

Psalm 131 Bible Study

This lesson is meant to accompany the song "Psalm 131" as written by musician, Hebrew scholar, and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary graduate Jeremy Fisher. To get the most out of this lesson, you will need to play the song during your class. The audio file is currently available, at no charge, from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary at www.pts.edu/Lent_Resource_Kit_2017.



COMPLIMENTS OF THE
MILLER SUMMER YOUTH INSTITUTE AT
PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PSALM 131 MUSICAL BIBLE STUDY

TEACHER'S BACKGROUND ON LENT

"The English name is derived from the Anglo-Saxon Lencten, spring."

"We can trace up to very early times the existence of a preparatory fast to Easter, for it is mentioned definitely by Irenaeus and Tertullian. While, however, the fast seems to have been one universally kept, there seems to have been very great latitude as to the duration of the fast."

- Dictionary of Christian Antiquities

"This period of course grew out of the time of the Master's temptation in the wilderness . . . Gregory the Great brought uniformity by enacting that Lent should consist of the forty-six days preceding Easter, Sundays being excepted from fasting."

- Memoirs of the Lutheran Liturgical Association

The Psalms are often used during lent because they cover such a wide range of emotions and experiences. This lesson will look closely at one psalm in particular from three different translations.

A handout is included in this study. It will be helpful for participants to have the three translations in front of them for this lesson. Simply print page 4 and cut as needed!

If you use this study, we would love to hear your feedback! You can reach us at SYI@pts.edu.

LESSON PLAN

OPENING

Open with prayer.

INTRODUCTION

We are in the liturgical season of Lent. Often considered a time for repentance and preparation, the season of Lent has deep roots in Christian practice. While the season of Advent leads us to Christmas, Lent leads us to Easter.

Certain Psalms are particularly appropriate for this season because of their prayerful and preparatory tone. Today, we will read a Psalm in two translations, and listen to a third that has been set to music.

Translation 1:

Our first translation of this psalm is from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, which was first published in the mid-1900s, which puts it pretty close to our own context.

[Leader may now read Ps 131 from the RSV.]

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

- 1 O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvellous for me.
- 2 But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.
- 3 O Israel, hope in the Lord
from this time on and for evermore.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Having read this psalm, what words stick out to you?
- What images come to mind?
- What would it take for you to be able to pray this psalm as a prayer?

Translation 2:

Our second translation of this psalm is from the King James Version, which was first published in the early 1600s, which is much farther removed from us than the RSV. Listen for the differences and similarities in this version.

[Leader may now read Ps 131 from the KJV]

- 1 Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty:
neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things
too high for me.
- 2 Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child
that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a
weaned child.
- 3 Let Israel hope in the Lord from henceforth and for
ever.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What differences do you hear between these two translations?
- Which version is more poetic? Which version is more clear? Which do you prefer?
- Having read both versions, if you were to set this to music, what style of music would you use? What instruments would you use?

Third and Final Translation:

This final translation was done by musician, Hebrew scholar, and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary graduate Jeremy Fisher. Drawing on his experience as a jazz performer, he set the psalm to music for use in a variety of worship services. This translation was done for a specific purpose in the early 2000s. (Hear more: <http://jeremyfisherjr.com/trio/>)

We will listen to this version twice. First, close your eyes and just listen.

[Play Psalm 131 – translated and performed by Jeremy Fisher]

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How is this similar to the way you would set this psalm to music? How is it different?
- Did this version surprise you in any way?

Now, listen again with the translation in front of you. Take notes on what you think or feel about Jeremy's version.

[Play Jeremy Fisher's Liturgical translation again.]

1 Oh Lord, my heart is not lifted up, and my eyes are not raised too high.
I do not occupy myself with things too great or marvelous for me,

2 But I have calmed and quieted my being.
Like a small child, calm and quiet in loving parent's arms,
Like a small child is my inner being.

3 Oh Israel, hope in the Lord now and always

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How is this version consistent with the feel of this psalm? How is it inconsistent?
- What changes when you hear this psalm set to music? Do you have the same reaction to it?

CLOSING QUESTIONS

- Having looked at three versions, which do you enjoy the most? Why?
- Which was most thought provoking? Why?
- What fights against calm or quiet in your life?
- What steps could you take to calm or quiet your soul?

HOMEWORK

This week, set aside time at least once (for bonus points once a day) to calm and quiet your soul.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, as we celebrate Lent, guide our preparations for Easter. Calm and quiet our souls, and focus us on you. In Jesus name, Amen.

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REVISED STANDARD VERSION

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KING JAMES VERSION

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