

## *Psalm 133 Unity: The Portrait, Purpose, and Prayer of Jesus*

### I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The subject and goal of unity, or *oneness* in the Body of Christ, is a glorious but often idealized reality.
- B. In the final hours before the cross, Jesus' heart and prayers were filled with a desire for a unified Bride made one with Him and the Father.



*<sup>11</sup>“Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are...<sup>21</sup>that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. <sup>22</sup>And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one.” (Jn. 17:11, 21–22)*

- C. What does unity look like? What is the purpose of unity? Why is it so valuable to Jesus that unity would be foremost on His thoughts and requests during His final moments on earth?
- D. Of all the passages on unity in the Bible, Psalm 133 is one of the most referenced. It is a helpful passage on unity because it is cast amidst contention, betrayal, and vast differences. In three very small verses, a world opens up which gives us a glorious picture of the unity that God is looking for and the fire from which it is birthed.

### II. CONTEXT: THE PSALMS OF ASCENT (PS. 120–134)

- A. *The Psalms of Ascent*: Psalm 133 is the 14th psalm within a series of 15 psalms entitled *A Song of Ascents*. These psalms form a remarkable group that were organized and implemented for singing at the dedication of Solomon's temple during the Feast of Tabernacles in 959 BC.<sup>1</sup>
- B. *Davidic authorship*: King David authored Psalm 133. It is one of four of the Psalms of Ascent that bear his name. Psalm 122, 124, and 131 are the other three authored by David. Although David had died prior to the dedication of the temple, these psalms were likely penned by David in his later years as part of his preparations for the temple and its ministries that Solomon would build and institute.<sup>2</sup>

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1. 1 Kgs. 8, note especially how 2 Chr. 6:41-42 quotes the words from the song of Ps.132:8.

2. 1 Chr. 22:5, 14; 29:2; cf. 1 Chr. 21:22-26:32; 28:1-29:9; Ps. 132:1-5.

### III. OVERVIEW OF PSALM 133: THREE VERSES, TWO PICTURES, ONE POINT

*<sup>1</sup>BEHOLD, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! <sup>2</sup>It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. <sup>3</sup>It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing—life forevermore. (Ps. 133)*

- A. The unforeseen vision of unity in worship (v. 1)
- B. The unanticipated visuals of unity in worship
  - 1. Unity picture #1: oil between two brothers (v. 2)
  - 2. Unity picture #2: dew between two mountains (v. 3)
- C. The unimaginable result of unity (v. 3)

### IV. THE UNFORESEEN VISION OF UNITY IN WORSHIP (PS. 133:1)

*<sup>1</sup>BEHOLD, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! (Ps. 133:1)*

- A. With the first word of this psalm, David draws our attention to the *rarity* of unity among brothers. This will become evident later in the psalm when the only human examples of unity he could use were Aaron and Moses.
- B. We must not forget the long-standing strife between the tribes of Israel that existed before and after this time. Unity among the twelve tribes of Israel was by no means normal. After becoming a nation under Moses, they stayed together until the death of Joshua, and then waged war against one another for centuries during the period of the Judges. Samuel slightly reunited them, and David more so following Saul's death. During and after David's reign the tribes united for about a century until Solomon's death, however the seeds of tribal animosity were always present.
- C. This picture of the tribal unity at the dedication of the temple only lasted for a short time until the death of Solomon when the rival kingdoms of Judah and Ephraim split, never to be reunited. The animosity was so strong between these brothers that the Judahites killed 500,000 of the men of Ephraim in the late 10th century BC (2 Chr. 13:17).
- D. All of this serves to show that unity is rare to form, and rare to keep.

### V. VISUAL #1: TWO BROTHERS (PS. 133:2)

*<sup>2</sup>It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. (Ps. 133:2)*

- A. David looks to the time of Moses to describe *what* brotherly unity is and *how* it is reached.

