

SONG: "Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun"

<https://youtu.be/AoCsWKpTwWI>

SONG: "Crown Him with Many Crowns"

<https://youtu.be/6vWRXvWZPUQ>

**Most senior adults love to sing "the old" songs.** This may draw some adverse reaction, but sadly, younger adults have not developed the taste, discernment, or experience to appreciate the familiar tunes and encouraging, but sometimes-complex language of old songs. Older Christians often dismiss songs young adults sing as "7-11" songs, songs with seven words repeated eleven songs. I knew some songs were like that but until recently when my granddaughters asked me to tune the radio in the car to a particular FM station that brands itself as "worship music," I was not aware of how many contemporary songs merely repeated the same words. I could give examples, but it would not help if you don't get it. In my younger years we called some of those songs "choruses," and included among them songs like "I've Got Peace Like a River." While those songs have value to teach and reinforce some basic truths, they do not go beyond what can be trite expressions that offer nothing more.

That said, I recall in my 20s listening to quite a bit of what was called "Jesus music." One noteworthy group called itself "Love Song" (the title of one of their most noteworthy songs). One song I remember vividly was "A Brand New Song." The words connected with me:

"Sing unto the heavens with a brand new song  
The one that we've been hearing's been a hit too long  
The lyrics sound confused as if they don't belong  
So sing unto the Lord and sing with feeling

And sing a song of love  
And sing a song of gladness  
Much too long our music  
Has been filled, filled with sadness."

Only later did I realize the concept for the song came from Psalm 96, which the great hymn writer Isaac Watts long ago put into words more fully expressing the text in “Joy to the World, the Lord Is Come.”

Watts, too, had wanted to sing a brand-new song. Watts had been a precocious child who versified at an early age, writing more than 750 hymns during his lifetime. *Wikipedia* described his impact this way: “Watts led the change in practice by including new poetry for “original songs of Christian experience” to be used in worship.... The older tradition was based on the poetry of the Bible: the Psalms. ... Psalms had been sung by God's people from the time of King David, who with a large staff over many years assembled the complete book of Psalms in a form appropriate for singing (by the Levites, during Temple sacrifices at the time). The practice of singing Psalms in worship was continued by Biblical command in the New Testament Church from its beginnings in Acts through the time of Watts.... The teachings of 16th-century Reformation leaders such as John Calvin, who translated the Psalms in the vernacular for congregational singing, followed this historic worship practice. Watts was not the first Protestant to promote the singing of hymns; however, his prolific hymn writing helped usher in a new era of English worship as many other poets followed in his path”

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac\\_Watts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Watts)).

King David, himself no slouch when it came to writing verse, must have had the same inclinations (indeed, believers through the millennia have as well). Psalm 96:1 begins with this call to worship: “O sing unto the LORD with a new song.” Psalm 96 is not, however, a new song. If you look at 1 Chronicles 16, when David led the procession of leading the ark of the covenant from Obed-Edom to Jerusalem to install in the Tabernacle, we are told, “Then on that day David delivered first *this psalm* to thank the LORD into the hand of Asaph and his brethren.” If you examine the text of the psalm, which runs from verse 8 to verse 36, you will discover Psalm 105 and Psalm 96 combined in a single composition. (The King James translators obscure that by varying English words for Hebrew originals.) David replicated verses 8-22 in Psalm 105:1-15 and verses 23-33 in Psalm 96 with a few simple

variations. Musicians do things like that. They adapt; they modify; they fine-tune—all as the mood and situation dictate. Of course, we believe the Holy Spirit led David to this division for our benefit.

Psalm 96 celebrates the Person of God, His attributes and worthiness to be worshipped. The psalm looks forward to the day His rule will be “from shore to shore,” as Watts phrased it in the first stanza of another of his great hymns, “Jesus Shall Reign.” The Psalm concludes with a chorus of praise from all of the created order at its release from the bondage of corruption (cf. Rom. 8:18-23). In Psalm 96:11-12 you can almost see the symphonic conductor pointing to the various groups of instruments for their contributions to the swelling finale—“earth,” “sea,” “field,” “trees of the wood.” Watts captured that powerfully in the second stanza of “Joy to the World”: “while fields and flood, rocks, hills and plain repeat the sounding joy.” His choruses, “And heaven and nature sing,” “Repeat the sounding joy,” “Far as the curse is found,” “And wonders of His love,” while repetitive are distinct and expansive, stressing the universality of rejoicing, the blessing of redemption, and the marvels of God’s love for a lost world.

