

LESSON 9

God Reigns on Earth

Psalm 96:10-13

Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns. The world is firmly established; it cannot be shaken. He judges the peoples fairly." Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice; let the sea and all that fills it resound. Let the fields and everything in them celebrate. Then all the trees of the forest will shout for joy before the Lord, for he is coming—for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his faithfulness.

PSALM 96:10-13

Psalm 96:10-13 serves as a triumphant call to declare that the Lord reigns, not just in heaven but here on earth. It encourages God's people to proclaim His rule to the nations, worship Him with reverence and joy, and anticipate His coming judgment. Far from a message of fear, this psalm celebrates God's justice and faithfulness as the hope of the world. Even creation itself joins in the song, rejoicing that the King is coming to make things right. For those living under His reign, this psalm inspires confidence, drives mission, and roots our joy in the unshakable truth that **God reigns — now and forever.**

Class Objective: This class will help students understand what it means to say, "The Lord reigns," and why this statement remains relevant today. We will explore how Psalm 96 links worship and witness, calling us to declare God's rule with joy and confidence. The lesson will challenge us to live with hope, trust in God's justice, and speak boldly of His coming reign.

Introduction

What do you say to a world falling apart? What can God's people offer when injustice, war, corruption, and fear fill the headlines? Psalm 96 responds with a clear, powerful call: **"Say among the nations, 'The Lord reigns!'"** That's the message. Human solutions and political campaigns won't solve it. The world's only lasting hope is this ancient, thunderous truth: **God is King.**

Psalm 96 is part of a group of enthronement psalms (Psalms 93-99) that celebrate Yahweh's sovereign rule over all creation. These psalms do not just look back to the past or focus solely on Israel; they declare a truth intended for the whole world: then and now. What makes Psalm 96 especially powerful is how it combines the **call to worship** with the **call to witness**. It isn't enough to praise God privately. His greatness calls for a public, worldwide declaration. "Declare His glory among the nations...for the Lord reigns."

The last part of this psalm, verses 10-13, is our focus for this lesson. It's where the entire psalm points to one great truth: God is not only King... He is coming to judge the world with righteousness and truth.

This is a reason to rejoice, not tremble. Judgment here is not about fear and dread but about hope and restoration. It is a call for the whole earth, seas, fields, trees, and all people, to lift their voices in joyful praise.

Psalms 96 was probably sung at national festivals like the Festival of Shelters, where Yahweh was celebrated as King. Some scholars connect it to the dedication of the Second Temple. Others link its themes to David's celebration when the ark was brought to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 16). Whether written during David's time or centuries later, the message remains powerful and relevant: **God's reign is real. His justice is certain. And His coming judgment is good news.**

As we examine this passage, we'll see why the truth of God's reign matters more than ever. It encourages us to live with joy, speak boldly, and hope in something unshakeable. This isn't just religious sentiment... It's the foundation beneath our feet. **The Lord reigns. The King is coming. Let the earth rejoice.**

Say Among the Nations: "The Lord Reigns" (v. 10)

Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns. The world is firmly established; it cannot be shaken. He judges the peoples fairly."

This verse is a command and a public proclamation: **"Say among the nations: The Lord reigns."** The Hebrew phrase carries urgency and a loud voice. The psalmist is urging God's people to boldly declare something that changes everything to the world.

A Message for the Nations

This is not Israel whispering to itself. This is the voice of the covenant people proclaimed high to every tribe, language, and nation. The same God who created the heavens (v. 5) now calls for every part of creation to recognize and serve His reign. The call is mission-driven: "Declare His glory among the nations" (v. 3), and now: "Say among the nations: 'The Lord reigns.'" These commands reflect the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) and forecast the gospel's spread in the book of Acts (Acts 1:8). This is evangelism in its oldest form—declaring who God is and what He's doing.

In a world filled with human rulers, corrupt powers, and false gods, this message challenges every other claim to authority. **Yahweh reigns.** Not Molech, not Baal, not Caesar, not Pharaoh. Not money, not self, not nation. God alone is King.

