

PSALM 133

Translation and Performance Notes

LEGEND FOR COLORED WORDS:

Key term

Exegesis of emotions

Imagery

Other translation challenges

Hebrew text	verse	English Close-but-Clear Translation
שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת לְדָוִד הִנֵּה מֵה־טוֹב וּמֵה־נָּעִים שָׁכַת אֲחִים גַּם־יַחַד:	1	The song of the ascents. By David. Look! How good and delightful where brothers dwell together.
כַּשֶּׁמֶן הַטוֹב עַל־הָרֹאשׁ יֵרֵד עַל־הַנֶּהָר זָקוֹן־אַהֲרֹן שֶׁיֵרֵד עַל־כִּי מְדוּתָיו:	2	[Brothers dwelling together is] like the finest oil on the head, flowing down onto the beard, the beard of Aaron; which flows down onto the collar of his garments.
כַּטֵּל־חֶרְמוֹן שֶׁיֵרֵד עַל־הַרְרֵי צִיּוֹן כִּי שָׁם צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־הַבְּרָכָה לְחַיִּים עַד־הָעוֹלָם:	3	[Brothers dwelling together is] like the dew of Hermon, which flows down onto the hills of Zion. For there YHWH has sent the blessing of life everlasting.

GENERAL TRANSLATION TIPS FOR THIS PSALM:

- To translate poetry accurately and beautifully, a knowledge of both the source language's poetry and the target language's poetry is needed. So, here are the steps we recommend to follow when setting out to translate this or any psalm:
 - GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE TARGET LANGUAGE'S POETRY/ARTS.** Research and analyze many examples from numerous genres of poetry, storytelling, and music in the target language and culture, and document findings. See our [Local Arts Analysis Guide](#) for help.
 - GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOURCE LANGUAGE'S (HEBREW) MEANING AND POETRY.** The aim of all our materials is to provide exactly this for the translator, poet/musician/artist, and consultant: an understanding of what the psalm means, as well as its poetics.

3. **TRANSLATE THE PSALM IN THE APPROPRIATE LOCAL ART/POETRY GENRE(S).**
4. **TEST THE TRANSLATION WITH THE LANGUAGE COMMUNITY, SEEKING FEEDBACK ABOUT BOTH WORD CHOICES AND FORM/GENRE/MEDIA OF TRANSLATION.**

TRANSLATION TIPS: PSALM AS A WHOLE

These are the elements that we believe are most helpful to keep in mind during both drafting and checking translations, to help verify that the translation or performance is accurate beyond just a word- or verse-level; just as important is accuracy on the level of a **whole**.

Additionally, these are elements that will guide decisions about **performance** in oral translations, songs, poems, or other kinds of art based on this psalm.

1. Overview

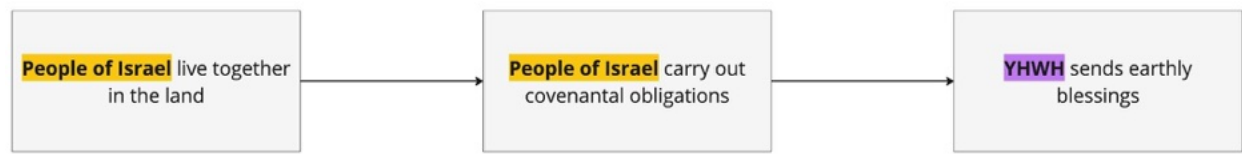
The following gives a basic **Overview** of the Psalm, answering the following questions:

- **Title-what title best describes this unique psalm?**
 - "Where YHWH commanded blessing"
- **Purpose-why was this psalm written?**
 - The purpose of Psalm 133 is **to celebrate the blessings of covenant living**.
- **Content-In summary, what is said in this psalm?**
 - Living in YHWH's covenant community (facilitated by the High Priest) brings delight and never-ending blessing (as abundant as the dew).
- **Message-what is the general theme of this psalm? What seems to be the main point the psalmist wanted his audience to realize by hearing this psalm?**
 - The High Priest connects the covenant community with YHWH's blessings.

2. Story Behind the Psalm and Background Situation

Every psalm has a coherent story behind it. However, many psalms are not written in typical "story" format, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Here, we attempt to understand the story and background that prompted the psalmist to write.

- **Story Behind**-How do the various parts of the psalm fit together into a single, coherent story? What is the main message/theme conveyed by this "story behind"?
 - The psalmist saw himself in a story in which the people of Israel live together in the land, and the people carry out covenant obligations. Then YHWH sends earthly blessings and the blessing of life everlasting.
 - The theme of the story is that covenant obedience, in other words, successful togetherness, results in blessing.
 - The superscription of this psalm tells us that this psalm is a **song of the ascents**. Thus, it was written for the people of Israel to sing as they journeyed up the hill into Jerusalem for holy festivals 3 times per year.
- **Background Situation**-what are the series of events leading up to the time in which the psalm was written?



