that is given, even though it is the last (1 Kings 17:8-13)
8 Then the word of the Lord came to him: 9 "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." 10 So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" 11 As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread." 12 "As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread — only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it — and die." 13 Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.

An offering of a life of service that is almost to death (Phil 2:29-30)
29 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, 30 because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.
Worship of God’s holiness (9)

God is Holy because His glory fills the earth (Isa 6:3)
3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

God is majestic in His Holiness (Exodus 15:11)
11 "Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you — majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?

The heavens declare the Holiness of God (Ps 19:1)
19 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

God is Holy because He is Almighty and Everlasting (Rev 4:8)
8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

God is perfect in His Holiness (Matt 5:48)
48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

New Song about God’s Judgment (Ps 96:10-13)

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.

Judgment with righteousness (10)

Judgment with righteousness because it is based on truth (Rom 2:2)
2 Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.

Judgment with righteousness because God judges with justice (Ps 9:7-8)
7 The Lord reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. 8 He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice.

Judgment with righteousness because God is righteous in all His ways (Ps 145:17)
17 The Lord is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made.

Judgment with righteousness because it is right (2 Thess 1:5)
5 All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.

Judgment rejoiced by nature (11-12)

Nature rejoices because God reigns (Ps 97:1)
97 The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice.

Nature rejoices because God populates and covers it (Ps 65:12-13)
12 The grasslands of the desert overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness. 13 The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing.
Nature rejoices because it is at peace (Isa 14:7)

7 All the lands are at rest and at peace; they break into singing.

Nature rejoices because God comforts His people (Isa 49:13)

13 Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.

Judgment with truth (13)

Judgment with truth because God judges with equity (Ps 98:9)

9 let them sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.

Judgment with truth because with God there are no distinctions (Col 3:11)

11 Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Judgment with truth because with God there is no favoritism (James 2:1)

2 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.

Judgment with truth because God does not judge by human standards (John 8:15-16)

15 You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. 16 But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me.

Judgment with truth because God accepts all men who fear Him and do right (Acts 10:34-35)

34 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Steven Cole

Psalm 96 is a call to tell the nations about God’s glory and His great salvation. It follows on Psalm 95, which describes the stubborn hard-heartedness of Israel in the wilderness, in spite of God’s goodness towards them (C. H. Spurgeon, The Treasury of David [Eerdmans], 4:336). It was the same hardhearted nation that later rejected her Messiah, leading to the gospel going out to the Gentiles (Matt. 21:43; Acts 13:46). So Psalms 95 & 96 form a pair, showing Israel’s rejection of the gospel and the subsequent missionary task of proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles.

There is debate about the author and date of this psalm. Probably it was originally written by David as a part of a longer psalm that was used when he brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. (It appears in 1 Chron. 16:23-33 as part of a longer psalm containing Psalms 105:1-15 and 106:1, 47-48. Psalm 96 also contains many common themes with Isaiah 40-66.) The Septuagint (Greek OT) adds the superscription, “When the house was built after the exile. A song of David.” So perhaps a later scribe took the original composition by David and modified it into the version that we have here for the celebration of the second temple.

Psalm 96 describes a growing crescendo of worship. First, God’s people are called to sing His praises, not just among themselves, but also to tell of His glory among the nations (96:3). Then the nations are called on to ascribe to the Lord the glory of His name (96:7-8). Finally (96:11-12), the inanimate creation is brought into the swelling chorus. The reason for the praise of all creation is the prophecy that the Lord is coming to judge the world in righteousness (96:13). So there are the three themes: worship, witness, and waiting expectantly for the day when the Lord comes to right all wrongs. We can sum up the message:

Because the Lord is the only great and glorious God, we should worship Him, witness of Him, and wait expectantly for His coming to judge the world.
There are two “worship and witness” sections (1-6, 7-10) followed by the final “waiting expectantly” section (11-13).

1. Worship and witness (cycle 1): All the earth should worship God and witness of His salvation because He is the only great and glorious God (96:1-6).

Verses 1-3 are a call to worship and witness; verses 4-6 give the reasons why we should worship and witness.

A. The call to worship and witness: All people should joyfully worship God and witness of His salvation among the nations (96:1-3).

The psalmist repeats his theme, “Sing to the Lord,” three times. The first time, he tells us to sing to the Lord “a new song.” This does not necessarily mean a newly composed song, although that may be included. But it refers to a song that celebrates the mercies of God, which are new every morning (Derek Kidner, Psalms 73-150 [IVP], p. 347).

The second exhortation to sing to the Lord is directed to “all the earth.” The last part of the psalm will tie back into this by calling all creation to praise the Lord. It shows that the scope of God’s praise is as wide as all the earth, which He has created.