A Kingdom That Cannot Be Shaken

The psalm continues: **"The world is firmly established; it cannot be shaken."** This isn't denying global instability or human suffering; it's emphasizing something deeper. God's reign isn't fragile. His kingdom can't be toppled. His plans aren't at the mercy of human chaos.

This reminds us of Psalm 93:1 while looking forward to Hebrews 12:28, where we are told, "Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful." God's throne is not subject to elections.

His reign doesn't depend on how we feel or what the polls say. His sovereignty offers the only real stability in a world that often feels unmoored.

A Judge Who Is Fair

Finally, we are told: “**He judges the peoples fairly.**” God's justice is not corrupt. He is impartial. He sees all, knows all, and executes judgment with perfect fairness. This starkly contrasts human judges, who are limited, biased, and often unjust. The Hebrew word for “fairly” conveys the idea of **equity, righteousness, and integrity.**

This verse provides comfort to the oppressed and warns the powerful. Every injustice will be brought before the throne of the true Judge. And for those who belong to Him, this judgment is good news. It means **wrongs will be corrected** and **truth will prevail.**

A Gospel-Shaped Announcement

Psalm 96:10 serves as a prelude to the gospel. It declares a reigning King who offers salvation and administers justice. In Christ, this verse finds its complete significance: Jesus reigns at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33–36), and He will return to judge the living and the dead (Acts 17:31). His reign brings peace, His rule brings joy, and His judgment will make all things new.

So what should we do? **Say it.** Say it to your neighbor. Say it to the nations. Say it in worship. Say it in suffering. **The Lord reigns.**

Let Creation Rejoice (v. 11-12)

Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice; let the sea and all that fills it resound. Let the fields and everything in them celebrate. Then all the trees of the forest will shout for joy

The reign of God is not just good news for humanity. It is **cosmic** in scope. These verses invite us into an amazing vision of all creation responding to the kingship of Yahweh. The heavens, earth, sea, fields, and trees are not passive background scenery—they are participants in a universal chorus of joy.

Creation Is Not Silent

The psalmist personifies creation to illustrate that God's reign restores everything. The heavens rejoice. The earth celebrates. The sea roars—not with destruction but with praise. The fields exult. The trees shout.

This is not poetic exaggeration. It reflects a profound theological truth: **all creation was made by God, is sustained by God, and yearns for God's redemption.** Paul speaks of this in Romans 8:19-22, where he describes creation groaning and waiting for the day of liberation from decay.

Psalm 96:11-12 offers a glimpse of that coming liberation—not groaning, but **celebrating.** The natural world was subjected to futility because of sin (Genesis 3), but it will not remain that way. When the King comes, the world will rejoice like never before.

The World Responds to Righteousness

What inspires the celebration? Not wealth. Not power. Not progress. Creation rejoices because the Lord reigns and is coming to judge the world in righteousness (v. 13). The justice of God is not just a courtroom issue; it is environmental, global, and universal. When justice flows from the throne of God, **everything prospers**. The trees don't fear His coming... they **welcome** it.

This vision is also seen in other psalms. Psalm 98:7-9 mirrors this passage almost word for word. Isaiah 55:12 says, "The mountains and the hills will break into singing before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands." The same is true in Revelation 21, where heaven and earth are made new under the reign of the Lamb.

Why This Matters

These verses present a broader view of God's kingdom. We often limit God's reign to personal salvation or church activities. But here, we are reminded: **The reign of God impacts everything**. It restores broken systems, heals creation, and renews all things. The gospel is not escapism—it's a declaration that the King is coming, and the entire world will rejoice.

We should long for this day. We should share and celebrate this joy. And we should live now in a way that reflects the goodness and justice of the King who is coming.

The King is Coming to Judge (v. 13)

before the LORD, for he is coming—for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his faithfulness.

This is the crescendo of the psalm. Everything has been building to this: **the Lord is not only reigning now—He is coming**. And when He comes, He comes not to destroy but to judge in righteousness and faithfulness. This is the foundation of the world's rejoicing. **God's justice is not something to dread—it is something to hope for**.