3. Layout

Knowing the layout of the psalm by sections helps us to understand the progression of thought as the poem progresses.

How to read the visual below: The picture below shows the main “chunks” or pieces of the poem. Verse numbers appear on the left. The second column has a title for each section. The large third column contains a brief summary of the section’s content. As you read through the content column, you will see important words and ideas highlighted in similar colors. The icons on the right may be used as memory aids.

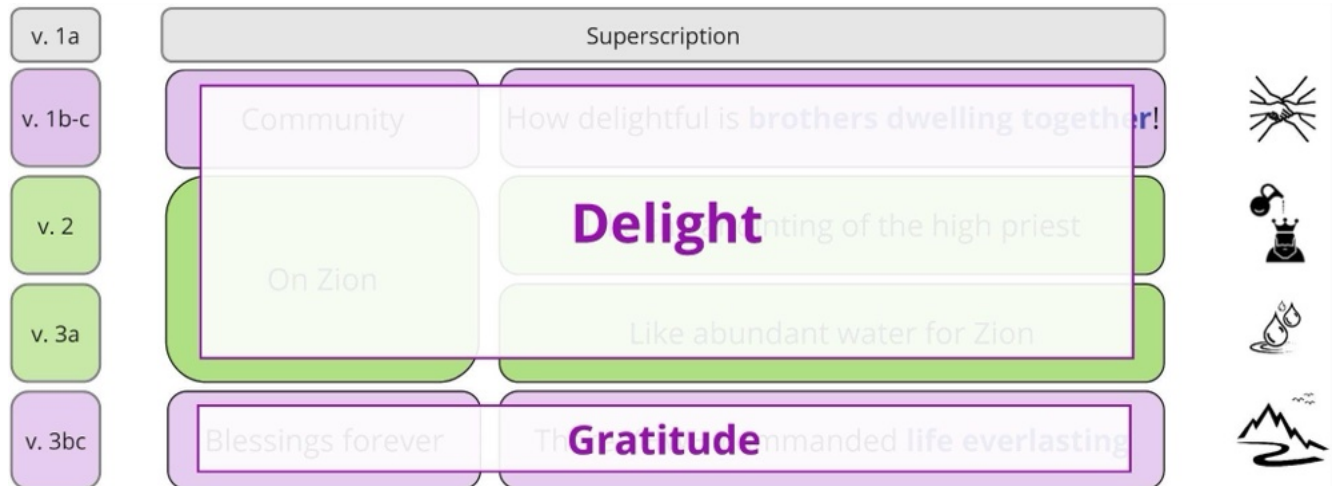
v. 1a	Superscription		
v. 1b-c	Community	How delightful is brothers dwelling together!	
v. 2	On Zion	Like the anointing of the high priest	
v. 3a		Like abundant water for Zion	
v. 3bc	Blessings forever	There YHWH commanded life everlasting	

Progression—what is the flow of thought as the poem progresses?

- The psalmist begins with an exclamation about **the delight of unity**.
- He then expands on this delight with two images about the covenant between YHWH and his people, mediated by the priesthood, which makes unity between them possible.
- Then, the psalmist gives the reason why unity in Israel is so delightful and desirable: because YHWH blesses it, because it is obedience to his covenant law. And the blessing is defined as life everlasting.

4. Emotions

Part of poetry is communicating emotion. Each section, and even each verse, can contain a number of different emotions. Here are the main emotional themes of each section:

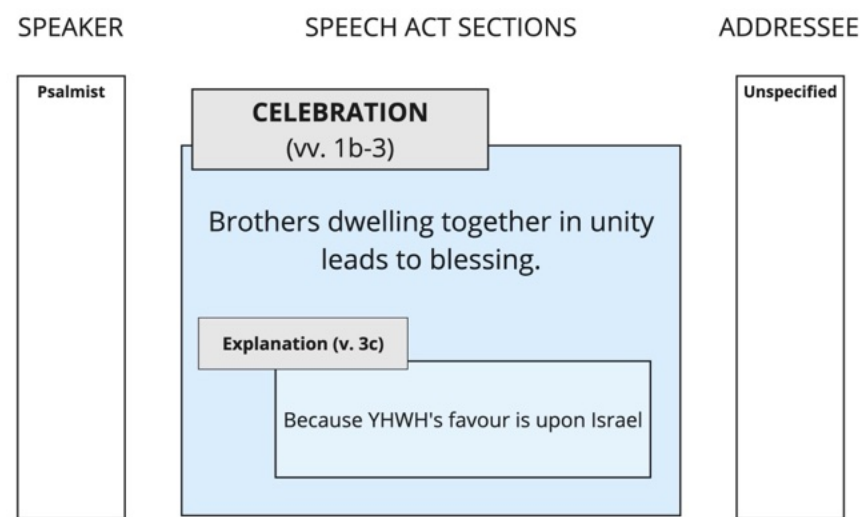


The main emotions of this psalm are *delight*, *gratitude*, and an underlying *desire* that the people would continue to seek to live in unity.

