



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 133

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# Introduction

- The title of this Psalm is: *A Song of Ascents. Of David*
- Of the fifteen Psalms in the series, Psalm 133 is the last of the four attributed to King David in the title
- As to the occasion on which the Psalm was composed, it cannot be certainly determined
- However, the kingdom of Israel was first united under David, and it is appropriate that David would write a Psalm about living together in unity
- David's kingdom ended a terrible season of national division and conflict, 2 Samuel 5:1



# Introduction

- But, according to others, it was written when the rebellion of his son Absalom was defeated, and all the tribes of Israel brought back the king, and show the greatest zeal and loyalty to him, 2 Samuel 19:9
- Some claim it to be a prophetic Psalm, related to the union of the tribes after the Babylon captivity, who had been disunited in the times of Rehoboam, but now were no more two nations and kingdoms
- Another opinion says that the Psalm represents the priests and Levites returned from captivity, and united in the service of God in the sanctuary





# Introduction

- Still others carry it further to the first times of the Gospel, when the Christians were of one heart and of one soul, Acts 4:32
- It may have also been composed for the service of the people when gathered in their annual festivals
- The Jewish people sang Psalm 133 to express their joy in coming together for worship at the Temple, where God promised to meet them
- It describes the blessings which flowed from their meeting at Jerusalem at the great religious festivals
- The Psalm proclaims oneness in faith



# Introduction

- Such meetings were a consecration of the whole nation; they spread a spirit of brotherly harmony throughout them; they sustained and enhanced the national life by bringing individuals into fellowship with God and with one another
- The Psalm is an illustration, in most beautiful language, of brotherly love, particularly in regard to its gentle, and sweet influence - like the ointment which flowed down from the head of the anointed priest
- Psalm 133 tells us three things about living together in unity
- It tells us the goodness of living together in unity



# Introduction

- It tells us the source of living together in unity
- It tells us the blessing of living together in unity
- This Psalm, the preceding, and the following, appear to make one subject
- In Psalm 132, the Lord is entreated to enter His temple, and pour out His blessings
- In Psalm 133, the beautiful order and harmony of the temple service is pointed out, and in Psalm 134, all are exhorted to diligence and watchfulness in the performance of their duty





# Introduction

## Psalm Outline

- Unity Among God's People is Good and Pleasant 133:1
- Like Oil on the Head 133:2
- Like the Dew of the Mountains 133:3

# Unity Among God's People is Good and Pleasant 133:1



- Living together in unity is both good and pleasant
- The psalmist seems to have before his eyes some instance of the blessing and the beauty of brotherly unity and harmony which inspires this Psalm
- The goodness of living together in unity is so good, that the psalmist says, *Behold!* Look! Marvel at what I am about to describe to you!
- It is well worthy of admiration; pause and look and contemplate upon it!
- It is good in itself, in accordance with the will of God, and therefore extremely pleasing to Him, as it is also to all good men



# Unity Among God's People is Good and Pleasant 133:1



- It is *pleasant* because it makes life together as God's people so much more enjoyable than seasons when constant disagreement, contention, and conflict dominate
- Unity among God's people is such a remarkable blessing because it is both *good* and *pleasant* – and both to a high degree, indicated by the repetition of *how*
- The word translated “good” is a word that recalls God's assessment of creation in Genesis 1
- In Genesis 1:25, the creation story tells us that “*And God saw that it was good.*”

# Unity Among God's People is Good and Pleasant 133:1



- At its conclusion, *“God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.”* (Genesis 1:31)
- In the Genesis 2 God declares, *“It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”* (2:18)
- The word “good” in Psalm 133:1 is a reminder of God’s planning of community and kinship for humanity
- St. John Chrysostom says, “There are many things that are good, but lacking delight; other things in turn give satisfaction but lack complete goodness. It is no simple matter for the two to coincide. In this Psalm, by contrast, both these have come together, satisfaction and complete goodness.”

