FORM AND EXPERIENCE DWELLING IN
UNITY
A COGNITIVE READING OF THE METAPHORS OF PSALM 133

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Summary

This article uses the cognitive approach to analyse the metaphors of Psalm 133 while concurrently using a study of the remaining Psalms of Ascents to understand the underlying world-view that Psalm 133’s metaphors are based on. Such an approach reveals that the subjects of the metaphors of Psalm 133 are connected at a deeper conceptual level. This conceptual relationship allows the psalmist to both describe the blessings of brotherly unity and to provide a literary parallel of the experience of those blessings through the psalm’s form.

1. Introduction

A little poetic gem it may be, but Psalm 133 has nonetheless proven vexatious for its interpreters. As Hossfeld and Zenger observe, the psalm, while ‘so simple at first glance, has been unusually controversial in the details of its interpretation by scholars’. One of the major challenges presented by the psalm is its metaphors. Commentators are divided over the extent of the metaphors, the referents of the metaphors’ subjects, as well as the significance of the metaphors, just to cite a few of the complexities of the psalm.

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1 This article is dedicated to my mentors, Dr Jerry Hwang and Dr Samuel Goh, who instilled in me a love for the Hebrew language and its poetry.
3 An overview of these complexities is provided in Hossfeld and Zenger, Psalms 3, 472-77. See also Leslie C. Allen, Psalms 101-150 (WBC; Waco: Word, 1983), 211-15;
This article seeks to re-examine the metaphors in Psalm 133 through applying cognitive linguistics. Conceptual Metaphor Theory, including its more recent developments in the conceptual blending approach, has recently been used profitably to study metaphors throughout the Hebrew Bible, especially in the Psalter. However, as Van Hecke observes, ‘cognitive metaphor theories are … developed with a view to analyse metaphors in living languages and not in dead languages’. So, while it is possible to study modern metaphors via the cognitive approach because we possess the appropriate conceptual domains to interpret them, the same cannot be said of the metaphors of Psalm 133, which draw from conceptual domains separated from its modern readers for more than two millennia.


How might one address this chronological problem? In a recent book, Kövecses observes that there is a ‘close dependence of the metaphorical mind on the surrounding physical, social and mental environment … [including] the situational context and the linguistic context, or cotext’. This article argues that one way of accessing these contexts for the metaphors of Psalm 133 is through studying the rest of the corpus of the Psalms of Ascents. If the corpus reflects a coherent world-view, then the other psalms of the collection could provide insight into the conceptual domains that the metaphors of Psalm 133 draw upon.

Indeed, the literary unity of the corpus suggests that this is a reasonable assumption. Its psalms share common but unusual words and particles, share distinctive phrases, and are on average shorter than those in the rest of the Psalter. This has led a number of commentators to affirm the collection’s literary unity. In addition to this, while not all existing manuscripts (e.g. 11QPsא) group Psalms 120–134 together as the MT does, the expression שיר המעלות (‘the Song of the Ascents’) is nonetheless present in all but one of the psalms’ superscriptions, even in these alternate arrangements. This, along with the observation that this unique expression occurs in no other superscription elsewhere in the Hebrew Psalter, suggests that the Psalms of Ascents existed as an independent collection before being included in the MT and other corpuses. Based on all these

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10 It should be noted that this approach is not a canonical reading of the psalms which aims to interpret the psalms in light of their canonical arrangement. This approach seeks to study the world behind the text. I thank one of the anonymous reviewers of this article for clarifying this.
11 For a fuller description of their common literary features, see Philip Satterthwaite, ‘Zion in the Songs of Ascents’ in Zion, City of Our God, ed. Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 105-107.
13 Even in the exception, Psalm 121, the superscription is only a minor variant, namely, שיר המעלות (‘the Song to the Ascents’).
14 A fuller argument for the Psalms of Ascents being a source collection for both the MT and 11QPsא is made in Ryan M. Armstrong, ‘Psalms Dwelling Together in Unity:
observations, one would be reasonably confident of the validity of understanding the conceptual domains of the metaphors of Psalm 133 through studying the rest of the collection.

2. The Metaphors of Psalm 133

2.1 Extent of the Metaphors

The first task in studying the metaphors of Psalm 133 is to identify where the metaphors start and end. One common reading of Psalm 133 is as a set of two metaphors, that is, the programmatic statement in 133:1 is compared via two similes in 133:2 and 133:3a respectively. These similes are signalled by the use of the comparative preposition כְּ (‘like’) that begins each poetic colon. In this interpretation, the metaphors have a common principal subject (133:1), but have two different subsidiary subjects (133:2 and 133:3a).

