

Psalms 96:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

O sing unto the LORD a new song: sing unto the LORD, all the earth.

Analysis

This verse opens with a command to sing 'a new song,' establishing immediacy and freshness in worship. The Hebrew 'shir chadash' (new song) appears repeatedly in the Psalms (Psalm 98:1, 149:1) and suggests that worship should be ever-renewed rather than stale or rote. The 'newness' may indicate songs composed for specific occasions, responses to fresh mercies, or spiritual renewal. 'Sing unto the LORD, all the earth' universalizes the call to worship - not merely Israel but 'all the earth' should worship YHWH. This universalistic vision is remarkable in an ancient context where religions were typically territorial and national. It declares that the God of Israel is the God of all creation and worthy of universal worship. The command structure creates urgency: this is not optional or leisurely but an imperative demand. The repetition 'Sing unto the LORD' emphasizes the centrality of God as the object of worship. The phrase establishes that authentic worship must be responsive to God's ongoing work ('new' song) while being offered by the entire creation ('all the earth'). This verse sets the theological tone for the entire psalm: God's sovereignty extends beyond Israel to all humanity and nature.

Historical Context

Psalms 96 is one of the 'Psalms of YHWH's Kingship' (Psalms 93, 95-100) that celebrate God's reign. These psalms appear to be post-exilic, possibly composed during or shortly after the Babylonian exile. The vision of 'all the earth' singing to YHWH would have been particularly meaningful to exiled Jews living among pagan nations. The call for a 'new song' may reflect the post-exilic community's sense

that God had renewed His faithfulness through restoration (though incomplete). The emphasis on YHWH's universal kingship countered the apparent supremacy of Marduk during exile and the subsequent rule of Persian and Greek powers. The command to 'all the earth' reflects the Jewish conviction that ultimately all nations would recognize YHWH's supremacy (Isaiah 49:6, 52:10). In the context of Second Temple Judaism, when Israel lacked political independence, such psalms asserted theological reality: despite earthly appearances, YHWH remained sovereign. The psalm was ultimately placed in the Psalter at a point (following Psalm 95) where it would have been sung in Temple worship, making the ancient Jewish community the voice for all earth in praising YHWH.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to sing 'a new song,' and how should worship respond to God's fresh acts rather than relying on tradition alone?
2. How does the command for 'all the earth' to sing to the LORD reflect God's universal sovereignty and the ultimate destiny of all creation?
3. Why might calling for a universal song of worship be particularly meaningful for those experiencing oppression or political insignificance?
4. In what ways does newness in worship prevent it from becoming merely mechanical or rote?
5. How does this verse establish that faithful Israel's worship participates in a cosmic reality of God's sovereignty?

Interlinear Text

שִׁירוּ לַיהוָה שִׁירוּ לַיהוָה שִׁירוּ לַיהוָה
O sing unto the LORD song a new O sing unto the LORD H3605
H7891 H3068 H7892 H2319 H7891 H3068

הָאֲרֶץ:
all the earth
H776

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 149:1 (Sin): Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints.

Psalms 33:3 (Sin): Sing unto him a new song; play skilfully with a loud noise.

Psalms 98:1 (Sin): O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory.

Revelation 14:3 (Parallel theme): And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

Revelation 5:9 (Parallel theme): And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

Psalms 68:32 (Sin): Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth; O sing praises unto the Lord; Selah:

Romans 15:11 (References Lord): And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people.