# Unity Among God's People is Good and Pleasant 133:1



- The book of Acts describes the early church and its remarkable unity
- We read in Acts 2: *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers... Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common... breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people.”* (Acts 2:42-47)
- What a beautiful picture of unity
- It pleases God and brings us joy when harmony and good will prevail in our relationships



# Unity Among God's People is Good and Pleasant 133:1



- St. Augustine says, “They first dwelt together in unity; who sold all they had, and laid the price of their goods at the Apostles’ feet, as is read in the Acts of the Apostles. And distribution was made to each one as he had need, and none called anything his own, but they had all things common. And what is ‘together in unity’? They had, he says, one mind and one heart. So they were the first who heard, *Behold how good and how pleasant is it, that brethren dwell together.*”
- By *brethren* he does not mean the members of one family, but the members of the larger family of Israel, the whole nation

# Unity Among God's People is Good and Pleasant 133:1



- David had in mind the relationship that God's people have with one another, not with everyone in the world around them
- Believers should work to have good and peaceable relationships with everyone in general (Romans 12:18), but here the focus is on relationships among God's people
- This Psalm was especially relevant for pilgrims traveling together to Jerusalem
- During the pilgrimages, the Jews enjoyed a unifying experience on their way to Jerusalem

# Unity Among God's People is Good and Pleasant 133:1



- The pilgrims came from many different walks of life, regions, and tribes, as they gathered for one purpose: the worship of the Lord in Jerusalem
- *to dwell together in unity*, as one man, it is not only to dwell and abide in the house of God, but to associate together there, to go up to the house of God with delight to join together in worshipping
- It is to serve the Lord with one mind and to be of one accord, serving one another in love, bearing one another's burdens, forgiving each other, praying with one another, and building up each other and stirring up one another to love and to good works





# Like Oil on the Head 133:2

- The next part of the Psalm tells us the source of living together in unity
- Where does this beautiful, good, pleasant, brotherly unity come from?
- Definitely is not from this world
- The Psalm answers that question
- Living together in unity is like *oil upon the head*
- There is a downward movement in this image
- In the image the blessing comes from above and then pours down on us



# Like Oil on the Head 133:2

- It starts high and then moves downward
- And so in verse 2 the Psalm is telling us that God is the source of living together in unity
- Pouring oil on the head is a picture of hospitality and refreshing
- In the ancient Middle East, it was common to anoint one's head with oil, sometimes as a greeting entering a home (Luke 7:46)
- This was done to refresh the one receiving the oil, and to give a good smell from the fragrance that came from the perfumed oils
- Among God's people, unity refreshes and makes a pleasant atmosphere for all



# Like Oil on the Head 133:2

- But this is not just *precious oil poured on the head*
- It is also running down on the beard
- This is not just a little bit of oil, but this is oil poured out so richly, so fully that it even runs down on the person's beard
- The host is generous and gracious
- What an abundant blessing unity is!
- It is like oil poured out so richly that it flows from the head to the beard, and then down to the very edge of the priest's *garments*
- Oil was also symbol of joy and festivity (Psalm 45:7), but it is not common oil that is mentioned here; it is like *precious oil*





# Like Oil on the Head 133:2

- *The beard of Aaron*, The brotherly unity is compared to the sacred oil with which the High-priest was anointed (Exodus 30:23)
- This sacred oil was poured upon Aaron's head (Exodus 29:7; Leviticus 8:12; Leviticus 21:10) when he was consecrated to the office of high-priest, (Exodus 29:21)
- It would flow down upon his beard and on to his shoulders and his breast, upon which he bore the names of the Twelve Tribes (Exodus 28:9-12,17-21), symbolizing thereby the consecration of the whole nation of which he was the representative



# Like Oil on the Head 133:2

- The stream of perfumed oil, carefully compounded with aromatic spices, would diffuse its fragrance all around, symbolizing the holy influence which should come from the representative of Israel, and from the nation which he represented
- The idea then seems to be, that as the sacred oil flowed down over Aaron's shoulders, so the harmonious unity of those who dwell in Jerusalem will influence the whole nation for good
- The picture in words shows that unity is a *rich and abundant* blessing – as this oil overflowed the head and came down the beard



# Like Oil on the Head 133:2

- It also shows that unity is a *rare and precious* blessing, because this was holy anointing oil, which was not to be imitated (Exodus 30:22-33)
- What a sacred thing must brotherly love be when it can be likened to an oil which must never be poured on any man but on the Lord's high-priest alone
- Aaron was the high priest, and the anointing of the high priest with oil connects this Psalm with the previous Psalm
- Psalm 132 focused on God's promise of the Messiah, which means "*the Anointed One*."





# Like Oil on the Head 133:2

- And so Aaron the anointed high priest points forward to Jesus, who is our Great High Priest and who is also the promised Messiah
- “*Christ is the head of the church*” and that “*we are members of His body.*” (Ephesians 5:23,30)
- Christ is the head, and therefore our unity is founded in Him
- We are united with Christ, and therefore we are united with each other
- The good blessing of Christian unity flows from the head to the beard which is the Apostles and to the robe, the believers



# Like Oil on the Head 133:2

- It is an image of the whole body of Christ united together with Jesus as our Head
- Oil in the Holy Bible is a symbol of the Holy Spirit
- God poured out His Spirit on Jesus the Head, and Jesus poured out the Spirit on His body the church
- St. Augustine says, “Who is a priest, except that one Priest, who entered into the Holy of Holies? Who is that priest, but Him, who was at once Sacrifice and Priest? But Him who when He found nothing clean in the world to offer, offered Himself? The ointment is on His head, because Christ is one whole with the Church, but the ointment comes from the head.”