This reading has been disputed and two significant alternatives have been proposed. The first alternative, by Berlin, is that the twin כְּ that begin 133:2 and 133:3a signal mutual comparison to each another (‘as the oil … so also the dew …’), rather than comparison with 133:1.15 This is indeed one of the possible uses of the twin prepositions.16

Nevertheless, this interpretation should be rejected for three reasons. First, while the twin כְּ can be used in this way, the presence of twin כְּ does not automatically mean that it must be used in this comparative way.17 One should not, by default, assume this usage, especially since such usage appears to be rarer than its typical use.

Second, in the examples that Berlin cites of the twin כְּ being used in this way,18 the twin כְּ are used in quick sequence, with at most two words between the two prepositions. In contrast, the twin כְּ in Psalm 133 are separated by eleven words (which Berlin does not comment on). This is communicatively significant, since in order for the

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15 Berlin, ‘On the Interpretation of Psalm 133’, 144, citing Josh. 14:11; 1 Sam. 30:24; Ps. 139:12; Isa. 24:2 (the last with reference to Rashi’s reading). To support her reading, Berlin also cites E. Beaucamp, *Le Psaultier* (vol. 2; Paris: Gabalda, 1979), 239 as well as Joüon and Rashi.

16 Joüon §174i.

17 See, for example, Ps. 7:9; 17:12; 18:21.

18 Josh. 14:11; 1 Sam. 30:24; Ps. 139:12; Isa. 24:2.
audience of the psalm to recognise that the twin כְּ mutually relate to each other (rather than being used according to the preposition’s typical use), the reader must receive a syntactical signal to make this decision. One such signal would be the proximity of the twin כְּ. In contrast, the eleven-word distance between the twin כְּ in Psalm 133 signals that they are not mutually referential but rather begin separate similes.

Third, as Berlin herself observes, the psalm’s author uses a ‘word chain’ in verses 1 and 2, which is the occurrence of the same word (in this case, טוב (‘good’)) in two consecutive verses. She then observes that such techniques ‘serve to aid the perception of the relationship between the parts of the discourse in which they are located’. Despite this, Berlin rejects this reading without providing an alternative explanation for the presence of the word chain. However, as she rightly points out, this word chain does suggest that 133:1 should be read with 133:2.

The second alternative, by Watson, argues that there is actually one more simile in 133:2b. Observing that the two cola (133:2a and 133:3a) begin with the comparative preposition כְּ, he then argues that the phrase ‘Aaron’s Beard’ (זְקַן־אַהֲרֹן) in 133:2b is also implicitly preceded by a כְּ via ellipsis, which is also supported by the syntactical parallelism between 133:2a, 2b, and 3a. In other words, brotherly unity is not only like oil running down; it is also like Aaron’s beard running down. Since the כְּ is supplied via ellipsis, the burden of proof

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19 As cognitive linguistics have observed of syntactical form, closeness between words often parallels the strength of their relationship. See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (2nd ed.; Chicago: University Of Chicago, 2003), 128-32.

20 Berlin, ‘On the Interpretation of Psalm 133’, 141. Berlin, however, then dismisses it as a fallacious reading. See the discussion in §2.2 below.

21 In addition to the twin prepositions, Berlin also observes that the relationship between 133:2 and 133:3a is signalled by ‘the repetition of the syntactical structure, the word “that flows down”, and the use of the lexical association “oil” and “dew” … [T]hese are known cohesive devices and they suggest that relationship between vv.2 and 3 is stronger than between vv.1 and 2, or 1 and 3’. Berlin, ‘On the Interpretation of Psalm 133’, 145. While I do agree with Berlin that such commonalities cohere v.2 and v.3, this does not mean that vv.2 and 3 cannot also be linked to v.1 in some way, i.e. there is no need to postulate a sharp break between v.1 and v.2. This is because the link between v.1 and v.2 is established by the word chain of טוב, while all three verses are related by the underlying conceptual links between blessing (v.1), oil (v.2), and dew (v.3), as I will demonstrate later in this article.

is on Watson to show that the text leads the reader to supply the additional כְּ rather than read 133:2b as yet another stage in the flow of the oil.

There are also three arguments that make such proof difficult. First, the similes in 133:2a and 133:3a are both liquids whereas the additional simile that Watson proposes in 133:2b is not. Moreover, oil (שֶׁמֶן) and dew (טַל) are an established word-pair. The insertion of a simile involving a beard between the word-pair clashes with the cohesiveness of the word-pair. Second, the rest of the MT has no other text where a beard is described using the verb יָרָד (‘to go down’). The only other text in the MT where יָרָד and זֶקֶן (‘beard’) are collocated is 1 Samuel 21:14. However, there it is David’s saliva (another liquid) that is coming down and not his beard. Third, as Watson himself notes, the use of the triple simile is significantly rarer in Hebrew poetry. Hence it should not be postulated without strong evidence. Therefore, it seems that the best reading of the metaphor structure of Psalm 133 is still as 133:1 being compared to both 133:2 and 133:3a.