5. Participants and Speech Acts

In poetry, it is important to keep track of who is speaking, who is the audience, and what it is that the speaker is trying to do with his words.

In the chart below, the left-hand column identifies the speaker, who is the psalmist. The right-hand column identifies the audience, who is unspecified in this psalm. The middle column tells what the speaker is trying to do with his words (his speech acts) in each section.



6. Poetics

In this section, we ask, "what kinds of artistic beauty did the psalmist incorporate into the poem to reinforce its message?" (See Poetic Features video and layer for more details.)

Two metaphors describe the pleasantness of brothers dwelling together: that of **anointing oil** and **dew** from Mount Hermon. This section (verses 2-3a) is loaded with very soft, liquidy, flowy sounds in Hebrew,¹ which add to the imagery of *flowing liquids*. What is more, the key repeated roots יָרַד 'flowing down' and עַל 'on, onto' occur often and exclusively in this section about the liquid metaphors, adding to image of *descending liquids*.

כְּשֶׁמֶן הַטּוֹב עַל־הָרֹאשׁ יָרַד עַל־הַזָּקָן וְזָקֹן־אֶהְיֶה שֶׁיָרַד עַל־פִּי מִדֹּתָיו: בְּטַל־הַרְמוֹן שֶׁיָרַד עַל־הַרְרֵי צִיּוֹן	2	[Brothers dwelling together is] like the good oil on the head, flowing down onto the beard, the beard of Aaron; which flows down onto the collar of his garments.
	3	[Brothers dwelling together is] like the dew of Hermon, which flows down onto the hills of Zion.

¹ Approximant consonants and O-vowels.

7. Prominence

Prominence—what words, phrases, or ideas are most important in this psalm?: It is also important to consider how the author chose to draw attention to certain parts of the psalm. Here are the parts of the psalm that we believe are most prominent, and thus should be most prominent in a performance of the psalm.

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלֹת לְדָוִד	1	The song of the ascents. By David.
הִנֵּה מִה־טוֹב וּמִה־נְּעִים שָׁכַת אֲחֵים גַּם־יַחְדָּי:		Look! How good and how delightful where brothers dwell together.
כַּשֶּׁמֶן הַטוֹב עַל־הָרֹאשׁ יָרֵד עַל־הַנְּזָמָוּ אֶהְרֹן שִׁירָד עַל־פִּי מְדוּקָיו:	2	[Brothers dwelling together is] like the finest oil on the head, flowing down onto the beard, the beard of Aaron; which flows down onto the collar of his garments.
כַּשֶּׁל־תְּרֹמֹת שִׁירָד עַל־הַרְרֵי צִיּוֹן	3	[Brothers dwelling together is] like the dew of Hermon, which flows down onto the hills of Zion.
כִּי שָׁם צָנָה יְהוָה אֶת־הַבְּרָכָה לְחַיִּים עַד־הָעוֹלָם:		For there YHWH has sent the blessing of life everlasting.

- The repetition of **how** (מִה) in the phrase **how good and [how] delightful** serves to emphasize each adjective *good* and *delightful*, and gives this whole phrase high prominence in the psalm. In fact, every other clause in the psalm builds off of verse 1b-c, by either expanding on the idea via imagery (in verses 2-3a), or giving the reason/grounds for the idea (in verse 3b-c).
- This psalm conveys its message largely based on two key metaphors: that of **oil** and **dew**. So, translations should aim to do the same: making these pieces of imagery prominent.
 - In this psalm, the discussion of these metaphors takes place in the middle section, **verses 2-3a**, expanding on the main statement given in verse 1: that *brothers dwelling together is very good and pleasant*.
 - See the Verse-by-Verse Translation Tips for verses 2-3a below for more details on how these pieces of imagery function in the psalm.
- See the Poetics section above for the **key words** to emphasize in verses 2-3a.
- The words **[where] brothers dwell together** in verse 1 and **life everlasting** in verse 3 are prominent within their respective sections, due to Hebrew soundplay linking them together, as well as being key concepts in the psalm.
- The word **there** in verse 3 is also emphasized and packed with meaning (see details in verse 3 notes below).

TRANSLATION TIPS, VERSE BY VERSE

VERSE 1a

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

The song of the Israelites' ascents up to Jerusalem, where the temple was, for holy festivals. This psalm was written **By David**.