# Like Oil on the Head 133:2

- He continues and says, “Our Head is Christ crucified and buried; He rose again, and ascended into heaven; and the Holy Spirit came from the head. Whither? To the beard. The beard signifies the courageous; the beard distinguishes the grown men, the earnest, the active, the vigorous. So that when we describe such, we say, he is a bearded man. Thus that ointment descended first upon the Apostles, descended upon those who bore the first assaults of the world, and therefore the Holy Spirit descended on them.”



# Like the Dew of the Mountains

## 133:3



- David used a second picture to show how wonderful unity is among the people of God
- It is also like the rich *dew* that covers Mount *Hermon*, making it green and moist
- Dew is a symbol for what is refreshing and reviving; and the psalmist compares the influence of brotherly unity upon the nation to the effect of the dew upon vegetation
- Mount Hermon is located in the northern part of Israel extending also along the border of Lebanon and Syria with an altitude of over 9,000 feet above sea level

# Like the Dew of the Mountains

## 133:3



- In the winter it is covered with snow
- It is the highest mountain in Israel and it is known for its cool nights and heavy dew and it stays green all summer long
- Mount Zion is located in the southern part of Israel
- It is a much smaller mountain with an altitude of only 2400 feet above sea level
- Unlike Hermon there is very little dew, rain or any moisture at all in Jerusalem during the summer months
- And so these are two very different mountains
- Hermon to the north, and Zion to the south

# Like the Dew of the Mountains

## 133:3



- Hermon towering over the other mountains, and Zion just part of the range; Mount Hermon cool and refreshing, Mount Zion hot and dry
- What an amazing thing it would be if the dew of Mount Hermon were to fall on Mount Zion
- So, the life-giving effect of harmonious unity upon the nation is as though the most abundant dews fell upon the dry mountain of Zion
- Unity among God's people makes life thriving and healthy
- The word *Descending* here is the same word we saw for *Running down* in verse two



# Like the Dew of the Mountains

## 133:3



- Once again God's blessing of unity comes down to us from heaven
- Apart from God's blessing we are like the dry land of Mount Zion, but God sends His blessing upon us like the dew of Mount Hermon
- The dew here is another symbol for the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit is essential to our unity in Christ
- Ephesians 4 tells us: *"with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* (Ephesians 4:2-3)

# Like the Dew of the Mountains

## 133:3



- It seems that David's mind was turned to the dew of Hermon - to the gentleness, and the abundance, and the reviving nature of that dew - diffusing beauty and abundance all around
- He thought of that dew as descending on the mountains of Zion, not that the dew of Hermon actually descended there; but when changing the comparison, in illustration of brotherly love, from oil to dew, he most naturally thought of the dew of Hermon, and immediately thought of Zion as if that dew descended there
- That is love and unity there would be as if the dew of Hermon should descend on the barren hills of Zion there diffusing beauty, abundance, fertility

# Like the Dew of the Mountains

## 133:3



- Like the oil that flows down the beard of Aaron, so the dew of Mount Hermon reaches far beyond its point of origin and gives life to faraway lands
- God gives His blessing where believers live together in unity
- Even though unity is a gift from God, we still need to live it out in our lives
- We need to “*endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*” (Ephesians 4:3)
- We need to love, apologize, reconcile and forgive
- And the blessing of unity is something God *commands*, (John 17:20-23, Ephesians 1:9-10, Romans 12:18)



# Like the Dew of the Mountains

## 133:3



- The Christian fellowship we experience through the Holy Spirit here on earth, is only a taste of the perfect fellowship we will share with each other in heaven
- We read in 2 Corinthians 1: *“Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”* (2 Corinthians 1:21-22)
- As dew gives life to the vegetation around it, so God’s blessing gives also life
- But unlike the dew which passes away with the morning sun, God’s blessing lasts forever



# Discussion

- Why is unity good and pleasant?
- Why is unity like the precious anointing oil? What comes to mind when you think of the anointing oil?
- What does the picture of oil running down Aaron's beard signify?
- Why is unity like the precious dew of Hermon?