

Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Orcutt Christian Church

A Grace Driven Church for Grace Needing People!

"Come As You Are ... Leave Changed!"

Burning Questions 01

How Can You Believe The Bible?

2 Timothy 3:16-17

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Communion: Genevieve Williams

Care Calling: Archie Miller

Host: Sheila Cragg

Saturday 1/7 Clean Up: The Webb's

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John 20:30-31 (NASB)

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

Luke 1:1-4 (NASB)

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³ it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the

beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; ⁴ so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

Acts 1:1-2 (NASB)

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when He was taken up *to heaven*, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 (NASB)

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. ¹⁴ For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews, ¹⁵ who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, ¹⁶ hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NASB)

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

I. Can You Imagine a World Without the Bible?

Seriously, consider the question!

Let me share a rather awful story that happened to me.

About 12 years ago, I attended a Gary Smalley seminar on Marriage over in Bakersfield.

The Christian world lost a great marriage counselor when Gary died last March at the age of 75.

Smalley began his career in 1979, traveling through Texas and explaining the 10 better ways to love your spouse, according to his Smalley Institute, which focuses on “saving marriages and relationships one couple at a time.”

Gary has spoken to over two million people in live conferences.

He has been presenting his live two-day marriage seminars, once a month for the last 37 years.

Over one million people have attended Gary's live presentations.

Gary was a family counselor, president and founder of the Smalley Relationship Center and author of books on family relationships from a Christian perspective.

Gary authored more than 60 books, including For Better or Best, If He Only Knew and Making Love Last Forever.

The seminar I attended was excellent, and I went away inspired to be of better help to couples who came to me for counseling.

I also purchased a set of seminar videos.

And, that is where the nightmare began.

About three weeks after the seminar, I received a phone call from the Smalley Center, and was informed that their computer system had been hacked, and every credit card on file had been heisted and I would be contacted by the FBI.

I was contacted by the FBI and informed they had notified my credit card company, and I would not be liable for any charges I had not made.

That was good.

Then several weeks went by and I was again contacted by the FBI. My credit card had been used to set up eight porno sites in Indonesia.

The societal costs of pornography are staggering.

The financial cost to business productivity in the U.S. alone is estimated at \$16.9 Billion annually; but the human toll, particularly among our youth and in our families, is far greater.

According to Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D, psychologist and former Deputy Assistant Health and Human Services Secretary,

“...the pornographic content of phone texting among teenagers, make clear that the digital revolution is being used by younger and younger children to dismantle the barriers that channel sexuality into family life...

Pornography hurts adults, children, couples, families, and society. Among adolescents, pornography hinders the development of a healthy sexuality, and among adults, it distorts sexual attitudes and social realities...

In families, pornography use leads to marital dissatisfaction, infidelity, separation, and divorce.”

Here are some of the most credible statistics available today on internet pornography:

- Every second 28,258 users are watching pornography on the internet
- Every second \$3,075.64 is being spent on pornography on the internet
- 40 million American people regularly visit porn sites
- 35% of all internet downloads are related to pornography
- 25% of all search engine queries are related to pornography, or about 68 million search queries a day
- One third of porn viewers are women
- Every 39 minutes a new pornography video is being created in the United States

Then there is the fad among teen agers called sexting.

Sexting is using a cell phone for sending, receiving, or forwarding photographs or images or sexually explicit messages.

And, often the sexts end up where the sender never intended.

The Kinsey Institute at Indiana University, published in the journal *Sexual Health*, says the texts could be "literally anywhere."

After surveying 5,805 single adults between the ages of 21 and 75, 23 percent reported sharing the sexts they received with an average of more than three different friends.

OH YUK!

And, here is a hidden danger: 34% of internet users have experienced unwanted exposure to pornographic content through ads, pop up ads, misdirected links or emails.

I have the Eagle Scout rank in the Boy Scouts.

Once several years ago, I decided to do a sermon using some of the Merit Badge awards as the points.

So, I typed in my browser "Merit Badges."

The first site on the list, as I recall, was MeritBadges.Com, so I clicked on it.

Guess what?

It was a porno site.

And, let's say you are a High School student who needs to write a paper on the White House.

If the you clicked on Whitehouse.Com, you were accessing a porno site.

I am very grateful that our government closed both those websites down.

Porno is a huge problem.

Our porn culture has definitely sent sexual abuse skyrocketing.

There is a lot of disrespect towards women in the world and many men and boys don't treat them or value them as beautiful, unique women created in the image of God, but as sexual objects.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employees using a work computer to visit pornographic sites is a staggering \$17 Billion dollars annual productivity loss to companies.