David called “all the earth” (Ps. 96:1) to “sing” unto Jehovah. “LORD” translates once again the Hebrew word יהוה (“Jehovah”), the name by which God revealed Himself as the covenant God of Israel. “I am that I am” (Exod. 3:14) asserts God’s self-existence. He alone is God. He alone exists in and of Himself. We are but contingent, dependent beings. Paul echoed this same thought in Colossians 1:17: “And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.” “Consist,” according to A. T. Robertson, means “to cohere, to hold together.... Christ is the controlling and unifying force in nature. ...The Son of God's love is the Creator and the Sustainer of the universe” (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 4, p. 479).

“Sing” appears four times in the first two verses of Psalm 96, but never again. Instead other calls appear to “bless” (vs. 2), “shew forth,” “declare” (vs. 3), “give” (vss. 7-8), “bring” (vs. 8), “come” (vs. 8), “worship” (vs. 9), “fear” (vs. 9), and “say” (vs. 10). All of these verbs explain that worship is much more than merely singing.

What is a “new” (vs. 1) song? The word means “renewed,” “refreshed,” “repaired.” It was appropriate here (it does not appear in 1 Chronicles 16:23) because of the circumstances in which David wrote it. The Ark of the Covenant had been in captivity since the days Eli and his wicked sons had lost it in battle to the Philistines (1 Sam. 4:4-22). You can read about the travails the ark brought on the Philistines in 1 Samuel 5 and its return in 1 Samuel 6. For almost a century the ark was absent from Shiloh, where it had been, and Jerusalem, the place God intended it to reside. Some of that time it was in Beth-Shemesh (1 Sam. 6:12-15). Judgment fell when the residents of Beth-Shemesh violated its holiness (vs. 19) and they called for the residents of Kirjath-jearim to come and get it (vss. 20-21). It was kept at the house of Abinadab and his son Eleazar (7:1). Ahio and Uzzah, two of Abinadab’s sons (2 Sam 6:3-4), later accompanied the ark partway on its journey to Jerusalem, ending up with Uzzah’s being struck dead due to his lack of reverence for the holiness of the ark, which represented the Person of God. David had not followed God’s instructions for how the ark was to be moved—suspended on poles held by Levites—and had directed it to be carried on a cart. When the rough road caused the ark to shake, Uzzah reached out his hand to steady it and was struck dead. The two incidents (the death of the men of Beth-Shemesh and the death of Uzzah) struck a righteous fear of God into David and the nation of Israel. For three months the ark remained unmoved until David moved it in the prescribed manner. This was the incident of his dancing “before the Lord” (2 Sam. 6:14) and his wife Michal’s despising of him in her heart (vs. 16). Ryrie noted, “Michal sarcastically rebuked David for celebrating with the people in a manner that she considered unbecoming a king” (*The Ryrie Study Bible*, 2 Samuel 6).

David called for the people to sing unto their Master with a renewed song, a song touched and molded by the experiences they had and the events they had seen and what they revealed about the Person of God. He expanded that to a universal call to “all the earth,” the whole planet, not just the nation of Israel. David saw prophetically God’s call to all people, not just His Chosen People. “Bless” (Ps. 96:2) calls to kneel down in submission, to acknowledge God’s right to obedience. Kneel to

his “name,” His revealed character—holy, merciful, loving, gracious, long-suffering (cf. Exod. 34:5-7). We are to “shew forth” (Ps. 96:2), bear good news, gladden with the good news of “his salvation.” “Salvation” is, of course, the Hebrew word **יְשׁוּעָה**, “Yeshua,” which also happens to be the name of Jesus. I cannot help but smile as I see how God clearly revealed far more than may have been apparent at the time.

**The next aspect of worship called for is to “declare” (Ps. 96:3)** “his glory among the heathen.” “Declare” contains the ideas of counting something exactly or recounting something exactly. What is God’s “glory”? The Hebrew word literally means heaviness. It is also translated as honor, splendor, and reputation. According to Oswalt, forty-five times this term refers to a visible manifestation of God, His “self-disclosure,” the “stunning quality of his holiness” (*TWOT*, Vol. 1, p. 427) and reminds us we cannot ignore John 1:14 in this context: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” “Heathen” (Ps. 96:3) translates the word that has come into English via Yiddish, *goyim*, a normally pejorative word for Gentiles. Israel was called to share the good news of God’s revealing of Himself to the nations of the world (Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 60:3). At the same time, Israel was to remind themselves (“the people”) of “his wonders” (Ps. 96:3). “Wonders” is translated “marvellous works” in 1 Chronicles 16:24, but it is the same Hebrew word, a word that refers to miraculous events beyond human ability to accomplish. Think of the deliverance from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the crossing of Jordan, the capture of Jericho and so much more God did for the nation of Israel.