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת לְדָוִד	1a	The song of the ascents. By David.
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- This verse is the superscription of Psalm 133. Superscriptions can identify the psalmist, the instruments, the tune, the setting, and other information.
- The superscription of this psalm tells us that this psalm is a **song of the ascents**. Thus, it was written for the people of Israel to sing as they journeyed up the hill into Jerusalem for holy festivals 3 times per year. Psalms 120-134 are labeled as songs of ascent in the Hebrew Bible.
 - English translations tend to render the phrase 'song of the ascents' literally, even though the meaning is unclear to most modern audiences. Many translations in other languages add information to make it clear that the purpose of making the **ascent** is to worship. For example:
 - *The song of the going up to worship* (Hausa CLB)²
 - *A song for the journey to the dwelling place of the Lord* (French BDS)³
 - *Pilgrimage song* (French PDV)⁴ or *Song of the pilgrims* (Spanish NVI)⁵
 - *A song for those who go up to Jerusalem* (French NFC)⁶
 - *A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem* (NLT).
 - Another strategy to make the meaning clear is to include a footnote explaining the meaning of the phrase.
 - For more information about this special group of psalms, see our page [Psalms of Ascent](#).
- In some languages, the phrase **By David** may make little sense by itself. It may be necessary to add a verb: 'The song of the ascents *written* by David.'

² *Wakar Haurawa zuwa Sujada.*

³ *Cantique pour la route vers la demeure de l'Eternel.*

⁴ *Chant de pèlerinage.*

⁵ *Cántico de los peregrinos.*

⁶ *Chant pour ceux qui montent à Jérusalem.*

VERSE 1b-c

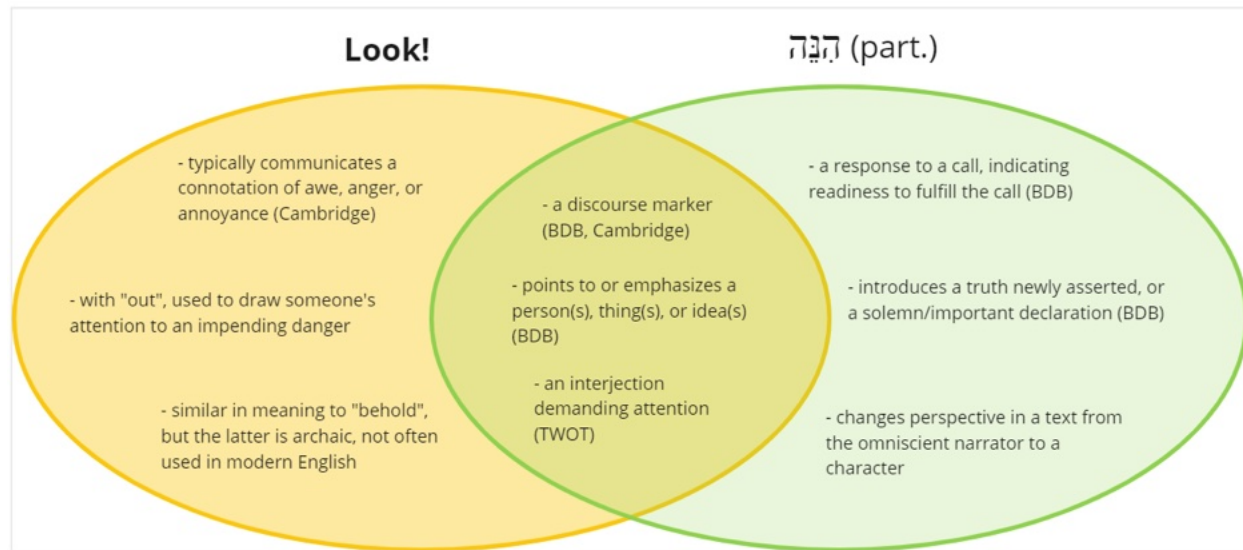
Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

Look! How good and delightful it can be **where brothers** *whether biological family or the nation of Israel as a whole dwell together in unity, inhabiting the land together with pilgrimage to Jerusalem a representation of living daily life together and carrying out the covenantal obligations that provide for the whole community, including preserving family lines when a man dies without children, which then lead to abundant blessing for the entire nation.*

הִנֵּה מַה־טוֹב וּמַה־נָּעִים שָׁכַת אֲחֵים גַּם־יַחַד:	1b 1c	Look! How good and delightful where brothers dwell together.
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- The phrase **How good and delightful** is made prominent by the word **Look!** (הִנֵּה) that precedes it, which is a classic attention-getting device in Hebrew.
 - A few English translations render the word **Look!** as *Behold* (ESV, NASB, KJV), which is not typical English today. Some French translations render it *Oh !* (TOB, BDS, S21), *Voici* (NVS), *Oui* (NFC), and some Spanish translations render it *Mirad* (RVR, BTX) or *Vean* (DHH). However, some translations in all three languages leave it untranslated (NIV, NLT, CSB, NRSV, French PDV, Spanish NVI). While we recommend translating the word, bear in mind that it does not necessarily need to be rendered as a verb of seeing. An appropriate attention-getting word in the local language should be chosen; for example, the Hausa CLB says *Truly/really*.⁷
 - The following diagram compares the Hebrew term with the English word *look!* Definitions in the yellow left side apply only to the English word, while definitions in the green right side apply only to the Hebrew word. Definitions in the middle, where the shapes overlap, apply to both the English and Hebrew words:

⁷ Hakika.