2.2 Identity of the Principal Subject

Having delineated the extent of the metaphors, the principal and subsidiary subjects will now be identified. Let us consider the principal subject first. One may be tempted to assume that the principal subject in 133:1 is the act of dwelling (שֶׁבֶת). This might be reasonable, since the infinitive construct שֶׁבֶת is the grammatical subject of the predicate construction. However, this does not do justice to the nuance of the text since 133:1 is not a noun phrase but an entire predicate construction. The force of such a construction is assertive, that is, the psalmist is

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23 This is established comparatively with Ugaritic (UT ‘nt:IV:87). See Dahood, Psalms III, 101–150, 251; Loren R. Fisher, ed., Ras Shamra Parallels (vol. 1; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1972), 189-91. In addition to the UT, Dahood also cites Gen. 27:28,39 in the MT. However, in those texts, שָׁמָן is pointed in the MT as שֶׁמֶן (‘fat’), not שֶׁמֶן (‘oil’). See also 2 Sam. 1:21 where שֶׁמֶן and טַל appear in the same context of blessing, though not as a pair linked by a connective.

24 Watson, ‘The Hidden Simile in Psalm 133’.

25 This, for example, appears to be the case in Berlin, ‘On the Interpretation of Psalm 133’, 141.

26 IBHS §14.3.2. One of the anonymous reviewers of this article helpfully suggested to consider whether or not 133:1 is meant to be exhortatory or an act of thanksgiving. The reviewer rightfully observed that, depending on the answer, it would affect the conceptual domain of the principal subject (see discussion later in §2.4a). I argue that it is exhortatory. As Brin observes, when one compares Ps. 133:1 to the other seven uses
claiming that dwelling in unity is good and pleasant. Thus, semantically, it is the grammatical predicates (טוֹב ('good') and נָעִים ('pleasant')) that are being emphasised. Hence, it is the goodness of dwelling in unity that is the principal subject of the metaphor. This is further confirmed by the repeated use of the word טוב in both 133:1 and 133:2a to mark the subjects. In 133:1, טוב is a predicate adjective and so functions itself as the principal subject. Meanwhile, in 133:2a, שעון is an attributive attribute and so marks the subsidiary subject שֶׁמֶן. This marking function explains the presence of the word chain of טוב in 133:1-2a.

Is this an unnecessary splitting of hairs regarding the principal subject? The answer is no, for the imprecise identification of the principal subject has impacted the appreciation of the psalm’s metaphors. For example, Berlin rejected the linking together of 133:1 and 133:2 as comprising a single metaphor precisely because she argued that dwelling together does not relate to oil. If the comparison was indeed between dwelling and oil, her observation would be reasonable, and that is why it is significant that the metaphor is really between the טוב of 133:1 with the שעון of 133:2. Moreover, as shall be seen later through further application of the cognitive approach, the conceptual domains that the principal and subsidiary subjects belong to have significant similarities, which would not be the case if שעון was the principal subject.

of המַה־טוֹב in the Hebrew Bible, the closest parallel in form is Prov. 15:23, which is also exhortatory in nature. See Gershon Brin, ‘The Significance of the Form Mah- ttôb’, Vetus Testamentum 38, 4 (October 1988), 462-65.

27 For a similar reading of the adjective, see F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, ‘Psalm 133: A (Close) Reading’, Journal of Hebrew Scriptures 8 (2008), 1-30, esp. 9. Separately, note that of the two adjectives (טוֹב and נָעִים) in 133:1, the psalmist chooses to emphasise נָעִים over טוב by placing it first in 133:1, then by further drawing attention to it via the word-chain. This suggests that the weight of principal subject in 133:1 is on goodness (rather than pleasantness, or a combination of the two). Thus, the adjective נָעִים appears to be used by the psalmist to intensify the sense of goodness associated with the word טוב.

28 It should be noted that the word טוב is not the ‘natural’ word to describe the oil, since anointing oil for the high priest is described by כש (see Exod. 30:22-39; 37:29; 40:9-15). This suggests a deliberateness on the part of the psalmist to create the word chain, which must be accounted for. See also Crow, Songs of Ascents, 113.

29 Berlin, ‘On the Interpretation of Psalm 133’, 144.
2.3 Identity of the Subsidiary Subject

Past readings of Psalm 133 have identified the subsidiary subjects as שֶׁמֶן (olive oil) and טַל (dew). However, they do not constitute the entirety of the subsidiary subjects. Again, it is critical to note the exact nuance of the text. For the psalm does not say:

> How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity, like precious oil, like the dew of Hermon.