And, from our Christian stance, it devalues the infinite worth of

both male and females who are created in the image of God.

“Nemo repente fuit turpissimus,” the Roman satirist Juvenal noted long ago.

“No one became thoroughly wicked all at once.”

It happens by slow degrees, step by painful step.

It is as Ralph Waldo Emerson, put it:

*Sow an act, and you reap a habit;
sow a habit and you reap a character;
sow a character, and you reap a destiny.*

So, who is behind this huge pornographic devaluation of human beings?

Jesus makes it crystal clear it is Satan:

John 10:10 (NASB)

10 "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly.

Please use your sanctified imagination of think of how the world would be without the influence of our Holy Bible.

You might reflect back on that series of sermons on how the church changed the world.

II. A New Attack on the Bible

Jude 3 (NASB)

3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

We are called in Scripture to contend for our faith.

I think that that means something different today than it would have meant a generation ago.

Because Christian assumptions, which used to be taken for granted in our society are now no longer shared.

Very interestingly we have seen in recent years, not just atheism, but a kind of new atheism.

More militant, more suave, more effective than the atheism of the past.

In fact if you thought of atheism twenty years ago you'd think of someone like the activist Madelyn Murray O'Hair.

Or you might think of some kind of an ACLU lawyer.

Not an atheism with mass appeal and evangelistic desires.

I'm thinking of people like the Oxford biologist Richard Dawkins, the author of the book The God Delusion, that's sold some two million copies.

Dawkins is an atheist, and is well known for his criticism of creationism and intelligent design.

In The God Delusion, Dawkins contends that a supernatural creator almost certainly does not exist and that religious faith is a delusion.

And, then there is the English writer Christopher Hitchens.

He's the author of the book God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything.

He regarded the concept of a god or supreme being as a totalitarian belief that destroys individual freedom, and argued that free expression and scientific discovery should replace religion.

These new atheists have a very different agenda than the atheists of the past.

They really want to make every Christian feel like a total idiot for believing in the authenticity of the Bible.

Their agenda is to totally discredit the Bible and its influence.

You believe someone was born of a virgin?

Walked on water?

Brought dead people back to life?

Are you out of your mind?

We're living in the twentieth century!

Don't you believe the world has fixed laws?
Do you think these laws can be suspended at somebody's whim or discretion?
With this steady media fed propaganda against Holy Scriptures ...

III. How Can You Believe The Bible?

Well, I want to say up front, you can't turn off your God given brain.

I just can't agree with the Calvinist John MacArthur in his 2006 monograph on **Why We Believe the Bible Is True**.
But I take objection, not only to MacArthur, but to most Calvinists on Why We Believe the Bible is true.
It could be MacArthur, Cornelius Van Til, or John Piper.
Now, you are probably wondering why?

Well, let me quote MacArthur from his Calvinist perspective:
"Evidences aren't going to cut it on their own. Human reason can't get you there. The natural man does not because he cannot. He does not believe because he cannot believe."

From his Calvinist perspective, faith and belief has to be given by God.

Calvinist teachers say that they can never persuade natural men of the gospel no matter how openly, clearly and earnestly they may preach it.

It is like presenting a sermon to a corpse - there is no response.

But, I want to say again, you can't turn off your God given brain.

In this sermon, we will adopt the attitude of the "**noble-minded**" Bereans:

Acts 17:10-12 (NASB)

10 The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the

synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so. ¹² Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.

A long time ago, I determined to find out if the Bible was the word of God, and if so, I determined to live by what it said. And if the Bible was not the Word of God, I determined to find that out and act accordingly.

And, what did I found out?

I found out beyond any possibility that there is a God, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that the Bible is the Word of God.

Today it's with me not a matter of mere probability nor even of mere belief, but of absolute certainty.

I'm going to give you some of the reasons why I believe the Bible to be the Word of God.

And believe me, I just said "**some of the reasons.**"

I do after all have a time constraint.

Can you find good reason to trust the ancient bible?

It's an old book in a world where age is no longer considered a virtue.

If I am going to trust it, I have to have good reasons.

People who trust the Bible say it is different from any other book ever published.

They say it is the ONLY book authored by God, and shows us how to know Him, how to live, and how to have eternal life.

And you know the objections:

It's filled with errors.

It's not scientifically reliable.

It's not historically accurate.

It's outdated.

It's the work of men.

BUT, I say You Can Trust the Bible ...

A. Because of It's Textural Preservation

Now, what do I mean it's textural preservation?