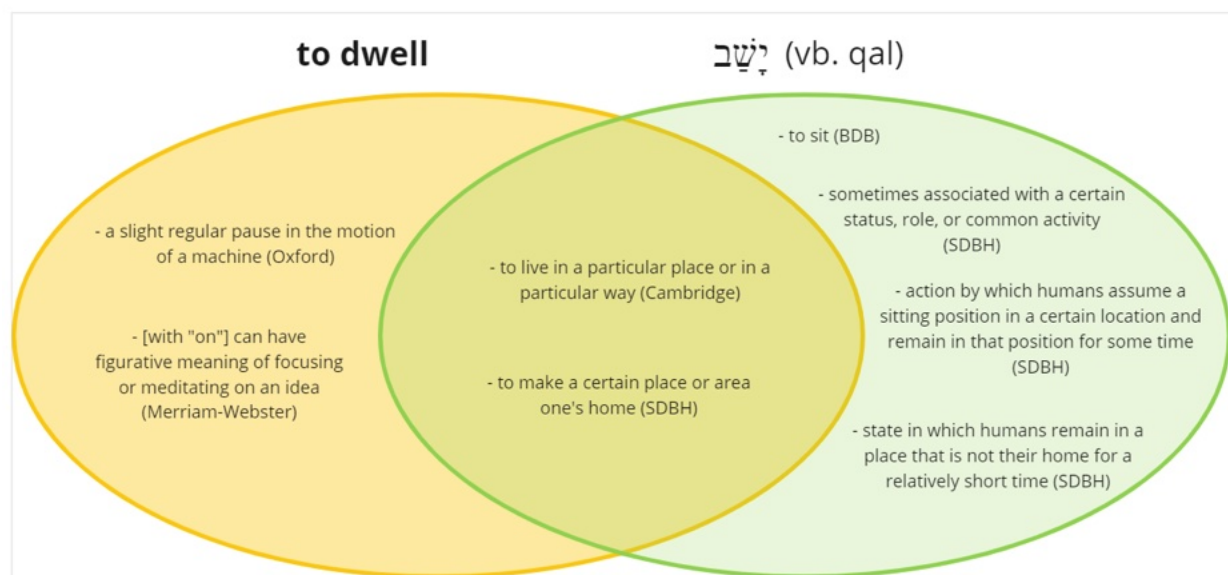
- The phrase **How good and delightful where brothers dwell together** may be understood as the thesis statement for this psalm, with everything that follows in the psalm supporting this statement.
- All three of the verses in this psalm begin with a clause that lacks a verb, and all the verbs that do appear in other clauses of these verses suggest a situation that is *timeless* or *repeating*, even though the psalm was written for specific gathering times.⁸
- The phrase **how good and [how] delightful** has some important features for translators:
 - The word **how** introduces an exclamation, not a question.
 - The repetition of the word **how** (הֵךְ) in the Hebrew serves to emphasize each adjective *good* and *delightful*.
 - The Hebrew word for **good** (טוֹב) is the same one used throughout Genesis 1, when God repeatedly described his creation as "good"--meaning that it has qualities that make it useful or desirable.⁹
 - In some languages, an adjective cannot be the subject of a sentence. In such cases, one possible strategy is to translate these adjectives as noun phrases. An example is the Hausa CLB: *It is a good thing, a pleasant [thing] also...*¹⁰
- The meaning of the phrase **brothers dwell together** (שָׁבֵת אֲחִים יַחְדָּם) is ambiguous: does it refer to *unity among people*, in general? Or, is it referring to a more *specific instance* of unity, or perhaps unity among *specific parties*?
 - In short, we favor the interpretation that the "dwelling together" in this psalm refers to a specific (recurring) instance of unity—the holy festival gatherings at the Temple in Jerusalem, where the whole nation would gather three times a year.

⁸ The verbs in these other clauses are either participles, an infinitive, or a *qatal* that's understood as a recurring situation (see note in verse v. 3 about *sent*).

⁹ Fenlason 2014.

