

Mizmor 079

Tragedy and Justice

Key Concepts

The prophet Asaph had ended Mizmor 078 with the promise of a new life of Torah under the royal House of David. At long last there would be a permanent home for the Divine Presence in Yerushalayim. But now Asaph turns from the lessons of the past and peers ahead into the distant future. Through the power of prophecy he foresees a tragic time when Yerushalayim will be overwhelmed by an invading army and the First *Bais HaMikdash* (Temple) will be destroyed.

This anticipated tragedy was to be symptomatic of many calamities that the Jewish people would have to face over the centuries. It was Asaphs' mission to prepare the people for these difficulty times ahead and he composed this mizmor as a model of the *tefillos* to Hashem in such circumstances.

Exploring the Mizmor

PART 1. A CRY OF ANGUISH. The mizmor begins by calling upon Hashem to witness the insult that the enemy has perpetrated by defiling the holiness of Hashem's domain on earth. He then turns to the tragic vision of the unburied bodies of Hashem's devoted servants and concludes his lament with the sense of shame felt by Yisrael at being scorned by the surrounding nations.

(א) מִזְמוֹר לְאַסָּף אֱלֹקִים בָּאוּ גוֹיִם בְּנִחְלָתָךְ טִמְאוּ אֶת־הַיֵּכָל קִדְשְׁךָ שְׁמוֹ
אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלַם לְעַיִים: (ב) נָתַנוּ אֶת־נִבְלַת עֲבָדֶיךָ מֵאֲכָל לְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם בְּשֵׁר חֲסִידֶיךָ
לְחִיתוֹ־אֲרָץ: (ג) שָׁפְכוּ דָמָם כַּמַּיִם סְבִיבוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם וְאֵין קוֹבֵר: (ד) הֵיִינוּ חֲרָפָה
לְשִׁכְנֵינוּ לְעַג וְקֶלֶס לְסַבִּיבוֹתֵינוּ:

(1) A mizmor by Asaph. O G-d!. The [invading] nations have trespassed upon Your private domain. They have defiled Your holy Sanctuary. They have turned Yerushalayim into ruins. (2) [The invaders] have left the corpses of Your servants as food for the birds of the sky and the flesh of Your devout ones to the beasts of the land. (3) They have shed their [victims'] blood like water all around the holy city of Yerushalayim and there was no one to bury them. (4) We have become an object of ridicule to

our neighbors, the mockery and scorn of those around us.

PART 2. A PLEA FOR MERCY. Having set the scene, Asaph now appeals to Hashem to relent from His anger at our sins. Surely, we have been punished enough! He asks Hashem to vent His rage at the enemy nations which are far more guilty than we because of their refusal to recognize Hashem.

(ה) עַד־מָה ה' תִּאָּנֶן לְנֹצֵחַ תִּבְעַר כְּמוֹ־אֵשׁ קִנְאָתְךָ: (ו) שְׂפָךְ חַמְתְּךָ אֶל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִדְעוּךָ וְעַל מַמְלָכוֹת אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁמְךָ לֹא קָרְאוּ: (ז) כִּי אָכַל אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת־נְוֹהוּ הַשָּׁמוֹ:

(5) *How long [will this Galus continue], Hashem? Will You be angry forever? [How long] will Your indignation burn like a raging fire? (6) [Instead of venting Your rage against Yisrael,] pour Your fury upon the nations that do not recognize You and upon the kingdoms that have not proclaimed Your Name. (7) For [the enemy] has devoured Yaakov and laid waste [the Bais Hamikdash].*

PART 3. ASKING FORGIVENESS. Asaph now seeks to understand why our sins have been treated so severely. He considers the possibility that we are being held accountable not only for our own sins, but for those of previous generations. He acknowledges that we ourselves are unworthy but asks Hashem to grant us forgiveness for the sake of His Name. He is the One Who has always been our *yeshuah*.