**Why? Because God is “great” (Ps. 96:4).** Jehovah, the faithful covenant God of Israel was “greatly to be praised” or exceedingly to be “hallelujahed,” if I may coin a word to picture the original. God is worthy of praise because of what He did. He is “to be feared above all gods.” Feared means to revere, honor, or stand in awe. “Above all gods” is not expressing the idea that there actually are other gods. David explained, “For all the gods of the nations are idols” (vs. 5). “Idols” comes from a root that means to be weak and deficient. One Hebrew dictionary says it means “no.”

David was saying the gods of the nations “are no gods” (1 Chron. 13:9; cf. Jer. 5:7; 16:20). Paul told the Galatians they “did service unto them which by nature are no gods” (Gal. 4:8). The need to worship is built into human beings. We know intuitively that the earth did not create itself and life did not originate from nothing. Experience and observation of the external world reveal the reality of God (cf. Rom. 1:19-20). Rejecting God means we must create our own gods, something history and Scripture testify to abundantly.

**“The Lord made the heavens” (Ps. 96:5)** boldly contrasts the deficient man-made “no gods” of the world. While they can do nothing, Jehovah created “the heavens.” David reflected on that subject in Psalm 8:3-4: “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” Only the hardened cynic cannot help but be impressed at the vastness of a night sky. When was the last time you intentionally and consciously gazed at the stars in a dark place? Most of us moderns are so inundated by light—city lights, streetlights, house lights—that we can hardly see any but the brightest of stars. Back in 1972, I helped lead a group of youth on a combination Vacation Bible School/Revival to Yampa, Colorado. On our way back to Fort Worth, we camped outside of Aspen at a primitive campsite. That night when the kids were asleep around the fire, I gazed up at the night sky ablaze with heavenly lights. I could not have put my finger on a blank spot in the sky. God created those, all those. It gives humans beings a sense of how insignificant we are in the cosmos. Yet God, the One who created the cosmos, sent His Son, Yeshua, to die for us.

“Honor and majesty are before him” (Ps. 96:6). Those two terms, “honor and majesty” appear eight times together in the Bible, always in the same order. Splendor and majesty, a word that contains the idea of swelling or getting larger, greater, are God’s. “Strength and beauty” speak of God’s inherent power and glory or majesty as the King of the universe. “Beauty” translates a word with broad meaning: “beauty,” “glory,” “honor,” “finery,” or even “excellence.” They are in God’s sanctuary.

In this case, it would be the Tabernacle into which David had just installed the Ark of the Covenant, the visible representation of the presence of God among His people.

**Three times David repeated the call to “give” (Ps. 96:7-8)** God the “glory” He deserves. “Kindred of the people” refers to the families or tribes of Israel. This is a full-throated call to worship God as He reveals Himself. I think of the transfiguration of Matthew 17. Recall? “His face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light ... While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard *it*, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid” (vss. 2-5). Remember Israel’s plea after God revealed Himself on Sinai with thunderings and lightnings and blasts that sounded like a trumpet? “Let not God speak with us lest we die” (Exod. 20:19). Remember John’s response in Revelation 1 when He saw the glorified Lord? “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I *am* he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (vss. 17-18). The holiness of God should have been fresh on David’s mind after the deaths of the men of Beth-Shemesh and the death of Uzzah. God is not, as someone said, a tame God. J. B. Phillips in *Your God Is Too Small* reminded us God is not in a box of our own making, regardless of what we may think. In Deuteronomy 4:24 Moses said, “The LORD thy God *is* a consuming fire,” and the writer of Hebrews repeated that: “Our God is a consuming fire” (12:29). The seraphim in Isaiah 6 said, “Holy, holy, holy, *is* the LORD of hosts: the whole earth *is* full of his glory” (vs. 3). Isaiah’s response should be our response: “Then said I, Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (vs. 6).

Still David said, “Bring an offering” (Ps. 96:8). “Offering” is here the Hebrew word מִנְחָה *minchah*, which always signifies a grain offering. This was not a sin offering. Carr noted this was the offering that was given each morning and evening together

with the sacrifices in the temple that signified submission of “the totality of life” to God (TWOT, Vol. 1, p. 515). Unger says, “It recognized the sovereignty of Jehovah and his bounty in the bestowal of earthly blessings” (*Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, p. 949).