¹⁰ *abu mai kyau ne, mai dadi kuma.*

- See our exegetical issue [The meaning of שָׁבַת אֶחָיו גַּם יָחַד in Ps. 133:1](#) for a full discussion.
- **Brothers** (אֶחָיו) in this instance refers to "the extended family structure of ancient Israel, where brothers would often live in proximity to one another (Deut 25:5), giving the family greater social prominence and security."¹¹ However, in this psalm's later usage in Israel's worship, it probably was expanded to mean unity within the spiritual community, as well.¹² When translating, try not to use a term that refers only to biological family, or just to males.
- The Hebrew verb **dwelling** is an infinitive form (literally, "to dwell" or "the dwelling").
 - Some English translations render this verb as *to dwell/to live*. In order to create a smooth English translation, they supply the word *for* to the phrase also, resulting in *for brothers to dwell/live* (NASB, GNB, NASB). French translations use the infinitive form and supply the word *pour* ("for").
 - Other English translations render the verb in the present tense as *dwell/live*, and supply the word *when* (ESV, NLT, CSB, NET, NRSV, NIV), resulting in the translation: *when brothers dwell*. However, later in the psalm, YHWH blesses a place ("there," see notes on verse 3bc), and this place appears to be the location in which **brothers dwell together**. So, while we render the verb in the present tense, we prefer to supply the word **where** to introduce the phrase. Spanish translations also use the present tense and supply the word *que* ("that"). Furthermore, not every language requires a word to be supplied for the present tense (see Hausa CLB).
 - The following diagram compares the Hebrew term with the English word *dwell*. Definitions in the yellow left side apply only to the English word, while definitions in the green right side apply only to the Hebrew word. Definitions in the middle, where the shapes overlap, apply to both the English and Hebrew words:



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- The Hebrew phrase we have rendered **together** (גַּם יָחַד) here does not simply mean "in close proximity" but rather refers to being *together in unity*, and many English translations make this

¹¹ Allen 2004, 212–15.

¹² Longman 2008, 936.

clear (ESV, KJV, NASB, NLT, NRSV; CSB, GNB: *together in harmony*). Most French translations do not bring out this sense, but an exception is the NVS, which says *unis ensemble*. Spanish translations bring out this sense by including *en armonía* (*in harmony*: RVR, NVI, BTX) or *unidos* (DHH). The Hausa CLB says *together as one*.¹³

VERSE 2

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

[The blessing that flows from this kind of dwelling together is] **like the finest special anointing oil on the head** which designates people for tasks to which YHWH has called them, the oil **which flows down on the beard** because the oil is abundant and extravagantly poured out, to announce to all the delightfulness of the occasion by means of its all-pervading scent, **the beard of Aaron** who was consecrated as high priest at Sinai, where God first made a covenant with the nation of Israel, a covenant that was to lead to abundant and extravagant blessing for all; **which flows down on the collar of his priestly garments** consecrating not only the man but the very garments that mark his office, illustrating again the abundance and extravagance of the blessing and delight.

כְּשֶׁמֶן הַטּוֹב עַל־הָרֹאשׁ יֵרֵד עַל־הַנֶּחֱסֹר זָמֹר־אֶהְרֹר לְשִׁירָד עַל־כִּי מִדֹּתָיו:	2	[Brothers dwelling together is] like the finest oil on the head, flowing down onto the beard, the beard of Aaron; which flows down onto the collar of his garments.
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- This verse begins with the word **like**, which signals a comparison is going to be made. In many languages, it is necessary to supply a subject-pronoun and/or verb. So, most English translations say it is *like*, and French translations have *C'est comme*. Spanish does not require a subject pronoun but does require a verb: *Es como*. Other languages have their own ways of introducing a comparison, such as Hausa: *Yana kama da*. The supplied subject-pronoun should refer to *brothers dwell[ing] together* from verse 1c.¹⁴
- This verse supplies the first instance of imagery that expands on the thesis statement that *brothers dwelling together is good and pleasant* from verse 1. In fact, this entire verse combines several images to form a description of **oil** which **flows down** from **Aaron's head** to his **beard**, and then to **the collar of his garments**. This imagery has the following key features:
 - The name **Aaron** here serves as a symbol for the high priesthood.¹⁵ Aaron may be an unknown figure in many cultures; in order to make his significance clear, translators can either supply an explanation in a footnote (see French NVS) or within the text itself. This is

¹³ tare kamar daya.

¹⁴ The first clause in this verse is **like the finest oil on the head**, and in Hebrew this clause is a verbless clause. This is similar to the first clause of verse 3; both clauses are seemingly incomplete thoughts ("like the finest oil"/"like the dew of Hermon"). The most likely subject of both these clauses is in the thesis/main statement of the psalm, which is given in verse 1c: *brothers dwell[ing] together*.

¹⁵ Fokkelman 2003, 303.

the strategy of the Hausa CLB, which says Aaron *our priest*.¹⁶ The Spanish DHH actually replaces the word **Aaron** with *the priests*, but this is not recommended.