Several years ago when I had a TV connection, there was a documentary on the Bible.

A interviewer was asking people on the street what they thought about so many different Bible translations.

One lady answered: "If King James English was good enough for Jesus, it is good enough for me!"

Well, we can only feel sorry for her misinformation.

You know the Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.

You know the Bible was written over a time span of 1500 years.

You know it was written on three continents: Africa, Asia and Europe.

Remember there are seven continents: North America, South America, Australia, Antarctica, Africa, Asia and Europe.

Why they count Europe as a separate one from Asia is beyond me, and that is why some countries use a 6 continent system calling one Eurasia.

But, I hear you saying, Africa?

The first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch, are traditionally held to have been written by Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, which is in the country of Egypt and continent of Africa.

Also, Jeremiah may have written at least some of his book from Egypt, where he was taken after the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar.

You know that the bible had 40 authors.

There are 30 authors in the Old Testament and 10 in the New Testament.

Some of the stories in the Bible go back 2,000 years prior to the birth of Jesus.

And, the critics say with all that time span, and all those authors, and all those locations, surely there are problems with the purity of the text.

And, up front, none of the original manuscripts written by the biblical authors are still in existence.

So, how can we be confident that the texts we hold in our hands were the same as the originals.

Let's think about the Old Testament first.

The Old Testament books were written primarily in Hebrew on either papyrus or animal skins.

When a copy wore out, a new copy was made, and the old destroyed.

Since they didn't have computers and copy machines, the copies had to be laborously made by hand.

And the Jews had strigent rules for making those copies.

The scribes who did the new copies were called Masorettes.

And the texts they provided are called the Masoretic texts.

They had a highly elaborate system which required precise counting.

First, they would count all the words on a page to be copied.

Then when they finished copying the page, they would count the letters on the copy to see if the number agreed.

If the count didn't agree, they destroyed the new copy and started all over.

The texts of these Masoretic scribes agree completely with scrolls from the Dead Sea caves dated a thousand years earlier.

In the case of the New Testament, the same procedures were followed, and the only variations are minor changes of spelling, like the British "labour" and the American "labor."

And, scholars have at their hands 14,000 manuscripts, the earliest dated at 125 A.D.

So, even though we no longer have the original manuscripts, the process of copying assures us of a remarkable accuracy.

I recall talking with one of the scholars working on the accuracy and authenticity of the ancient New Testament manuscripts.

He said we could absolutely rest assured that what we had was for

superior to anything from antiquity.

Now keep in mind that we have over 14,000 manuscripts and the earliest is dated at 125 A.D.

In comparison, Homer's Iliad, the greatest all Greek classical works only has 650 manuscripts, and the earliest is dated in the eight century A.D.

In comparison, Euripides' tragedies, the next greatest collection of Greek works, only has 330 manuscripts, and the earliest is dated around the 12th century.

Caesar's Galic Wars only has 10 manuscripts, and the earliest is dated around 900 A.D.

Now, here is the clincher.

The Chester Beatty collection of new testament papyri contain almost the entire New Testament, and dates to around 200 A.D.

No scholars doubt the authenticity of Homer, or Euripides, or Caesar's Galic Wars.

What, you need to keep in mind is there is not another collection of books in the world like our Holy Scriptures.

Can you trust our Christian Bible?
You bet you can!

I took a little longer to share the reasonableness of it's textural preservation.

So, now, I am going to be a little briefer in the following reasons to trust the bible.

I say You Can Trust the Bible ...

B. Because of its Historical Accuracy

The Old and New Testaments are filled with references to specific people, places, and events.

Dr. Nelson Glueck was the leading Jewish archaeologist. I heard him give a lecture on the reliable scholarship and the findings of the archaeologists.

He said:

"It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference."

Let me give you a couple of examples of the bible historical accuracy.

The Old Testament mentions a people known as the Hittites about 50 times, but for centuries there was no evidence of such a people. And of course the sceptics went wild about this. However, in 1906, the Hittite capital was uncovered about 90 miles of Ankara, the capital of Turkey.

Another example is the ancient city of Ebla, in northern Syria. It was the leading city of commerce, and the crossroads of wealthy and prosperity, until the Hittites destroyed it in the 16th century B.C. And then archaeological research discovered a vast wealth of historical materials that supports the biblical record. The Ebla documents provide some of the best evidence that some of the people described in the Old Testament actually existed.

David - The critics' verdict was that David was "nothing more than a figure of religious mythology."