He Is Coming

The phrase is repeated for emphasis: "He is coming... He is coming." It is intentional, certain, and impossible to ignore. The psalmist builds anticipation. Unlike false gods who are lifeless and silent (v. 5), Yahweh is **active and close**. He is not distant. He is not ignoring the world. He is coming.

This anticipation looks beyond Israel's history to a final, ultimate arrival: the coming of the Messiah. In Christ, God has already come to bring salvation (John 3:17), and He will come again to deliver judgment and renewal (Acts 17:31; Revelation 22:12). Psalm 96 encompasses both themes: God's presence in the present and His assured return in the future.

He Will Judge the Earth

The judgment of God is often misunderstood. We associate it with fear, condemnation, and destruction. But in the biblical sense, **judgment means setting things right**. It is the action of a righteous King who comes to restore justice and truth to a world marred by sin.

The psalmist declares that this judgment will be:

- **With righteousness:** God's standards remain uncorrupted. He does not favor the rich, the powerful, or the religious elite. He judges with truth and fairness. He sees clearly and rules justly.
- **With faithfulness:** This word signifies **steadfast love, truth, and trustworthiness**. God does not change, lie, or forget. His judgment is not only right... it aligns with His covenant promises.

This judgment is **universal**: He will judge the **world** and the **peoples**. No one is excluded. Every nation, tribe, and language will answer to the King.

The Gospel in the Judgment

This is where Psalm 96 points us directly to the gospel. The righteous Judge is also the compassionate Savior. Jesus has come once to bear our judgment (Isaiah 53:5-6; Romans 3:25-26), and He will come again to govern with justice. For the believer, His return is not a threat; it is a promise.

His judgment is the final answer to the evil and injustice we see today. It is the hope of the persecuted, the healing of the broken, the vindication of the faithful. The psalmist doesn't ask, "Will God come?" but proclaims: **He is coming**. And that truth reshapes how we live, worship, and witness right now.

Kingdom Connection: Worship That Fuels Witness

Psalm 96 shouts a message that rings throughout the Bible: **God reigns, and His reign demands a response**. These final verses take us beyond personal piety or temple ritual, they call us to see God as the reigning King over all the earth. This is kingdom language. And it's not abstract. It's deeply practical.

The Gospel of the Kingdom

When Jesus began His ministry, He declared: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15). That good news echoes Psalm 96: "The Lord reigns!" In fact, Psalm 96 serves as a **preview of the gospel**. It announces that God reigns, that judgment is approaching, and that this is a cause for joy. It proclaims that God's justice will cover the earth and His faithfulness will be made known to all peoples.

When the New Testament discusses Christ's return in judgment (Acts 17:31; Revelation 19:11), it does so with the same tone found here: **hopeful anticipation** for those who belong to Him. The King is coming, not just to rule over the church, but over the nations. And His reign isn't delayed until some distant day; it is already established in heaven and is growing even now through the church (Matthew 28:18-20).

Worship and Witness Are United

This psalm teaches us that **genuine worship leads to worldwide testimony**. “Say among the nations...” (v. 10) is not just poetic; it is a command. If we genuinely believe that the Lord reigns, we will speak it, live it, and share it. As one writer said, God's people are never more faithful than when our worship is **lively and joyful**, and our witness is **clear and courageous**.

Psalm 96 refuses to separate the two. Worshiping God without proclaiming His reign is incomplete. Speaking of His reign without hearts that rejoice in His majesty is empty. Worship that stirs the soul will lead to open mouths. Evangelism isn't just about techniques or strategies; it begins with people who are in awe of their King.

A Global and Cosmic Vision

This kingdom is not limited to Israel. It's not even limited to humanity. The sea, the fields, and the trees are invited to rejoice (vv. 11–12). Why? Because the Lord reigns. His rule restores all things. His justice is for all creation. Romans 8 reminds us that the natural world groans for that day. Psalm 96 shows us what it will look like when that day arrives—**rejoicing everywhere**.

