

PSALMS

Chapter 133

When Brothers Dwell in Unity

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! 2 It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! 3 It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

Ps 133 A song in praise of brotherly unity among the people of God. If David was the author, he may have been moved to write it by some such occasion as when, after many years of conflict, all Israel came to Hebron to make him king (2Sa 5:1–3). The first and last (Hebrew) lines (vv. 1, 3b) frame the whole with the song’s main theme. Next to these an inner frame (lines 2,4) elaborates with two striking complementary similes (vv. 2a, 3a). The center line (v. 2b) extends the first simile. (CSB)

All of the Israelites would come from far and near to Mount Zion to offer their sacrifices (Dt 12). The psalm celebrates the unity the people felt with one another as they gathered to worship the one God and to receive His blessings. (TLSB)

The 133rd psalm is a psalm of instruction (in both spiritual and worldly stations). We should live together harmoniously as friends, having one teacher, one authority, and that each should carry the burden of the other. The psalmist gives two comparisons: first, of the anointing oil which flows from Aaron’s head over his beard and robes; second, of the dew which fall from Mr. Hermon onto Mr. Zion. Where things happen in this way, there God gladly dwells with all his grace, blessing, and life. But where disunity and faction prevail, there the devil dwells and death, and all misfortune.

133:1 *brothers dwell in unity* – References to the Levitical priesthood (v 2) and to Zion, the site of the sacrificial worship in the tabernacle and then the temple (v 3), indicate that the emphasis is on religious unity. Agreement in spirit, doctrine, and practice is objectively “good” to achieve and inwardly “pleasant” to experience. (TLSB)

The unity of God’s people is an occasion for joy. (PBC)

133:2 *like precious oil ... on Aaron’s beard ... upon the collar of his robes.* The oil of Aaron’s anointing (Ex 29:7; Lev 21:10) saturated all the hair of his beard and ran down on his priestly robes, signifying his total consecration to holy service. Similarly, brotherly harmony sanctifies God’s people. (CSB)

Pressed from olives and used medicinally to eliminate or prevent lice and soothe the skin (as we would use lotion). Anointing was probably associated with mutual care and a kindness extended to visitors at one’s home. (TLSB)

Vivid description of what it felt like to be anointed by oil, here referring specifically to Aaron and thus to the ordination of priests (Ex 30:22–33). As the priest felt the oil pouring over him in the

presence of the congregation, he must have felt a great sense of unity with the people he was ordained to represent. (TLSB)

Anointing with oil was a symbol of joyful celebration and rich blessing from God. Like anointing oil, fellowship with God flows down and spreads out to all who receive him. The unity of God's people is as refreshing and invigorating as abundant dew in a dry climate. (PBC)

133:3 *dew of Hermon ... on the Mountains of Zion.* A dew as profuse as that of Mount Hermon would make Mount Zion (or the mountains of Zion) richly fruitful (see Ge 27:28; Hag 1:10; Zec 8:12). So would brotherly unity make Israel richly fruitful. The two similes (vv. 2–3) are well chosen: God's blessings flowed to Israel through the priestly ministrations at the sanctuary (Ex 29:44–46; Lev 9:22–24; Nu 6:24–26)—epitomizing God's redemptive mercies—and through heaven's dew that sustained life in the fields—epitomizing God's providential mercies in the creation order. (CSB)

Mount Hermon is a tall, snow-covered mountain at the northern-most border of the Promised Land, part of the range that is the source of the Jordan River. Moisture comes from those mountains to fall on the dry land of Israel. The imagery of dew falling on the mountains of Jerusalem is one of refreshing moisture falling on dry ground. Such is the blessing of spiritual unity. (TLSB)

Although Mt Zion is much lower than Mt Hermon, it is more richly blessed because it is the place of the Lord's presence. (PBC)

life. The great covenant blessing (see Dt 30:15, 19–20; 32:47). (CSB)

From Jerusalem comes the promise of everlasting salvation, symbolized on the temple mount but fulfilled on that other mountain of Zion—Calvary, where Christ was crucified. (TLSB)

This pleasant unity of God's people is not mere organizational unity or is not based on political compromise. It is based on shared loyalty to God and his word. (PBC)

Ps 133 Living in unity is as soothing as being anointed with oil, as refreshing as dew from the mountains on a parched desert. Descriptions of the goodness and pleasure of unity and brotherhood remind us that we often experience discord, strife, and disunity instead. This is true of our families, our communities, and our churches. Yet Christ's prayer is "that they may be one, even as We are one" (Jn 17:11). He bestows that unity through the Holy Spirit in the refreshing waters of Baptism. • We praise You, Lord, for the unity we have through You with all our fellow Christians. Amen. (TLSB)