Instead, these nouns are in motion – the oil moving steadily from the head, to the beard, then to the collar; the dew falling down upon the mountains of Zion. This movement is particularly heightened by the triple use of the participle יֹרֵד (‘falling down’). Thus, what we have in Psalm 133 is the comparison between the goodness of fraternal unity (principal subject) and two subsidiaries which both involve ‘falling down’, that is, (1) ‘good’ oil falling down from head, to beard, to collar, and (2) dew of Hermon falling down on to the mountains of Zion.

2:4 Conceptual Domains of the Metaphors’ Subjects

A distinctive step of the cognitive approach is identifying the conceptual domains to which the principal and subsidiary subjects belong, and then understanding how the metaphors relate these domains to one another. Thus, the conceptual domains of the subjects of Psalm 133 will now be identified.

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30 Of the two subsidiary subjects, there is more contention regarding the meaning of the second (133:3a), especially over the issue of why the dew of Hermon is depicted as coming down the mountains of Zion, despite the two mountains being geographically distant. There are two major approaches to this question. First, in light of passages like Ps. 89:12, some scholars suggest that חֶרְמוֹן acts as a metonym for the north of Israel and claim that the colon is an expression of reunification, with Zion being a symbol for the south of Israel. (See, for example, Berlin, ‘On the Interpretation of Psalm 133’, 145-46; Crow, Songs of Ascents, 116.) The second approach recognises that dewfall at Hermon is extremely abundant and thus interprets חֶרְמוֹן as essentially functioning descriptively, i.e. the ‘dew of Hermon’ means ‘Hermon-like abundant dew’. Note how the adjective in the parallel simile (טֶהֶרָה (shemen) in 133:2) also functions descriptively. One commentator goes so far as to call טֶהֶרָה ‘a literal cipher for heavy dew disposition’ (Dobbs-Allsopp, ‘Psalm 133’, 15). But why use חֶרְמוֹן when an adjective would do? One possible reason is to rhyme חֶרְמוֹן (hermon) with both אַהֲרֹן (aharon) and צִיּוֹן (tsiyyon). This would not be surprisingly since the psalmist uses a wide range of phonological poetic devices throughout the psalm (see Dobbs-Allsopp, ‘Psalm 133’ for a comprehensive description).

31 Van Hecke, ‘Conceptual Blending’, 220.
a. Conceptual Domain of the Principal Subject

The preceding analysis concluded that the principal subject in 133:1 was the quality of goodness. To understand this quality fully, it is necessary to understand what this goodness describes by identifying the referent of the expression גַּם־יָחַד אַחִים שֶׁבֶת (‘to-dwell brothers even together’). There are at least four options for how the expression can be understood, namely, as referring to (1) Israelite brothers living in familial unity on a common estate of their patriarch, (2) to an undivided kingdom, (3) to worshipping Israelites, and (4) to gathered pilgrims in Jerusalem.

Searching through the Hebrew Bible, it is observed that ישב (‘to dwell’) and יחד (‘together’) are collocated in the Hebrew Bible in Genesis 13:6; 36:7 and Deuteronomy 25:5. All of these instances refer to situations of family members living together on the same piece of land. In particular, Deuteronomy 25:5 (which additionally mentions אחים (‘brothers’)) refers to the practice of Levirate marriage for brothers who live together on the same patrimonial estate. These examples strongly suggest that 133:1 is stock language for familial unity, and therefore option (1) appears the most attractive.

However, just because it is a stock expression does not mean that it does not bring with it a series of associations. Most importantly, we see in Deuteronomy 25:5 that brothers dwelling in unity have a covenant obligation to take care of one’s brother’s widow. Elsewhere in the Torah, we see that right living in familial life is included in Israel’s covenant obligations. Dwelling together in right familial relations

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33 Berlin, ‘On the Interpretation of Psalm 133’, 142.
with one other is an Israelite’s act of obedience to the Deuteronomic covenant.

Moreover, it is critical to recognise that such obedience to the Deuteronomic covenant brings with it blessings from YHWH in accordance with the promises of the covenant. In Deuteronomy, such blessings are frequently described as טובות or with its cognate verb טוב (`to be good`).38 This is significant since Psalm 133:1 uses the word טוב as well, suggesting that the psalmist might well have in mind YHWH’s blessings when extolling the goodness of brotherly unity. Therefore, while the immediate referent of 133:1 is familial living, the principal subject belongs to the broader conceptual domain of YHWH’S BLESSING OF ISRAEL.