This vision broadens our perspective. The kingdom of God isn't limited to what happens in our church on Sunday. It encompasses God's global plan for all people groups and the entire universe to know, worship, and obey Him.

So What?

If we truly believe “the Lord reigns,” then:

- We live with **hope** even in a chaotic world.
- We resist the temptation to trust in earthly power.
- We long for Christ's return and live like it's soon.
- We speak of the gospel boldly, clearly, and joyfully.
- We worship God with reverence, joy, and a sense of purpose.

Psalm 96 doesn't just announce that the King reigns; it trains us to **live like it's true**.

What's In This For Us?

Psalm 96:10-13 calls us to lift our eyes, to see a bigger picture of God, a deeper hope for the world, and a clearer mission for our lives. It's not just about ancient worship; it's about how we live today in light of God's reign.

We can have confidence in a shaky world. We live amidst political chaos, moral confusion, and personal uncertainty. But this psalm reminds us: “**The world is firmly established; it cannot be shaken.**” (v. 10)

That doesn't mean life won't be hard, it means God's rule is secure. He isn't panicked. He isn't losing control. We can rest in His authority when everything around us is unstable.

Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful. — Hebrews 12:28

God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble. — Psalm 46:1

We know judgment is coming—and that's good news. Judgment might seem frightening. But for those who trust God, it signifies **justice, not destruction**. It means the broken will be healed, the proud humbled, and the oppressed uplifted. He will judge the world righteously (v. 13). That's what we yearn for.

Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is just? — Genesis 18:25

He has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. — Acts 17:31

We're called to speak boldly. Verse 10 says: "Say among the nations..." That means us. If you believe the gospel, you can't keep it quiet. We are not just saved to worship, we are sent to **witness**. Your life and your words point people to the King.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations. — Matthew 28:19

Proclaim his salvation from day to day. — Psalm 96:2

Our worship should be joyful, public, and reverent. This psalm doesn't allow for sleepy, lifeless worship. It calls for singing, shouting, declaring, rejoicing, trembling. God's people are meant to **reflect His glory** through meaningful, passionate praise. He is worthy! Our worship should show it.

Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; let the whole earth tremble before him. — Psalm 96:9

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God. — Hebrews 13:15

We live in hope of the King's return. Verse 13 ends with a forward-looking hope: **He is coming**. That's not wishful thinking. That's the future of the world. Jesus is coming again. We live today in light of that day.

Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him. — Revelation 1:7

Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! — Revelation 22:20

Conclusion

Psalm 96 ends with joy, but it is not shallow happiness. It is the gladness of a world that finally recognizes who is in control. It is the celebration of creation under a fair King. These verses do not deny the brokenness of the world; they point us to the only One who can make it right. "The Lord reigns" is a statement that changes our view of everything.

For Israel, this psalm was a call to declare God's glory to the nations. For us, it's the same. We are kingdom people—those who live under the reign of Jesus and yearn for His return. That means we worship passionately, witness urgently, and wait patiently. While others hold onto power, wealth, or ideology, we rest in this truth: **our King is coming**.

So let the heavens rejoice. Let the earth be glad. Let the church rise up and declare once more: **The Lord reigns.**

For Discussion

1. What does it mean for us to say, “The Lord reigns,” even when the world feels chaotic?
How does that shape our confidence and our prayers?
2. Why is God’s judgment seen as good news in this psalm? What distinguishes God’s judgment from human judgment?
3. Verse 10 calls us to “say among the nations.” What are some practical ways we can declare God’s reign in our everyday lives?
4. What does the celebration of nature in verses 11-12 teach us about God’s kingdom?
How should that influence the way we see creation?
5. Psalm 96 connects worship and witness.
Why do you think passionate worship often results in bold evangelism?
6. Verse 13 discusses God’s judgment with righteousness and faithfulness.
Why is it crucial that we trust in God’s character as we wait for His return?
7. How can our church family better reflect the joy, hope, and mission of Psalm 96?
What needs to grow or change in our worship and witness?