- The phrase describes the journey of the oil from the top of Aaron's head down to Aaron's beard, and then continues further downward to the collar of his garment.
 - The syntax of the Hebrew says **on the head, which flows down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, which flows down on the collar of his garments**. This order may be difficult to follow in many languages, especially because the phrasing makes the owner of the head and beard difficult to identify at first.
 - Some languages may require the addition of prepositions such as *from* in order to make the direction of the movement clear.
 - One strategy to solve both of these problems is that of the Hausa CLB: *from the head of Aaron our priest onto his beard, from his beard all the way onto the neck of his shirt*.¹⁷ This rendering retains the repetition of the word **beard** while making clear the direction of the oil's movement and the owner of the head and beard.
- The oil is a fine, spiced oil that was applied to the head (anointing) to mark special occasions, such as the ordination of a priest (Exodus 30:23–25, 30), or to welcome guests and refresh their skin in an arid climate (Psalms 23:5; 92:10; 141:5).
 - Most English translations render the phrase **the finest oil** as *precious oil* or *fine oil*. Some translations make it clear that this oil was *anointing oil* (GNB, NLT). Hausa CLB says *valuable anointing oil*.¹⁸
 - The anointing of the High Priest with special oil was associated with **joy** and *beauty*.¹⁹
 - Among many other possible meanings, perhaps the two most prominent associations between this oil imagery and the psalm's theme, *unity*, are:
 - 1. Setting apart as holy/fit for serving YHWH. The image of **oil** suggests the anointing of the high priest to begin his service in the Temple, where he will serve as intermediary between YHWH and his covenant people. Similarly, when the people are obedient to the commands to attend the holy festivals in Jerusalem and to live peaceably with each other, their obedience sets them apart as holy and fit for service to YHWH. The obedience from living peaceably together is what prompts blessing from YHWH (see verse 3bc).
 - 2. Refreshment. Just as **oil** on the head would refresh a person in a hot and dry climate, so would unity bring spiritual refreshment to the people and land (see verse 3a) of Israel.
- The repetition of **flows down/flowing down** showcases one of the most important repeated roots and themes of this psalm: "to go/flow down" (יָרַד).

¹⁶ *firist namu*.

¹⁷ *daga kan Haruna firist namu zuwa gemunsa, daga gemunsa zuwa wuyan rigarsa*.

¹⁸ *Man keɓewa mai daraja*.

¹⁹ See Bratcher and Reyerburn, 1097.

- The psalm has only six occurrences of verbs, and the verb "flow down" accounts for half of these occurrences.
- The repetition of this key word ties into the two main images of oil and dew, which are both liquids. Along with the mentions of the two mountains (Hermon and Zion) later in the psalm, the language suggests the idea of *blessing flowing down from above*. This is an interesting contrast/complement to the idea of *going up* that is inherent to the Psalms of Ascent. See our Poetic Features #1 and #2 for more details.
- The two verbs in this verse are participles ("flows/flowing"), which is a form that often denotes *continuous action* in Hebrew, rather than a specific point in time.
- There is another important repeated root in this verse: **onto** (עַל). It appears three times in this verse, and once in verse 3, and further adds to the mental image of *blessing flowing down from above* (see Poetic Feature #2).
- There is some ambiguity in line c of this verse: **which flows down onto the collar of his garments**. Is the "which" referring to the oil, or the beard?
 - In short, it seems more likely that "which" refers to the oil.
 - See a full discussion of this issue in our page [The Antecedent of שִׁירָה in Ps. 133:2](#).

VERSE 3a

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

[The blessing that flows from brothers dwelling together is] **like the life-giving dew of Mount Hermon** that is, rainfall from a source that never dries up but has enough precipitation to supply the entire Jordan River, **which flows down on the hills of Zion** where YHWH's presence is located and which prospers thanks to his presence, receiving the blessing of abundant rainfall in contrast to surrounding areas that regularly experience drought.

בְּשֵׁל־חֶרְמוֹן שִׁירָה עַל־הַרְרֵי צִיּוֹן	3a	[Brothers dwelling together is] like the dew of Hermon , which flows down onto the hills of Zion .
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- As in verse 2, verse 3 begins with the word **like**. See the notes for verse 2 for translation strategies.
- Verse 3a provides the second piece of *liquid* imagery: **dew**, which flows down from **Hermon on the hills of Zion**. Like the imagery in verse 2, the imagery here illustrates the thesis statement in verse 1 that it is **good and delightful [where] brothers dwell together**. This imagery contains some important features:
 - The word **dew** refers to moisture that collects on the ground during the night.
 - **Hermon** refers to Mount Hermon, which is the tallest mountain in Israel, and is known for producing large amounts of dew.
 - Translators may want to supply the word *mountain* in order to make the identity of Hermon more clear (see French PDV: *la montagne de l'Hermon*; French NFC: *mont Hermon*; Spanish DHH: *monte Hermon*; Hausa CLB: *Tudun Harmon*).