b. Conceptual Domain of the Subsidiary Subjects
How about the subsidiary subjects? For 133:2, the immediate referent seems to be the process of anointing Aaron using oil and hence is cultic in nature. For 133:3a, the mention of dew appears to be referring to some sort of rain.39 Thus, on first glance, the two subsidiary subjects appear unrelated. However, as earlier noted, שמן (`oil’) and טל (`dew’) are an established word-pair in Hebrew parallelism. When used individually, they are also stock metonyms referring to YHWH’s blessings.40 Moreover, as Keel observes, the reference to Aaron in 133:2 is likely not a reference to the historical personage per se, but rather the character of Aaron functions as a prototypical priest.41 Thus, Aaron serves to evoke thoughts of the temple cult, and therefore, spatially speaking, 133:2 describes an event situated in Zion. Likewise, and more explicitly, the metaphorical picture in 133:3a is also situated in Zion. Thus, both 133:2 and 133:3a are about YHWH’S BLESSINGS OF ZION. If so, then this means that the two subsidiaries, while having

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38 For the use of טוב as blessing resulting from covenant obedience, see Deut. 5:33; 6:18,24; 10:13; 26:11; 28:12,47; 30:9,15. For the use of the cognate טוב in like fashion, see Deut. 4:40; 5:16,29; 6:3,18; 12:25,28; 28:63; 30:5.


40 For passages where oil and dew are individually used as stock language for YHWH’s blessing, see (1) for oil: Gen. 49:20; Deut. 8:8; 28:40; 32:13; 33:24; Ps. 23:5; 45:7; 92:10; 104:15; Eccl. 9:8 etc; (2) for dew: Exod. 16:14; Num. 11:9; Deut. 33:13,28; Job 38:27; Hos. 14:6; Hagg. 1:9; Zech. 8:12 etc. For the latter, see also Futato, ʿטַל’.

41 Keel, ‘Kultische Brüderlichkeit – Ps. 133’.
different referents, actually belong to the same deeper conceptual domain.

However, given that this is a subjective judgement, is there further evidence that suggests that the psalmist did intend for the two subsidiaries to be read holistically? There are three more pieces of supporting data. First, imagery-wise, both subsidiaries are liquids, thus naturally linking them in the mind’s eye. Second, and more concretely, both subsidiaries are described as being in motion using the same participle יֹרֵד. This is especially striking since typical Hebrew parallelism does not require the use of the same verb in parallel cola. Other verbs could have been used to take the place of יֹרֵד in both 133:2 and 133:3a. Moreover, יֹרֵד is not merely repeated once, but is used three times, in the same participle form, and is situated within syntactically similar phrases. This strongly suggests that יֹרֵד serves as a word chain to literarily bind the two subsidiaries together (in the same way that טוב bound 133:1 and 133:2 together). Third, such an interpretation provides structural symmetry of the psalm. If both 133:2 and 133:3a refer to Zion, then both verses elaborate on 133:1 and are then both justified by 133:3b. Moreover, if this reading is right, it further corroborates the earlier categorisation of both שֶׁ֖ם and the טַל as blessings, since 133:3b would then be explicitly referring to them as בְּרָכָה (‘blessing’).

3. The Psalms of Ascents’ View of Blessing

The next step of the cognitive approach would be to understand how the source domain (YHWH’S BLESSING OF ZION) structures the target domain (YHWH’S BLESSING OF ISRAEL). However, as mentioned earlier, this is the point at which further insight needs to be sought from the rest of the Psalms of Ascents to understand more fully each conceptual domain.

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42 For example, the verb יצק (‘to pour out’) would have been suitable to describe both the pouring out of oil (e.g. Gen. 28:18; Num. 5:15) and rain (e.g. Isa. 44:3). Thus, it appears that the sense of ‘downness’ is deliberate.

43 The participle is always paired with a prepositional phrase in all three instances of its use in Ps. 133.
3.1 YHWH’s Blessing of Zion

Of the various Psalms of Ascents, it is Psalms 122, 126, 127, and 132 that refer to the blessing of Zion in some way. Of these, only Psalm 132 uses the verb ברך (‘to bless’) explicitly. The verb is used in 132:15 in direct speech by YHWH to describe how he will bless Zion, showing that YHWH is the one who blesses Zion. Likewise, in Psalm 126:1, it is YHWH who restores (שוב) the fortunes of Zion.44 Blessing by YHWH is more tacit in Psalms 122 and 127. In the former, Jerusalem is being prayed for (122:6-9), implying that the psalmist is seeking YHWH’s blessing of Jerusalem; in the latter, in 127:1, there is the assumption that unless YHWH acts to build the house (a likely deliberate ambiguity that may refer, inter alia, to YHWH’s temple in Jerusalem), the house will not be built. In all these texts, blessing is portrayed as being from YHWH.