(ח) אַל־תִּזְכֹּר־לָנוּ עֲוֹנוֹת רִאשֹׁנִים מִהֵר יִקְדָּמוּנוּ רַחֲמֶיךָ כִּי דָלוּנוּ מֵאִד: (ט) עֲזָרְנוּ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־דָּבָר כְּבוֹד־שִׁמְךָ וְהִצִּילְנוּ וְכִפֵּר עַל־חַטָּאתֵינוּ לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ:
(8) *Don't hold against us the sins of those that came before. May Your mercies come swiftly before [we are found worthy of them], for we are impoverished [of good deeds]. (9) Help us, O G-d [for You have always been] our yeshuah. So rescue us and grant us atonement for our sins, for the sake of Your Name.*

PART 4. A VISION OF JUSTICE. Asaph recalls how the enemy nations have been directly challenging Hashem. He visualizes the day when they will get their answer in the form of Hashem's unlimited power. Hashem will surely respond to the cries of His suffering people and exact His vengeance.

(י) לָמָּה יֹאמְרוּ הַגּוֹיִם אֵיךָ אֱלֹהֵיהֶם יוֹדֵעַ [בְּגִיִּים] בְּגוֹיִם לְעֵינֵינוּ נִקְמַת דָּם־עַבְדֶּיךָ הַשָּׁפוּךְ: (יא) תָּבוֹא לְפָנֶיךָ אֲנָקַת אֶסִּיר כְּגֹדֶל זְרוּעֶךָ הַיּוֹתֵר בְּנֵי תַמּוּתָהּ: (יב) וְהָשִׁב

לְשִׁכְנֵינוּ שְׁבַעַתִּים אֶל־חִיקָם חֲרָפְתָם אֲשֶׁר חָרְפוּ אֶדְ־נִי:

(10) Why should the nations say, "Where is their G-d?" Let the revenge for Your servants' spilled blood be known among the nations before our very eyes. (11) Let the anguished cry of the shackled people reach You. In accord with the unlimited power of Your mighty arm, release the [suffering] people, [who are] near death. (12) As for our [wicked] neighboring nations, repay them sevenfold [directly] into their bosom, for the insult with which they have reviled You, Hashem.

PART 5. CONCLUSION. Asaph concludes the mizmor with an expression of our eternal devotion to the honor of Hashem that has been sullied by the destruction of the *Bais HaMikdash*.

(יג) וְאַנְחֵנוּ עִמָּךְ וְצֹאן מְרִיעִיִךְ נוֹדָה לְךָ לְעוֹלָם לְדֹר וָדֹר נִסְפָּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ:

(13) As for us, Your people and the flock of Your pasture, we will render You grateful homage forever. We will relate Your praise for generation after generation.

Learning the Mizmor

PART 1. A CRY OF ANGUISH

(א) מִזְמוֹר לְאַסָּף

A mizmor composed by **Asaph** — **מִזְמוֹר לְאַסָּף** as a song of gratitude to Hashem and hope for the *Geulah* (Redemption) that He will surely bring.

אֱלֹקִים בָּאוּ גוֹיִם בְּנַחֲלָתֶךָ
טָמְאוּ אֶת הַיְכָל קִדְשֶׁךָ
שָׂמוּ אֶת יְרוּשָׁלַם לְעֵיִם:

O God of justice! We plead with You to end our agony! How can you continue to show restraint in the face of these insults? **The** invading **nations have trespassed** upon the sacred precincts of **Your private domain** — **אֱלֹקִים בָּאוּ גוֹיִם בְּנַחֲלָתֶךָ**. **They have defiled Your holy Sanctuary** — **טָמְאוּ אֶת הַיְכָל קִדְשֶׁךָ**. **They have turned** the entire city of **Yerushalayim into** heaps of **ruins** — **שָׂמוּ אֶת יְרוּשָׁלַם לְעֵיִם**.

(ב) נָתַנוּ אֶת נַבְלַת עֲבָדֶיךָ מֵאֲכָל לְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם
בְּשָׂר חֲסִידֶיךָ לְחֵיתוֹ אֶרֶץ:

In their disregard for the sanctity of the human body, the invaders **have left the corpses of Your righteous servants** — נָתַנוּ אֶת נַבְלַת עֲבָדֶיךָ, out on the field of battle where they died. And so the dead became **food for the birds of the sky** — מֵאֲכָל לְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם. And in some cases the wicked enemy have even cut up **the flesh of Your devout ones** (people who go beyond what is right) — בְּשָׂר חֲסִידֶיךָ, and thrown it **to the dogs and other beasts of the land** — לְחֵיתוֹ אֶרֶץ. These servants and devout ones were righteous people who lived in a wicked generation and so they have made to suffer for the sins of the entire generation.