- B. David mentions that unity *is like the “oil”* which ran down Aaron’s beard. How does this portray a unity between brothers? The story that David refers to is when Moses, the *brother* of Aaron, anointed Aaron to be high priest of the nation of Israel. This unity was not formed apart from much heartache, pain, betrayal, and disappointment, set amidst the sin of the gold calf.
- C. Recall Moses and Aaron’s brotherly relationship:
1. Aaron was the older brother of Moses, who was privy to more insight and knowledge of the Lord, His ways, and plans than any other person in the nation.
  2. Though both brothers clearly had their flaws, Moses is portrayed as the stronger and more dominant brother. Moses was the star, hero, champion, and valedictorian *par excellent*. Moses is the *deliverer* of the nation, *teacher* of the law (Deut. 1:5), *prophet* like no other (Deut. 34:10), and *miracle-worker* of powerful deeds (Deut. 34:12).<sup>3</sup>
  3. Aaron, on the other hand, is only mentioned in the shadow of Moses’ excellence, or his own failures, like leading the nation into idol worship before the gold calf. Aaron not only fails a significant test of leadership, but also betrays his brother Moses.<sup>4</sup>
- D. The setup
1. Exodus 28-30: Moses is with the Lord in private on the mountain, when the Lord tells him that He has chosen Aaron to be the high priest of the nation of Israel.
  2. As this is happening, the Lord knows that Aaron is failing at the base of the mountain as the people worship the gold calf.
  3. After Moses confronts Aaron, Moses intercedes for the preservation of Aaron (Deut. 9:8-29, especially v. 20).
- <sup>18</sup>And I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger. <sup>19</sup>For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was angry with you, to destroy you. But the LORD listened to me at that time also. <sup>20</sup>And the LORD was very angry with Aaron and would have destroyed him; so I prayed for Aaron also at the same time. (Deut. 9:18–20)*
- E. Moses anoints Aaron
- <sup>12</sup>“Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the door of the tabernacle of meeting and wash them with water. <sup>13</sup>You shall put the holy garments on Aaron, and anoint him and consecrate him, that he may minister to Me as priest. <sup>14</sup>And you shall bring his sons and clothe them with tunics. <sup>15</sup>You shall anoint them, as you anointed their father, that they may minister to Me as priests; for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their*

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3. Kathleen Rochester, “The Missing Brother in Psalm 133,” *The Expository Times* 122 (2011): 380-82.

4. *Ibid.*

*generations.”<sup>16</sup> Thus Moses did; according to all that the LORD had commanded him, so he did. (Ex. 40:12–16)*

- F. *Conclusion:* unity is forged in the fires of forgiveness.

## VI. VISUAL #2: TWO MOUNTAINS (V. 133:3)

<sup>3</sup>*It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing—life forevermore. (Ps. 133:3)*

- A. David mentions that unity *is like the “dew”* which descended down from Mount Hermon and covered Mount Zion. Mount Hermon stands about 10,000 feet high on the northern border of Israel and Lebanon. Compared to Mount Zion, which is a stretch to even call a mountain, Mount Hermon is clearly depicted as the stronger of the two mountains.
- B. As Moses, the stronger of the two brothers, used his strength on behalf of the weaker brother, Aaron, so also Mount Hermon shares its life-giving strength with Mount Zion.
- C. Both pictures describe unity as a *descending* down from the stronger to support, preserve, and share its life with the weaker.

## VII. THE UNIMAGINEABLE RESULT OF UNITY: THE COMMANDED BLESSING (V. 133:3)

<sup>3</sup>*...For there [Zion] the LORD commanded the blessing—life forevermore. (Ps. 133:3)*

- A. The Lord commands the blessing of life for the “weaker,” when the strength of the “strong” is used for the weak. This blessing is of enormous consequences; it is *eternal life*. Both Moses and Mount Hermon, the stronger in the comparisons, foreshadow the coming of a stronger, life-giving Brother who would *descend* to employ His strength on behalf of the weak. This is none other than Jesus, the greater Moses (Deut. 18:15-20; Heb. 3:2-3; Num. 12:6-8).

<sup>5</sup>*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus... (Phil. 2:5)*

<sup>32</sup>*And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. (Eph. 4:32)*

<sup>13</sup>*And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses... (Col. 2:13)*

- B. The Lord intended all humanity, like Aaron, to be a kingdom of priests leading in the worship of Yahweh, yet we all forsook this for idol worship. Our greater and stronger Brother (Heb. 2:11–13) descended from His holy mountain in the incarnation to intercede for us through His death and resurrection. To all who receive His life-giving forgiveness, He commands “eternal life”—a new priesthood that worships Him forevermore.
- C. One point: unity forged in forgiveness fuels our worship, and this worship displays the magnificent love of Jesus toward us.