Such blessing is tied closely to YHWH’s presence in Zion. In Psalm 132, blessings to the Davidic household are explained in 132:13-14 as being because (כִּי, ‘for’) of YHWH’s choice of Zion as the place where he will dwell (ישב; 132:14; see also 132:5,8). This understanding of Jerusalem as YHWH’s dwelling place is also seen in Psalm 122:9 and 134:1, which refer to the temple in Jerusalem as YHWH’s house. It is also implied in Psalm 128:5 and 134:3, where the psalmist says that it is from Zion that YHWH will bless.

However, the blessing of Zion is not absolute. This is made clear in Psalm 132: YHWH has made a covenant with the Davidic dynasty (132:11). David’s descendants are expected to obey the terms of the covenant and, in response, YHWH will cause them to sit (ישב) on the throne in perpetuity (132:12). The result of this said covenant obedience will be blessing (ברך). This includes blessing for the Davidic dynasty (132:17-18; see also 122:5), and also blessing for Zion in two ways, namely, food for the poor of Zion (132:15) and blessings for Zion’s priests (132:16). This twofold blessing of Zion in Psalm 132 is paralleled in Psalm 133’s emphasis on dew (133:3a), which is representative of a rich harvest,45 and Aaron (133:2b), who is the priest par excellence. The subsidiaries of Psalm 133 hence parallel the results

44 There is some uncertainty as to whether or not this restoration spoken about in Ps. 126:1 is in the past (e.g. most English translations) or in the future (e.g. JPS translation). However, this does not detract from the point being made here that YHWH is the one who blesses Zion.

45 See, for example, Gen. 27:28,39; Deut. 33:28; 2 Sam. 1:21.
of obedience to the Davidic covenant as stated in Psalm 132. This provides yet another piece of evidence to confirm the earlier hypothesis that the two subsidiary subjects belong to the same conceptual domain.

In summary, the foregoing analysis of the Psalms of Ascents shows that the source domain of YHWH’S BLESSING OF ZION has the following structure:

S1. Blessing of Zion comes from YHWH.
S2. Zion’s blessing is intimately tied to YHWH’s presence who dwells in Zion.
S3. This blessing is conditional. It is dependent on the Davidic dynasty’s obedience to the Davidic covenant.
S4. Such blessing is comprised of abundance of food, the wellbeing of the temple cult, and, ultimately, the success of the Davidic dynasty.

3.2 YHWH’S Blessing of Israel

Like Zion, it is also clear that Israel’s blessing comes from YHWH in the Psalms of Ascents. For example, Psalm 128:5,8 and 134:3 explicitly state that it is YHWH who acts to bless (ברך). Elsewhere, YHWH is also seen as delivering ( длל, 120:2), helping (עזר, 121:2; 124:8), showing mercy (חנן, 123:2), restoring (שוב, 126:1,4), and redeeming (פדה, 130:8).

However, if YHWH is viewed in the collection as blessing Israel, does this imply that YHWH is also seen as being spatially present in the whole of Israel? No – rather, as earlier mentioned, YHWH is explicitly depicted in the collection as blessing ‘from Zion’ (מִצִּיּוֹן; 128:5 and 134:3). Moreover, elsewhere in the collection, spatial distance between Israelites and YHWH is also emphasised (121:1; 123:1). If YHWH blesses Israel if he dwells in Zion? The solution is found in 121:2 and 124:8. His creatorship of the heavens and the earth means that YHWH possesses a universal unbounded power, allowing YHWH to bless from Zion.

Like Zion, is YHWH’s blessing of Israel conditional? Indeed, this seems to be the case. For example, in Psalm 125, it is only the man

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46 There is one verse in the collection that could refer to YHWH’s presence, namely Ps. 125:2, where YHWH is described as surrounding (שָׁבֵב) his people. However, this has been taken by a number of commentators as intimating a sense of protectiveness rather than an actual theological statement of YHWH’s spatial immanence, cf. Allen, Psalms 101–150, 168; deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, The Book of Psalms, 911; Kraus, Psalms 60–150, 445.
who trusts (ברחה) in YHWH who is said to abide (ישב) forever (125:1). Similarly, later in the psalm, the psalmist calls for YHWH to be good (שתבע) to those who are good (טוב). Given the overlapping use of ישב and טוב in Psalm 125 with 133:1, this conditionality in Psalm 125 corroborates the earlier characterisation of 133:1 as blessing due to obedience to the Deuteronomic covenant. This is further corroborated by observations made by Liebreich that the Psalms of Ascents show significant evidence of being structured around the verbs of the Aaronic blessing, which itself is set in a Deuteronomic framework. One specific example is Psalm 121, which uses the verb שמיר (‘to keep’) six times and is apparently set in the context of a journey, much like the Aaronic blessing which also uses the verb in a similar context in Numbers.