The third call to sing to the Lord is followed by three imperatives (bless, proclaim, tell, 96:2-3): “bless His name; proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day. Tell of His glory among the nations, His wonderful deeds among all the peoples.” To bless God’s name means that we should praise and thank Him for all that He is, or His glorious attributes. “Day to day” shows that the good news of His salvation must go forth continually, until the whole earth has heard.

Lest Israel think (as they were always prone to do) that “all the earth” meant, “all the Jews,” the psalmist specifically states that he means the Gentile nations (96:3): “Tell of His glory among the nations, His wonderful deeds among all the peoples.” God’s glory and His wonderful deeds here (96:3) are poetic parallels to His salvation (96:2). God’s salvation displays His glory and His wonderful deeds. Paul refers to “the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). When God broke into his darkness with the gospel, he says that He (2 Cor. 4:6) “has shone into our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

So the order of the psalm is, first worship God joyfully. Sing, sing, sing! Then, bear witness of His glorious salvation to the nations who have never heard. Since under the Old Testament era the nations were specifically excluded from Israel’s worship (remember the wall of partition that kept the Gentiles out of the Jewish section of the temple), this psalm prophetically looks ahead to the New Testament era, when all the families of the earth are blessed through Abraham’s seed, Jesus Christ.

B. Why worship and witness: Because the Lord is the only great and glorious God (96:4-6).

Why should we get excited about worshiping God and go to all the trouble of telling the nations about His salvation? “For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before Him, strength and beauty are in His sanctuary” (96:4-6).

The pagan world is marked by their fear of the spirit world. They try to placate their gods by putting out offerings of food and drink. They observe superstitious rituals so as not to offend the gods. But the psalmist here says that the only one we should fear is the Lord, who made the heavens (96:5). When he says (96:5), “For all the gods of the people are idols,” the Hebrew word for idols is ʾelīlim. It means nothings or nonentities and is a play on words with the Hebrew word for the true God, elohim.

The true God is the creator of the universe, which is so vast that even powerful telescopes, such as the Hubbell, cannot find the edge of it. I was listening recently to the Star Date program on NPR, and they said that the giant star Arcturus, which dwarfs our sun, could have already exploded. But if the explosion happened 500 years ago, we still wouldn’t know about it for another 100 years, because the light takes 600 years to get from there to us!

So, don’t fear manmade idols, which are nothing. Rather, as Psalm 33:6, 8-9 declares and commands, “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host…. Let all the earth fear
the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.” Fear the Lord, who alone is great and greatly to be praised!

After this first cycle of worship and witness, the psalmist takes us through a second cycle (96:7-10). First, he calls on the nations to worship God because of His glory and strength and then he again calls on God’s people to bear witness to the nations of God’s rule.

2. Worship and witness (cycle 2): All the earth should worship God and witness of His salvation because He is the only great and glorious God (96:7-10).

A. The nations should worship God because of His glory and strength (96:7-9).

“Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory of His name; bring an offering and come into His courts. Worship the Lord in holy attire; tremble before Him, all the earth” (96:7-9).

The threefold “ascribe” parallels the threefold “sing” that opened the psalm. Ascribe is literally give. It does not imply that we can give God something that He is lacking. Rather, the idea is that we are to offer God worship that is commensurate with His infinite majesty and glory. Edward Payson observed (cited by Spurgeon, 4:346),

“How immeasurably great then is the debt which our world has contracted, and under the burden of which it now groans! During every day and every hour which has elapsed since the apostasy of man, this debt has been increasing; for every day and every hour all men ought to have given unto Jehovah the glory which is due to his name. But no man has ever done this fully. And a vast proportion of our race have never done it at all. Now the difference between the tribute which men ought to have paid to God and that which they actually have paid constitutes the debt of which we are speaking. How vast, then how incalculable is it!

Since the cross, when Christ offered the perfect and final sacrifice for our sins, the only sacrifices that we can bring into His courts are praise, thanksgiving, and good deeds (Heb. 13:15-16). To “worship the Lord in holy attire” (96:9) may refer to the holy garments that the priests wore, in which case it means that we should come before God clothed with holy lives. Or, it may mean, “worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness” (Kidner, Psalms 1-72 [IVP], pp. 125-126). Then it would refer to the fear that Isaiah experienced when he saw the Lord, with the seraphim proclaiming, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isa. 6:3). This latter meaning would be reinforced with the last line of Psalm 96:9, “Tremble before Him, all the earth.”

In other words, if we get just a glimpse of how great God is in His glory, strength, and holiness, we would quickly join Isaiah on our faces, exclaiming (Isa. 6:5), “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” While Isaiah’s vision of God was probably unique in human history, to the extent that God opens our eyes to see His greatness and majesty, to that same extent we will give to Him the glory that is due to His holy name.