Then in 1993 the Tel-Dan Stele was discovered inscribed "house • of David"

Pilate – Again the critics' verdict was that Pilate was "religious mythology"

Then in 1961 the Pilate inscription was found in Caesarea reading "Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea."

Caiaphas - The High Priest who engineered the murder of Jesus. Then in 1990 his burial tomb was opened, and his bone box discovered.

Jesus - Two French atheistic philosophers in the early 18th century argued that Christianity was an amalgamation of various ancient mythologies, and that Jesus was a totally mythical character.

But the fact is Jesus is mentioned by three first century historians.

The Jewish historian Josephus

The Roman historian Tacitus

The Roman Governor Pliny the Younger

The second century Roman historian Suetonius

Think about Jesus Christ divine influence upon all subsequent history.

Jesus Christ was without a doubt one of three things:

1. He was either the son of God in a unique sense, a divine person incarnate in human form or else
2. He was the most daring imposter that ever lived or else
3. He was one of the most hopeless lunatics.

That he claimed to be the son of God in a unique sense and that all men should honor him even as they honored the Father (as he said in John 5:23) and that he and the Father were one (as he said in John 10:30) and that he that had seen him had seen the Father (as he said in John 14:9), of this there can be no honest doubt.

Jesus was then either the divine person that he claimed to be or the most daring imposter or a most hopeless lunatic.

Was his influence upon subsequent history the influence of a lunatic?

Was his influence upon subsequent history the influence of an imposter?

No one but one whose own heart was thoroughly tainted with deceit and fraud would think of saying so.

Not an imposter.

Not a lunatic.

We have only one alternative left.

He was what he claimed to be, the Son of God.

Jesus was God the Son, and your Savior.

By the way, Archaeology has not proven so helpful for other religious writings. Consider the Book of Mormon. Not a single solitary item, location, ancient text has been found to support its claims.

There is not another collection of books in the world like your bible.

The bible is truly miraculous.

I say You Can Trust the Bible ...

C. Because of its Approach to Science

The Bible is not a science text book.

It often uses figures of speech to describe life that scientists would explain in different terms.

For example, it speaks of the sun setting and of the four corners of the earth.

And of course, scientists speak of those events in different terms.

But when the Bible does speak directly about matters of science, it speaks correctly.

The Bible also touches on matters of science in ways that seem to go beyond what was known to humankind at the time.

Let's consider a few instances that are remarkable.

1. The Universe Had a Beginning.

Genesis 1:1-2 (NASB)

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²

The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep

The very first verse of the Bible, written circa 1350 BC, states that the Universe had a beginning.

However, the idea that the Universe is static, that is without

beginning or end, was accepted until 1927, when the Belgian astrophysicist, Georges Lemaître, put forth his theory and mathematical equations to support the concept that the Universe had a beginning.

Based upon his original work, other scientists fine-tuned the idea and it has become the dominate concept Big Bang theory of the nature of our Universe.

2. The Expanding Universe.

Isaiah 40:22 (NASB)

22 It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.

Isaiah states that God “**stretches out the heavens**”; that is, the universe is expanding.

The scientific validation of Isaiah's 'expanding universe' statement did not come until Astronomer Edwin Hubble and his associates proved it, in the 1920s, by observations of movement in distant galaxies.

Thus, the Bible was proven to be correct 2500 years before scientists confirmed it to be so.

3. The Spherical Nature of the Earth.

Isaiah says God **sits above the circle of the earth**

4The word translated “**circle**” here is the Hebrew word **chuwg** which indicates something spherical and rounded - not something that is flat or square.

The Book of Isaiah dates to the 700s BC.

Thus, we know that Isaiah's emphatic statement of the spherical nature of the Earth precedes Greek speculations on the subject by a good 350-400 years.

4. The Earth Is Without Physical Supports.

The Egyptians believe the Earth was supported upon four poles. The Hindu scriptures claimed the Earth was supported by four

elephants which stood upon the back of a sea-turtle.
The ancient Greeks held that the titan, Atlas, held the Earth on his shoulders.

The Bible never put forward such myths, but said,

Job 26:7 (NASB)

7 "He stretches out the north over empty space And hangs the earth on nothing.

The scientific validation of the Earth not having physical supports but suspending and held in space by gravitational forces came in AD 1687 by Sir Isaac Newton.

That means the Bible spoke of this scientific fact over 3500 years before Newton.

Job's and Newton's position received visual proof when manned rockets orbited the Earth a mere 50 years ago.