**David calls, “O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (Ps. 96:9).**

“Worship” pictures bowing down or prostrating oneself before a majestic Ruler. “Bless” (vs. 2) signifies kneeling, but this word seems to go further. “Beauty of holiness” is one of those phrases that stick in one’s mind. It has the idea of the majesty of God’s holiness, His absolute, glorious purity as God, who alone is holy. We often think of “holy” as a negative term, for it means set apart, but it is certainly positive. It entails all God is. All that we are not, God is. He is majestically holy. “Beauty” translates the same word translated “majesty” in verse 6. That entails “fear,” or reverence. The word has the idea of twirling, dancing, trembling, which is probably the preferred meaning here. We are to tremble before Almighty God in His holiness. Recall Isaiah’s experience when he saw God in Isaiah 6. He was intimately aware of his own sinfulness in the presence of holy God.

**“Say” (Ps. 96:10) means to speak or answer.** “Say among the heathen” is to openly speak among the nations, the meaning of “heathen,” which once more translates the word *goyim*, non-Jewish peoples, “The LORD reigneth.” Jehovah is King, Sovereign, and He rules over all. In the midst of the pandemic, we need to remind ourselves and others, God is in charge. Come ill or good, God rules. We know He is working His will in the world to glorify Himself, and we should pray to that end—that God is glorified with the glory He deserves. The second half of verse 10 appears to be an encouragement: “The world also shall be established that it shall not be moved.” Because God is sovereign, the “world,” a word for the inhabited world instead of the planet, will be “established,” or made firm, stable. Note that these verbs are future. This views the reign of Messiah, which we know is still future. Out of the chaos, Jesus shall reign and establish righteousness. “He shall judge the people righteously” points to this future rule. “Judge” comprehends all the range of government—legislative, executive, and judicial. “Righteousness” is actually

equity, or evenness. It could be translated ethically. There will be none of the ever-present favoritism in His government. Prince and pauper will be treated alike.

**Verses 11-13 explode in calls to the creation** itself to echo the joyous good news of the Messiah's future coming. While we sing Watts's hymn "Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come" as a Christmas hymn, it is actually, based on Psalm 96, a Second Coming hymn. In Romans 8, Paul described the futility under which creation was bound because of man's sin. He spoke of it being "made subject to vanity" (vs. 20), an acknowledgment of "the law of sin and death" (vs. 2). Verse 21 says, "The creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption." The next verse tells us, "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." All of these taken together show us this world is not what it was created to be. The fall of man brought a curse "on the ground for thy sake" (Gen. 3:19), thorns and thistles (vs. 18), and the curse of unfulfilling work (vs. 19—"sweat of thy face"). One day yet future, perhaps not far, that will all change. That is behind the cascading calls to praise from the creation that follow in verses 11-13. The "heavens" are called to "rejoice," and the "earth" called to "be glad." The sea is called to "roar," or thunder. "Rejoice," "glad," and "roar" all have a subtext of trembling. Have you ever watched a hunting dog tremble at the prospect of being released to hunt? That is entailed in these words.

**The "field" (Ps. 96:12) the open ground**, cultivated land, is called to "be joyful," to exult or triumph, and every plant, rock, clod of dirt is included as well. "Then," at that point, at that time when Messiah comes, "the trees of the wood" shall "rejoice." "Rejoice" can be translated "sing," and the King James translates it that way in the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 16:33. Have you ever heard the trees singing as the winds pass through them? It's a tune God knows well. While we may not know the language or rhythms, He does. Nature has its own language of praise to which we are deaf, or at least hearing-impaired.

**"For he cometh" (Ps. 96:13) clearly** restates the grounds for nature's rejoicing. The King is coming. "He cometh to judge the earth." "Judgeth" contains the ideas of

governing, vindicating, and punishing. All those ideas fall into that verb and the rule of Messiah. "He shall govern the world," the inhabited parts of the earth, "with righteousness," what is right or just. He will judge Israel "with his truth." "Truth" is a form of the word from which we get "Amen" and here includes faithfulness, stability, and steadiness. Isaiah wrote of the same thing when He wrote, "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever" (Isa. 9:6-7). In Matthew 1:21, Gabriel told Joseph: "thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."

Joy to the world! The Lord is come.

SONG: "Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come."

<https://youtu.be/2wMtbAgCj-g>