Likewise, the collection understands the rewards of such obedience to be the typical blessings of the Deuteronomic covenant. This can be seen, for example, in Psalm 128. Like Psalm 125, this psalm also displays conditionality. In this case, the condition is fear of YHWH (128:1,4), another Deuteronomic covenant condition, and the reward for such obedience is a successful harvest (128:2), wellbeing (טוב again; 128:2), a fertile wife who bears many children (128:3), and a long life (128:6). Such rewards are all drawn from Deuteronomy’s promises.

Finally, it is critical to observe that the collection often frames the blessing of Israel in terms of Zion. For example, in Psalm 128 that was just mentioned, Israel’s experience of blessing is described in 128:5 as seeing the prosperity (טוב) of Jerusalem. The use of טוב, a cognate of טוב, links 128:5 with 128:2 where the blessing of wellness on the Israelite who fears YHWH is described as טוב. This suggests that the psalmist understands the wellbeing of Israel to be intimately linked to the wellbeing of Jerusalem. This close relationship between Jerusalem and the rest of Israel is further corroborated in many other psalms within the collection.

49 See, for example, Deut. 6:2,13,24.
50 See Deut. 28:3-4,8,11,12; 30:9.
51 See Psalms 122, 125, 126, 129, and 134. A detailed exegesis of each of these five psalms would be beyond the ambit of this article, so only brief comments on each are
Thus, in summary, the target domain of YHWH’S BLESSING OF ISRAEL has the following logical structure:

T1. Blessing of Israel comes from YHWH.
T2. Israel’s blessing comes from YHWH who dwells in Zion.
T3. This blessing is conditional. It is dependent on the Israel’s obedience to the Deuteronomic covenant.
T4. Such blessing is comprised of many things, but, most noteworthy, of wellbeing (טַוְב).

How is all this related to understanding Psalm 133 better? First, as already mentioned, the collection as a whole confirms the reading of 133:1 as paralleling a Deuteronomic covenantal world-view. Second, it further confirms that טַוְב in 133:1 does indeed refer to covenantal blessing, since טַוְב and its cognates טָבַב and יָטַב are also used throughout the collection to refer to covenantal blessings (both Israel’s and Zion’s). Finally, it provides yet another reason to see that the comparison between the principal and subsidiary subjects is not a non-sequitur since the collection depicts YHWH’S BLESSING OF ISRAEL and YHWH’S BLESSING OF ZION as intimately related, with the former often being understood in terms of the latter. This is the same kind of relationship between the principal and subsidiary subjects of Psalm 133.

4. Relationship between the Conceptual Domains

4.1 Mapping between the Domains

The preceding analysis of the collection has shown how carefully the psalmist has chosen the principal and subsidiary subjects, and, by extension, the conceptual domains that they belong to. It has also illustrated the points of similarity and difference between the target and provided here. In Psalm 122, a pilgrim from Israel-at-large (122:1,4) is spoken of as seeking the welfare of the inhabitants of Jerusalem (122:6-9). In Psalm 125, the security of Israelites who trust in YHWH (125:1) is described in terms of Jerusalem’s security (125:1-2). Psalm 126 has two vignettes: 126:1-3 describes YHWH’s restoration of Jerusalem; 126:4-6 then builds on Jerusalem’s restoration to pray for restoration for the rest of Israel. Psalm 129 begins with Israel lamenting its affliction (129:1) by enemies equated with haters of Zion (129:5). Lastly, Psalm 134 involves the juxtaposition of blessings. The speaker of 134:1-2 calls upon servants of YHWH to bless YHWH in the temple. In contrast, 134:3 appears to be a return blessing from the servants of YHWH to the speaker of the initial two verses. The use of מִצִּיִּים (‘from Zion’) in 134:3 indicates that the speaker is outside of Zion.
source domains. Both domains are concerned with blessing by YHWH, with covenantal obedience, and with covenantal blessings. Yet the domains are not identical. Since the spaces are different, the covenants in question are different (Davidic versus Deuteronomic), and thus, likewise, the blessings are different. This should not be surprising since metaphors thrive on both similarity and difference. If there is no difference, the metaphor then becomes an identity relation; if there is no similarity of any kind, then the metaphor fails.

Moreover, this analysis has also shown that the choice of the two domains is not arbitrary, and that the two domains are often related as well in other psalms in the collection. The wellbeing of Israel and its capital are deeply intertwined. The diagram below summarises the mapping between the two domains.

