



The 96th Psalm is sung every Friday night as part of the Kabbalat Shabbat service. A nearly identical section of 1 Chronicles is recited each morning as part of the Pesukei Dezimrah. The universalism of this psalm is striking, though there have been many commentators who have attempted to tame its implications.

Rashi places this psalm's fulfillment in the Messianic Age, while both Bereshit Rabbah and Radak connect its composition to the Ark of the Covenant's journey to Jerusalem in the book of Samuel. The Zohar asserts that this is the song that the Cherubim sang in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, while some non-Jewish sources claim that this is a song of the returning exiles who built the second Temple. Regardless of its author or its audience, the message of this psalm is irrefutable: the entire world is called upon to sing praises to God.

נִשְׁרָאוּ לֵה' נִשִּׁיר חֲדָשׁ נִשְׁרָאוּ לֵה' כָּל־הָאָרֶץ:

1

Sing to the Eternal a new song; sing to the Eternal, all the earth.

נִשְׁרָאוּ לֵה' בְּרַכּוּ שְׁמוֹ בְּשָׂרוֹ מִיּוֹם־לְיוֹם

יְשׁוּעָתוֹ:

2

Sing to the Eternal, bless His name;
proclaim from day to day His deliverance.

A new song: Why is the word “*shir*” (masculine) used here, when elsewhere (such as the Song of the Sea) we see “*shirah*” (feminine)? In this age the Jewish people sing a *shirah* because they are repeatedly “giving birth” to exiles, but in the coming age there will be no more exile and Israel will sing a *shir*. (Shemot Rabbah)

Others say that just as an unmarried daughter inherits 1/10th of her deceased father's assets (Ketubot 68b), the Jewish people in this age possessed 1/10th of the 70 nations of the ancient world, i.e. the land of the 7 Canaanite kingdoms. In the coming age, however, the Jewish people inherit everything like a son, i.e. will be entrusted with the spiritual welfare of the entire world. (Bereshit Rabbah)



סִפְרוּ בַּגּוֹיִם כְּבוֹדוֹ בְּכָל־הָעַמִּים נִפְלְאוֹתָיו:

3 Tell of His glory among the nations; His wondrous works among all peoples.

כִּי גָדוֹל ה' וּמְהֻלָּל מְאֹד נוֹרָא הוּא עַל־כָּל־
אֱלֹהִים:

4 For the Eternal is great and very worthy of praise; He is held in awe above all the gods.

כִּי כָל־אֱלֹהֵי הָעַמִּים אֱלִילִים וְה' שָׁמַיִם
עָשָׂה:

5 Because all the gods of the peoples are false gods, but the Eternal made the heavens.

הוֹד־וְהָדָר לְפָנָיו עֵז וְתִפְאֶרֶת בְּמִקְדָּשׁוֹ:

6 Glory and majesty are before Him; strength and splendor are in His holy place.

Tell of His glory: The Jewish people were brought out of Egypt not for their own merit, but instead so that they may declare God's praise among the nations. This praise throughout the whole world is itself the glory of God. (Midrash Tehillim)

Nations...peoples: These are two distinct groups. The "nations" are those who simply do not know God. The "peoples," meanwhile, are those who believe in God as the first cause and creator of the universe but do not believe that God continues to act in the created world. The "nations" must be told of God's glory: that is, God's simple existence. The "peoples," meanwhile, must be told of God's wondrous deeds: that is, God's ongoing redemption of the Jewish people throughout our history. (Malbim)

Very worthy: The letters of the word *me'od* (much) hint at the word *adam* (human being), revealing the universal scope of the call to reject polytheism in the next verse. (Chomat Adam)

The gods: Some say that these are angels (Radak) while others say these are the sun, moon and stars worshipped by the idolaters (Metzudat David.) All agree, though, that the gods of the peoples, so often manifested in the heavenly bodies, are as nothing compared to the God who created the heavens.



הָבוּ לַה' מִשְׁפָּחוֹת עַמִּים הָבוּ לַה' כְּבוֹד וְעֹז:

7 Give to the Eternal the families of the peoples; give to the Eternal glory and strength.

הָבוּ לַה' כְּבוֹד שְׁמוֹ שְׂאוּ-מִנְחָה וּבֵאוּ לְחִצְרוֹתָיו:

8 Give to the Eternal the glory of His name, bring tribute and come to His courts.

הִשְׁתַּחֲווּ לַה' בְּהַדְרַת-קֹדֶשׁ חִילוֹ מִפְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ:

9 Bow down to the Eternal with holy splendor; tremble in His presence, all the earth!

אָמְרוּ בְּגוֹיִם ה' מֶלֶךְ אֶף-תִּכּוֹן תִּבֵּל בַּל-תִּמּוֹט יִדִּין עַמִּים בְּמִישְׁרִים:

10 Declare among the nations, "The Eternal reigns!" the world stands firm; it cannot be shaken; He judges the peoples forthrightly.

Courts: This language hints at the sovereignty of God, who reigns like an earthly king. Just as an earthly king builds a court for receiving offerings from his ministers and his subjects, so too God built the entire world for the elevating praise that we might offer in the service of God's holy name. (Malbim)

Declare among the nations: The non-Jewish families that gathered in the Jerusalem temple and brought an offering in verses 8 and 9 now return to their home countries and tell their brethren about the God of Israel. (Radak)

The world stands firm: Compare Psalms 82:5, "They neither know nor understand, they go about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth totter." In both the positive and negative formulations, the psalmist clearly asserts that the foundations of the universe are bound up with our sharing the knowledge of God. (Ibn Ezra)

He judges the peoples forthrightly: the divine attribute of mercy, once reserved for the Jewish people, will be opened to the entire world. (Metzudat David)



יְשׁוּמְחוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְתִגַּל הָאָרֶץ יִרְעֶם הַיָּם וּמְלֵאוּ:

11

Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad; let the sea and everything in it roar.

יַעֲלֹז שָׂדֵי וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־בוֹ אֲז יִרְנְנוּ כָּל־עֵצֵי־יַעַר:

12

Let the fields and everything in them exult. Then all the trees of the forest will sing with joy,

לְפָנַי ה' כִּי בָא כִּי בָא לְשֹׁפֵט הָאָרֶץ יִשְׁפֹּט־תִּבְלֵ
בְּצִדְקָה וְעַמִּים בְּאֵמוּנָתוֹ:

13

Before the Eternal, because He comes. He comes to rule the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and its peoples with fidelity.

Let the heavens rejoice: All of creation rejoices in the coming of God like courtiers celebrating the return of the king from afar. (Ibn Ezra)

Let the fields: The entire world, the evil and the good, as symbolized by Cain and Abel, who labored in the field to divide the world between the righteous and the unrighteous (before Cain murdered his brother.) A day is coming in which the spiritual heirs of Cain will repent and the entire world will worship the God of peace. (Pesikta de-Rav Kahana)

The trees of the forest: symbolic of the world's national leaders. (Rashi)

Because He comes: Why is this phrase said twice? Because God in a sense already came into this world once, in the cycle of creation, redemption and revelation described in the Torah. When God comes a second time, interrupting the natural order as we know it, God will judge the world according to one standard: the Torah that was given beforehand. (Malbim)