The reason that I read and frequently quote men like John Calvin, John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones is that these men lift God up like few others. Calvin often spoke of God reverently as “The Majesty.” The first time I read his Institutes, he had me worshiping God within a few pages. I encourage you to read men like these (the Puritans could be added to the list) who knew God and stood in awe of His splendor and majesty.

And, as Isaiah spontaneously experienced, you cannot get a glorious vision of God without at the same time getting a greater understanding of your own sin and depravity. You immediately sense that God isn’t your good buddy in the sky! He is altogether separate from you. You shrink into nothingness in comparison with Him. What is your strength compared to the One who spoke the heavens into existence? What is your puny existence of a few short years compared with the One who is eternal? What are your attempts at holy living compared with His infinite purity?

But, as soon as Isaiah lamented his own impurity, the Lord immediately sent an angel to purify him and tell him that his sins were forgiven (Isa. 6:6-7). As Psalm 130:3, 4, 7 declares, “If You, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared…. O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is lovingkindness, and with Him is abundant redemption.” A bigger understanding of God and a deeper view of your own sin leads to a greater experience of His abundant grace, resulting in more worship.
As in the first cycle, worship is followed by witness:

B. God’s people should witness to the nations about His sovereign rule (96:10).

“Say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns; indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved; He will judge the peoples with equity.’” Even though at present God permits the nations to rage against His Messiah (Ps. 2:1-3), He still reigns. Verse 10 reminds us of Isaiah 52:7, “How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” Although at present, Jesus’ enemies are not all under His feet (1 Cor. 15:25-28), He is coming again in power and glory, to rule the nations with a rod of iron (Rev. 19:11-16). He came the first time as the humble Savior, to die for our sins. But He will come again to rule and judge.

We do not proclaim the gospel adequately if we only present Jesus as meek and mild, gently knocking on your heart’s door, wishing that you would open up to Him. He is the risen, sovereign, righteous King of kings and Lord of lords, who is coming with all the armies of heaven, with His sword coming out of His mouth to strike down the nations. “He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty” (Rev. 19:15). Sinners can either bow willingly before Him now, or they will bow forcibly when He comes. Don’t give lost people the idea that Jesus is a wimpy weakling! He is the sovereign Judge! That leads to the last section:

3. Waiting in hope: All creation will worship God when He comes to judge the world (96:11-13).

The thought of God judging the peoples with equity (96:10) leads the psalmist to call the inanimate creation to break forth in praise (96:11-13): “Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all it contains; let the field exult, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy before the Lord, for He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in His faithfulness.”

These verses remind us of Paul’s comments in Romans 8:19-22, that the creation presently groans under the curse, waiting for the day of redemption when it will be restored. The Lord’s coming to judge the earth refers to the coming of Messiah, who is God.

Three terms describe this future judgment: equity, righteousness, and faithfulness (96:10, 13). Equity means that God’s judgment will be fair. No one will be judged unfairly. Everyone who does not receive mercy will receive perfect justice. Righteousness refers to God’s perfect standard, which is Himself. He has revealed His righteousness in His Word. He will not judge on the curve of human goodness, but according to the absolute standards of His own righteous nature. Faithfulness can also be translated as truth. It means that He will not be arbitrary or whimsical in His judgment. He will judge each person faithfully and truthfully.

God’s righteous judgment will either be a source of great terror or great joy. For those who have not received salvation and forgiveness through the Savior whom God has sent, it will be a day of stark terror. They will cry out to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev. 6:16). But for those who by faith in the shed blood of that Lamb have been clothed with His righteousness, the day of judgment will be a time of great joy (Rev. 18:20). They will sing (Rev. 19:6b-7), “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give glory to Him...” I cannot urge you strongly enough to make sure that your faith is in the risen Savior, so that you look forward to that great day with joy, not with terror!

(Adapted from URL:https://bible.org/seriespage/psalm-96-worshiping-witnessing-waiting)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

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. 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.

**Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary**

1. We should express genuine praise to God rather than methodical, empty worship (Ps. 96:1-2)
2. Evangelism is a Christian requirement (Ps. 96:3; cf. Mark 6:7-12; 16:15; Rom. 10:15)
3. The created are eternally subject to the Creator (Ps. 96:4-6)
4. God reigns over all whether men acknowledge Him or not (vs. 10)
5. There is peace in knowing that God's sovereign plan supersedes our circumstances (vss. 11-12)
6. Those who await Christ's return will be vindicated by God's judgment accomplished with righteousness and truth (Ps. 96:13; cf. Matt. 5:6; 2 Tim. 4:8)