### Similes (133:2-3)

**Source domain:**
(YHWH’s Blessing of Zion)

**Target domain:**
(YHWH’s blessing of Israel)

1. Space: Zion
2. Covenant: Davidic
3. Covenant condition: right kingly living
4. Covenant blessings: dew (133:2) // blessing of food (132:15), oil (133:3a) // priests blessed (132:16)
5. Source of blessing: YHWH who dwells in Zion

### Programmatic Statement (133:1)

**Source domain:**
(YHWH’s blessing of Israel)

1. Space: Israel
2. Covenant: Deuteronomic
3. Covenant condition: right familial living
4. Covenant blessings: the goodness of family unity (Ps. 133:1; see also Psalm 128)
5. Source of blessing: YHWH who dwells in Zion

### 4.2 Form and Experience Dwelling in Unity

There is still one more poetic feature of Psalm 133 that has not been accounted for, namely, the triple use of יֹרֵד that emphases downward motion. Nonetheless, this can be explained given the mapping described in the last section. First of all, remember that the mapping of meaning is from the subsidiaries to the principal. Spatially speaking, we have observed that the scenes in the subsidiary subjects are located in Zion, while that in the principal subject is located in Israel. How would the spatial directionality of that mapping from Zion to Israel be
best described? The answer is ‘downwards’, using the verb ירד (‘to go down’). This is because the process of going from Israel to Zion in the Hebrew Bible is often described using the verb עלה (‘to go up’). Naturally, the movement from Zion to Israel is best described by its antonym ירד.

If this reading is correct, we see an interesting parallel between the form of Psalm 133 and the experiences of Israel that it seeks to describe. Form-wise, the directionality of the mapping of Psalm 133’s metaphorical subjects (blessed Zion → blessed Israel) is the same as the directionality of its central verb (ירד). Both are ‘down’. Likewise, experience-wise, the psalmist understand blessing as coming ‘down’ to Israel from YHWH in Zion. Thus, the form of Psalm 133 is a mimesis of the psalmist’s experience. The psalm showcases the ability of poetry to not just describe reality but provide a literary means of vicariously experiencing the reality described therein. In Psalm 133, form and experience dwell in unity.

This inter-relationship between form and experience is further strengthened by the use of the verb ישב in 133:1, ייחד in 133:1, and the phrase עמים ותרומתולם (‘life forever’) in 133:3. As discussed earlier, the verb ישב is used to refer to three key groups in the Psalms of Ascents: to Israelites (125:1; 127:2; 133:1), to the Davidic dynasty (122:5; 132:12), and to YHWH (123:1; 132:14). Hence, the use of ישב links the fate of Israel to the Davidic dynasty through the person of YHWH. And what is the result of that fate? For the Davidic dynasty, to rule forever (אגרדיה, 132:12); for Israel-at-large, to have a long life (מלים ויימים, 128:5). Both of these expressions are blended together in 133:3 (חיים ותרומתולם). Likewise, Jerusalem, described as a city bound tightly (ייחד; 122:3), is reflected in Israel’s brotherly unity (דגו; 133:1). So even as the poetic form of Psalm 133 intertwines expressions referring to Israel and Zion, such intertwining mirrors the psalmist’s experience of Israel’s blessing being intertwined with Zion’s

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52 See Ps. 122:4. For examples from the rest of the Hebrew Bible, see 2 Sam. 19:34; 1 Kgs 12:27-28; 2 Kgs 12:27; 2 Chr. 36:23 ( Ezra 1:3); Ezra 7:9; Isa. 2:3 ( Mic. 4:2); Zech. 14:16-17. See also DCH, 287. There may also be additional support for this in the superscription of the Psalms of Ascents, since one prominent interpretative tradition is to read פַּעְלָה as referring to pilgrimage to Jerusalem. See Crow, Songs of Ascents, 23-25.

53 See, for example, 2 Chr. 18:2; 22:6 where the king of Judah is said to ‘go down’ from Jerusalem to go north to the kingdom of Israel.
blessing. The fates of Israel and Zion are inseparable, bound together under the aegis of YHWH who chose them all.

5. Conclusion

The cognitive approach used in this article showed that the metaphors of Psalm 133 do more than simply describe the goodness of brotherly unity through the literary portraits of flowing oil and dew. Rather, it showed that the relationship between the subjects of the metaphors is not apparent at the level of the immediate referents, but rather at the level of their underlying conceptual domains. Seen through the eyes of the cognitive approach, Psalm 133 is appreciated as a poetic vehicle that allows its audience to experience (not just describe) one covenantal blessing through another.

Moreover, in this article the cognitive approach was complemented by an approach which sought to understand Psalm 133 through the world-view of Psalms 120–132 and 134. A study of blessing in the Psalms of Ascents as a whole revealed a sophisticated theology that was spatially heterogeneous. This theology allows a greater understanding of the world-view underlying Psalm 133’s metaphors, providing a fuller appreciation of the psalm’s metaphors and its rhetorical goals.