(ג) שָׁפְכוּ דָמָם כַּמַּיִם סְבִיבוֹת
יְרוּשָׁלַם וְאֵין קוֹבֵר:

They have shed their victims' blood like water all around the holy city of **Yerushalayim** — שָׁפְכוּ דָמָם כַּמַּיִם סְבִיבוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם, a city which had always been maintained in a state of sanctity and purity. **There was no one to bury** the victims — וְאֵין קוֹבֵר because the remaining Jews were afraid to leave their heading places.

(ד) הָיִינוּ חֲרָפָה לְשַׁכְנֵינוּ
לְעַג וְקֶלֶס לְסַבִּיבוֹתֵינוּ:

After scattering us among the nations, **we have become an object of ridicule to our neighbors** — הָיִינוּ חֲרָפָה לְשַׁכְנֵינוּ. We have fallen to such a low level that they don't want us in their vicinity, even in separate ghettos. We have become **the mockery and scorn of those around us** — לְעַג וְקֶלֶס לְסַבִּיבוֹתֵינוּ. Furthermore, it is not only we who are disrespected, but the laws and the *mitzvos* that we observe.

PART 2. A PLEA FOR MERCY

(ה) עַד מָה ה' תִּאֲנֹף לְנֶצַח
תִּבְעַר כְּמוֹ אֵשׁ קִנְאָתְךָ:

How long will this seemingly endless *Galus* continue, **Hashem** — עַד מָה ה' ? **Will You be angry forever** — תִּאֲנֹף לְנֶצַח ? **How long will Your indignation burn**

like a raging **fire** — **תִּבְעַר כְּמוֹ אֵשׁ קִנְאֲתְךָ** that continues to flame until there is nothing left? Surely it has burned out by now.

(ו) שְׂפָךְ חֲמַתְךָ אֶל הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִדְעוּךָ
וְעַל מַמְלָכוֹת אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׂמְךָ לֹא קָרְאוּ:

Instead of venting Your rage against Yisrael, **pour Your fury upon** our oppressors, **the nations that do not recognize You** — **שְׂפָךְ חֲמַתְךָ אֶל הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִדְעוּךָ**.

As for Yisrael, we have admitted to our sins and at least we make a sincere effort to serve You. Let your anger take its effect **upon the kingdoms that have not proclaimed Your Name** — **וְעַל מַמְלָכוֹת אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׂמְךָ לֹא קָרְאוּ**. They have not acknowledged that they are only tools in Your hand. Instead, they have taken pride in the victory that You granted them.

(ז) כִּי אָכַל אֶת יַעֲקֹב
וְאֶת נֹהוּי הַשֵּׁמוֹ:

For the enemy **has devoured Yaakov** — **כִּי אָכַל אֶת יַעֲקֹב**, taking full credit for their victory, whereas it was Your doing, punishing Your people for their sins. **The enemy** even **laid waste** to the *Bais HaMikdash*, **Your place of dwelling** — **וְאֶת נֹהוּי הַשֵּׁמוֹ** thinking that in this way they had diminished Your Name in the world. Surely, they are deserving of becoming the brunt of Your anger in place of Yisrael.

PART 3. ASKING FORGIVENESS

(ח) אַל תִּזְכֹּר לָנוּ עֲוֹנוֹת רֵאשֵׁנִים
מִהֵר יִקְדְּמוּנוּ רַחֲמֶיךָ כִּי דָלוּנוּ מְאֹד:

Don't hold against us the sins of those that came **before** us — **אַל תִּזְכֹּר לָנוּ**
מִהֵר יִקְדְּמוּנוּ — **עֲוֹנוֹת רֵאשֵׁנִים**. **May Your mercies come swiftly** even **before** — **רַחֲמֶיךָ** we are found worthy of them, **for we are impoverished** of good deeds — **כִּי דָלוּנוּ מְאֹד**.

(ט) עֲזָרְנוּ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעָנוּ עַל דְּבַר כְּבוֹד שְׂמֶךָ

Help us, O G-d for You have always been **our yeshuah** — **עֲזָרְנוּ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעָנוּ** and have always saved us. In our present miserable state, people might think You are no longer able to be our *yeshuah*, so come now to our aid **for the sake of the**

glory of Your Name — על־דבר כבוד־שִׁמְךָ, which will be restored through our *yeshuah*.