- Translators may supply a preposition besides **of** to indicate the relationship between the dew and Mount Hermon. The Hausa CLB says *dew on top of Mount Hermon*.
- Mount Hermon was located in the northernmost part of the territory of Israel, and its water runoff provided life and refreshment for much of the land surrounding it. Water for crops was also regarded as a sign of God's favor and blessing. The mention of **Zion** in 3b, which is in the south of the region, could also metaphorically point to the unification of the whole land of Israel during these festival gatherings in Jerusalem--north (**Hermon**) and south (**Zion**) coming together. See the imagery table below for more details on the comparisons:

<i>[Brothers dwelling together is] like the dew of [Mount] Hermon</i>		
	Source: Dew	Target: the act of brothers dwelling together in unity
Flowing down from above	Descending from Mount Hermon	[resulting blessing] descending from heaven/YHWH
Life-giving	Provides water to support flora and fauna life	[resulting blessing] is life everlasting for those in unity
Abundance	Hermon is known for its excessive amounts of moisture (including dew)	[resulting blessing] of life is abundant (everlasting) for its recipients
Many composing one whole	Dew consists of many small droplets of water	The unity is formed by many brothers coming together as a community
Uniting of north and south	Hermon, in the northmost parts of Israel, is metaphorically connected to Zion in the south by this dew	Brothers from both north and south came together at Zion during the time of the holy festivals

- The phrase we have rendered **the hills of Zion** was generally understood to describe a landform that was a bit higher than a small hill, but not as tall as a mountain like Mount Hermon.
 - **Zion** was itself a single hill. Since the hills in the phrase **the hills of Zion** are plural, the phrase probably refers to *the hills located in the region of Zion*, and not *the hills called Zion*.
 - So, translations that render this phrase as *the mountain of Zion* (French Louis Segond)²⁰ or *Mount Zion* (NIV, French BDS)²¹ are incorrect.

VERSE 3b-c

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

All this blessing comes to Zion **For there** on Zion, the place YHWH chose for his presence, **YHWH has commanded the blessing** of being in covenant with him, which starts with the law and proper worship and leads to temporal blessings, such as the joy of living in unity, and climaxes in the blessing **of life everlasting** all demonstrating that YHWH's favor is upon Israel. It is YHWH's favor upon Israel that explains why such abundant blessing is coming upon the nation. We

²⁰ *la montagne de Sion* (French Louis Segond).

²¹ *le mont de Sion* (French BDS).

commemorate that favor and blessing as we make our pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

כִּי שָׁם צִוְּהָ יְהוָה אֶת־הַבְּרִכָּה חַיִּים עַד־הָעוֹלָם:	3b 3c	For there YHWH has sent the blessing of life everlasting.
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- Verse 3b-c provides the reason for the main statement of the psalm, given in 1bc (*how good and pleasant [where] brothers dwell together*).
- The word **for** (כִּי) that begins this clause, though treated differently among modern translations, most likely has a causal meaning ("for" or "because"). It provides the reason, or grounds, for the claim that *brothers dwelling together is good and pleasant*. See a full discussion of this exegetical issue in [The Function and Scope of כִּי in Ps. 133:3](#).
- The word **there** (שָׁם) is a key word in this verse and in the whole psalm. Not only is it marked for focus by means of the word order, but it also serves as an important connection with "look" (הִנֵּה) in verse 1b. Both words that direct or refer to location²² in a psalm where location and movement are big themes. But where is this word *there* referring to, exactly?
 - Option 1: If we were to read this psalm as a narrative text or story where everything happens in sequence, then the word *there* would refer to the nearest place in the text, which is Mount Zion. This appears to be the rendering of most English translations, especially those that supply the word *when* in verse 1. However, this reading is dispreferred.
 - Option 2: Poems should not necessarily be read in sequence. In this case, it makes sense to read verse 3b-c, which is a single line, as connected with the only other single line in the poem, which is verse 1. In this reading, the word 'there' refers to the place 'where brothers dwell together.' This is the preferred reading.
 - So, poetically, the word 'there' links Zion and the dwelling of brothers.
- **YHWH** is God's proper name (not a title such as *lord*), which he commanded his people to call him in Exodus 3:15. For more guidance about how to translate this name, see the "Names/Titles of God" document.
- The verb translated as **has sent** (צִוְּהָ) is often glossed as "commanded"; but when used with blessing, the sense is "to send."²³ Though this verb form normally indicates a completed action, this is a special case called a *gnomic perfective*, where the perfective "may be used with habitual meaning in the sense that a single instance exemplifies a recurrent situation."²⁴ So, translators can understand the sending of blessing as being an event that repeats habitually.
- Verse 3c clarifies just what exactly is the content of the blessing that YHWH sends: **life everlasting** (חַיִּים עַד־הָעוֹלָם). This is the *refreshment* that Israel needs, much like the oil and dew refresh. Translators may find it more natural to reverse the order: "everlasting life". This is, of course, not

²² These are called *deictic particles*.

²³ See Lev 25:21; Deut 28:8; HALOT.

²⁴ IBHS §30.4b.

to be understood literally: this does not mean that the people of Israel will never die; rather, it is referring to spiritual life.

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