5. The Hydrologic Cycle.

The Hydrologic Cycle is the scientific term for the process whereby Earth's water follows an on-going cycle of evaporation from lakes and oceans, condensation in the atmosphere (formation of water-bearing clouds) and precipitation (falls to the ground by rain and snow), collects in bodies of water (lakes and oceans) and repeats the cycle again.

The 'discoverer' of this theory was Bernard Palissey in AD 1580. However, the Bible described the Hydrologic Cycle 3500 years earlier than Palissey -

Job 26:8-9 (NASB)

8 "He wraps up the waters in His clouds, And the cloud does not burst under them. 9 "He obscures the face of the full moon And spreads His cloud over it.

Job 36:27-29 (NASB)

27 "For He draws up the drops of water, They distill rain from the mist, 28 Which the clouds pour down, They drip upon man abundantly. 29 "Can anyone understand the spreading of the

clouds, The thundering of His pavilion?

Psalm 135:6-7 (NASB)

⁶ Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps. ⁷ He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; Who makes lightnings for the rain, Who brings forth the wind from His treasuries.

Ecclesiastes 1:7 (NASB)

⁷ All the rivers flow into the sea, Yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, There they flow again.

6. The Value of Blood.

Leviticus 17:11 (NASB)

¹¹ 'For the life of the flesh is in the blood,

And that was written prior to 1400 BC.

Here we learn that the physical body's life and health is dependent upon its blood.

In 1616, William Harvey discovered that blood circulation is the key factor in physical life - confirming what the Bible revealed 3,000 years earlier.

7. Mankind Created From One Man and Woman.

Acts 17:26 (NASB)

²⁶ and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,

Genesis 3:20 (NASB)

²⁰ Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all *the* living.

The Bible teaches as fact that all Mankind descends from a single man and woman.

In the last twenty-five years, researchers have discovered that we have all descended from one gene pool.

In 1987, Allan Wilson presented research showing that by analyzing Mitochondrial DNA from women all over the world, it was clear that Mankind descended from a single woman.

A 1995 study of a section of Y chromosomes from 38 men from different ethnic groups around the world was consistent with the biblical teaching that we all come from one man.

Thus, the Bible's assertion that Mankind has a common male and female parentage, has been confirmed by science almost 3500 years later.

Now, I want to recap one very important point mentioned a few minutes ago...

If you combined all of the manuscripts of the writings of Homer, Plato, Euripides, Sophocles, Thucydides, Aristophanes, Aristotle, Herodotus, Demosthenes, Caesar, Livy, Lucretius, Pliny, Seutonius and Tacitus...they would number about 1062 manuscripts.

In comparison, there are presently 5,686 Greek manuscripts in existence today for the New Testament.

Because they are so numerous, the New Testament manuscripts can be cross-checked for accuracy and they have been found to be 99.5% textually pure.

That is amazing accuracy.

In addition to the Greek manuscripts, there are over 19,000 manuscript copies in the Syriac, Latin, Coptic, and Aramaic languages.

The total supporting New Testament manuscript base is over 24,000.

If the critics of the Bible dismiss the New Testament as unreliable information, then they must also dismiss the reliability of the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Caesar, Homer, and the other authors of antiquity I just mentioned.

On the other hand, if the critics acknowledge the historicity and writings of those other individuals, then they must also retain the

historicity and writings of the New Testament authors; after all, the evidence for the New Testament's reliability is far greater than the others.

It is good evidence on which to base trust in the reliability of the New Testament.

Well, I said that I was going to give you some of the reasons why I believe the Bible to be the Word of God.

And believe me, I just said "**some of the reasons.**"

There is so much more that could be said, but for me, I sing ...

**The B-I-B-L-E,
Yes that's the book for me,
I stand alone on the Word of God,
The B-I-B-L-E.**

**The B-I-B-L-E,
Yes that's the book for me,
I read and pray, trust and obey,
The B-I-B-L-E.**

Now, how do you apply the truth that the bible is God's word to you?

If you claim to be a believer, do you trust the bible enough to put it into practice?

Are you as willing to obey its commands as you are to claim its promises?

If you haven't committed your life to Jesus the Messiah, what are you going to do with the Bible?

The Bible is the only book that tells you how to have eternal life.

You can't be neutral about what God commands you to do.

You must either accept what it says, or you must reject it.

If you accept it, and do what God says you must do to have eternal life, heaven awaits.

If you reject it, you will spend eternity out of God's loving presence, because hell awaits.

What are you going to do with the Bible?

Prayer and Invitation

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.

KEY VERSE

Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.—[Psalm 96:1](#)

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.

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.
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