



A Commentary on the EA° Psalm

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[Psalm 133]

This beautiful psalm is traditionally attributed to King David. However, its style and language leave little doubt that it was written some five centuries after David's time, when the faithful remnant returned to Jerusalem after their exile in Babylonia. It is one of the six "wisdom" psalms, 1, 49, 73, 113, 127 and 133. These psalms were part of a body of Hebrew literature and poetry designed to teach moral principals to groups of pilgrims to the holy Temple at Jerusalem. It is a particularly appropriate way to introduce the initiation of those who are beginning their pilgrimage to light in Masonry.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

Pilgrims to the Temple in Jerusalem came from all walks of life. Ancient Israelite society was strictly stratified and class-conscious, and it was rare for one class to have social intercourse with another. The one exception was in pilgrimages to the holy shrines and to the Temple. People of all walks of life went on these pilgrimages, and as they traveled together, class and background were ignored. They even referred to each other as brethren. Even in today's society people are all too aware of class and socio-economic levels. In Masonry, however, we value the principle that despite our individual backgrounds, we meet on the level and all are equal as brothers. "On this principle, Masonry unites men of every country, sect and opinion, and conciliates true friendship among those who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance."

"It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments."

In the ancient Middle East anointing was a common practice, consisting of pouring scented olive oil on the head. It was used not only to signify elevation to a high rank, such as the anointing of a king or priest, but also to symbolize a change in status, such as the official recognition of a boy's becoming a man. When an honored guest was received into one's home it was basic courtesy to greet him with a kiss on both cheeks, then to wash his feet and anoint his head with oil (*Lk. 7:44ff*). Anointing was usually with enough oil that a few drops would run onto the collar of the robe. It was a rare man whose robe collar was not oily, and one whose hair was not oily would have been suspect). When the anointing was for a special honor enough oil was used that it ran onto the beard, and when a king or high priest was anointed enough was used that it would run

down the full length of the robe (Aaron was the first high priest). No honor was higher, so the unity of brethren is as wonderful as the anointing of a king or high priest.

“As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion:”

During the summer months rain was extremely rare in most parts of Palestine, and the landscape was arid, dusty and brown. Mount Hermon, on the other hand, because of its high altitude and the abundance of rain and snow from October to April, was bathed in dew every morning even during the summer. The mountainside of Hermon was therefore green and lush all year round. There were two main pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem each year: the Feast of the Firstfruits (*Bikkurim*) in early June, and the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkoth*) in September. Although the crops flourished in the fertile lands, the city of Jerusalem was hot and dry at these times. Despite the harsh and dry conditions, however, the beauty of brotherhood was as refreshing as the dew of Hermon, and brought refreshment to the mountains of Zion (Jerusalem).

“For there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life forevermore.”

God blessed Jerusalem as the heart of faith. It was there that Abraham offered to sacrifice Isaac and that God established David’s kingdom; it was there that Jesus died and rose again; and it was from there that Mohammed ascended to heaven. And as the prophets promised countless times, God blesses His people when they live in unity. The Jews revere life as one of the greatest of all God’s gifts to man — a standard Jewish toast and blessing is *l’chaim*, “to life.” To them, as it is to all Masons, life is not an end in itself. It is the great unifying gift and blessing, the one thing that we all have in common with each other and that unites us with God.