וְהַצִּילֵנוּ וְכַפֵּר עַל חַטֹּאתֵינוּ לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ:

So rescue us — וְהַצִּילֵנוּ through Your mercies **and grant us atonement for our sins** — וְכַפֵּר עַל־חַטֹּאתֵינוּ, which are holding back the *yeshuah*. Do this **for the sake of Your Name** — לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ because Your Name will then be universally known for being all-good and forgiving.

PART 4. A VISION OF JUSTICE

(י) לָמָּה יֹאמְרוּ הַגּוֹיִם אֵיךְ אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ

יִנָּדַע בְּגוֹיִם לְעֵינֵינוּ

נִקְמַת דָּם עֲבֹדֵיךָ הַשְּׁפוּדִים:

Why should the nations say about us, "**Where is their G-d?**" — לָמָּה יֹאמְרוּ הַגּוֹיִם אֵיךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ. On the contrary, **let the revenge for Your servants' spilled blood be known among the nations** in our own experience, **before our very eyes** — נִקְמַת דָּם־עֲבֹדֵיךָ הַשְּׁפוּדִים יִנָּדַע בְּגוֹיִם לְעֵינֵינוּ. Let them realize and acknowledge that their present troubles are the direct consequence of the Jewish blood they spilled.

(יא) תָּבוֹא לְפָנֶיךָ אֲנָקַת אֲסִיר

כַּגֹּדֶל זְרוּעֶךָ הַחַיִּת בְּנֵי תַּמּוּתָּהּ:

Let the anguished cry of the shackled Jewish nation in the dungeons of Exile **reach You** — תָּבוֹא לְפָנֶיךָ אֲנָקַת אֲסִיר. **In accord with the unlimited power of Your mighty arm** — כַּגֹּדֶל זְרוּעֶךָ, which is not not restricted by any circumstance, **release the suffering people**, who are **near death** — הַחַיִּת בְּנֵי תַּמּוּתָּהּ.

(יב) וְהָשֵׁב לְשַׁכְנֵינוּ שְׁבַעֲתִים אֶל חֵיקֵם

חֲרָפָתָם אֲשֶׁר חֲרַפוּךָ אֲדֹנָי:

Hashem, **repay our wicked neighboring nations sevenfold** — וְהָשֵׁב לְשַׁכְנֵינוּ שְׁבַעֲתִים for the disrespect they have shown You by saying, "Where is their G-d?" Let their retribution not be diverted, but applied directly **into their bosom** —

אֶל־חִיקָם, for the insult with which they have reviled You, *Hashem* —
חֲרַפְתֶּם אֲשֶׁר חֲרַפּוּךָ אֲדֹנָי

PART 5. CONCLUSION

(יג) וְאַנְחֵנוּ עִמָּךְ וְצֹאן מְרֵעִיִּךְ
נוֹדָה לְךָ לְעוֹלָם
לְדֹר וָדֹר נִסְפֵּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ:

As for us — וְאַנְחֵנוּ, whether in Exile or freed from Exile, we are **Your people and the flock of Your pasture** - עִמָּךְ וְצֹאן מְרֵעִיִּךְ, who will always be dependent on You, as the sheep are dependent on the shepherd. And so **we will** continue to **render You grateful homage forever** — נוֹדָה לְךָ לְעוֹלָם. **We will relate Your praise for generation after generation** — לְדֹר וָדֹר נִסְפֵּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ, as we continue to tell of Your wonders to our descendants.

Sources

The primary sources used in the interpretation of the verses in this mizmor are listed below.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ח - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, מלבי"ם, בן רמון, ספורנו,
אבן יחיאל, רשר"ה, נר לרגלי | א - המאירי, רש"י, רד"ק, בן-רמון, מלבי"ם |
| ט - רד"ק, מלבי"ם | ב - רד"ק, מצודות, בן-רמון, אבן יחיאל, מלבי"ם |
| י - מלבי"ם, אבן יחיאל, רשר"ה | ג - רד"ק, בן רמון |
| יא - אבן עזרא, מצודות, המאירי, אבן יחיאל,
רשר"ה, נר לרגלי | ד - רד"ק, מלבי"ם, המאירי |
| יב - רד"ק, מצודות | ה - רש"י, רד"ק, מצודות, מלבי"ם, בן-רמון,
רשר"ה |
| יג - רד"ק, מצודות, בן-רמון, נר לרגלי | ו - רד"ק |
| | ז - מצודות, ספורנו, אלשיך, רשר"ה, נר לרגלי |

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