

Mizmor 082

The Ultimate Judge

Key Concepts

The prophet Asaph composed this mizmor as a condemnation of corruption in the courts wherever and whenever it may be found. Such a condition had occurred during the reign of Yehoshafat, a righteous king of Yehudah who appointed new judges throughout his kingdom. Yehoshafat placed special emphasis on the integrity of the judicial process. He told the judges that they were not just acting on behalf of man, but on behalf of Hashem. (See II Divrei Hayamim 19:7.)

In the mizmor Asaph points out that Hashem is the ultimate Judge, who monitors the activities of every court. Because of Hashem's presence in the court, any failure of the judges in rendering fair and honest judgment is a direct insult to Hashem.

Asaph was especially concerned about the role of the justice system in protecting the interest of the needy and disadvantaged. As a result of their lack of influence among the decision makers in a community, poor people are vulnerable to being treated unfairly.

This mizmor is also noteworthy because it was designated as the Song of the Day (*Shir Shel Yom*) for the third day of the week. The connection between the subject of the *mizmor* and this particular day is based on the fact that the third day of Creation was the day on which the waters that covered the earth were withdrawn and dry land appeared. Thus, the world became habitable. The continued existence of our world depends on the maintenance of justice, which is the subject of the mizmor.

Exploring the Mizmor

The mizmor has four parts. After a brief introduction (Part 1), Asaph speaks for Hashem, accusing the corrupt judges of their crimes and telling them to reform their ways. Then in Part 3 Hashem pronounces a guilty verdict against the corrupt judges, telling them that His high hope for their special role in society has been disappointed. Hashem expected the judges to be acting directly for Him, since He has always considered Himself responsible for the administration of justice. Thus, when judges are worthy, they are like angelic beings, acting for Hashem in rendering judgment. If they are unworthy, they are no better, and much worse, than ordinary, mortal men.

In Part 4, Asaph concludes with a plea to Hashem to intervene in those cases where judges have acted corruptly and to rectify the situation so that true justice is restored.

PART 1. INTRODUCTION.

(א) מִזְמוֹר לְאַסָּף אֱלֹקִים נֹצֵב בְּעֵדוּת אֵל בְּקֶרֶב אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁפֹּט:

(1) *A mizmor by Asaph. G-d is present in every judicial assembly. He judges in the midst of the judges.*

PART 2. THE INDICTMENT. Hashem presents His case against the corrupt judges of the world:

(ב) עַד מָתַי תִּשְׁפָּטוּ עֹל וּפְנֵי רָשָׁעִים תִּשְׂאוּ סֵלָה: (ג) שִׁפְטוּ דַל וְיִתּוֹם עֲנֵי וְרָשׁ הַצְּדִיקוּ: (ד) פִּלְטוּ דַל וְאֶבְיוֹן מִיַּד רָשָׁעִים הַצִּילוּ:

(2) *How long will you judge lawlessly, and show favor to the wicked, Selah? (3) Provide justice for the impoverished and the orphan. Vindicate the poor and the indigent. (4) Save the impoverished and destitute and rescue them from the hand of the wicked.*

PART 3. THE VERDICT. Hashem reflects upon the guilt of the judges. Because of their failure to adhere to the principles of justice, they are no longer to be treated as angelic beings and will be subject to mortality of ordinary men.

(5) *They do not know nor do they understand. They walk in darkness, while all the foundations of the earth totter. (6) I had said "You are angelic. You are all sons of the Most High. (7) But you will die like like [ordinary mortal] man and you will fall like one of the princes."*

(ה) לֹא יָדְעוּ וְלֹא יָבִינּוּ בַחֲשֵׁכָה יִתְהַלְכוּ יְמוּטוּ כֹּל מוֹסְדֵי אָרֶץ: (ו) אֲנִי אֶמְרָתִי אֱלֹהִים אַתֶּם וּבְנֵי עֲלִיוֹן כְּלַכֶּם: (ז) אַכֹּן כְּאָדָם תִּמְוֹתוֹן וּכְאֶחָד הַשָּׂרִים תִּפְלוּ:

PART 4. AN APPEAL FOR DIVINE INTERVENTION. Asaph appeals to Hashem to take action against the corrupt judges.

(ח) קוּמָה אֱלֹהִים שִׁפְטָה הָאָרֶץ כִּי אֶתָּה תִּנְחַל בְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם:

(8) *Arise, O G-d, judge the earth, for it is Your heritage [to care] for the oppressed among all the nations*

Learning the Mizmor

PART 1. INTRODUCTION.

(א) מִזְמוֹר לְאַסָּף
אֱלֹקִים נֹצֵב בְּעֵדוֹת קָל
בְּקֶרֶב אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁפֹּט

A mizmor by Asaph — מִזְמוֹר לְאַסָּף. G-d is present in every judicial assembly — אֱלֹקִים נֹצֵב בְּעֵדוֹת אֵל. He stands and judges in the midst of the judges — בְּקֶרֶב אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁפֹּט to ascertain whether they are judging fairly.

PART 2. THE INDICTMENT.

(ב) עַד מָתַי תִּשְׁפֹּטוּ עֹל
וּפְנֵי רְשָׁעִים תִּשְׂאוּ סֵלָה:

G-d says to the judges: **How long will you judge lawlessly — עַד מָתַי תִּשְׁפֹּטוּ** — **עַד מָתַי תִּשְׁפֹּטוּ** and **show favor to the wealthy wicked, Selah — וּפְנֵי רְשָׁעִים תִּשְׂאוּ סֵלָה** — **וּפְנֵי רְשָׁעִים תִּשְׂאוּ סֵלָה** to rule in their favor against the poor?

(ג) שְׁפֹטוּ דַל וְיָתוֹם
עָנִי וְרֵשׁ הַצְּדִיקוּ:

Render justice for the impoverished and the orphan — שְׁפֹטוּ דַל וְיָתוֹם to help them get fair treatment in the courts. **Vindicate the poor and the indigent — עָנִי** — **עָנִי** **וְרֵשׁ הַצְּדִיקוּ** even when they are up against the rich and powerful.

(ד) פִּלְטוּ דַל וְאֶבְיוֹן
מִיַּד רְשָׁעִים הַצִּילוּ:

Go beyond the law to **save the impoverished and destitute — פִּלְטוּ דַל וְאֶבְיוֹן** — **פִּלְטוּ דַל וְאֶבְיוֹן** from their oppressors. **Rescue them from the hand of the aggressive wicked — מִיַּד רְשָׁעִים הַצִּילוּ** — **מִיַּד רְשָׁעִים הַצִּילוּ**, who use force of arms when they cannot succeed in court.

PART 3. THE VERDICT.

(ה) לֹא יָדְעוּ וְלֹא יָבִינוּ

בַּחֲשֵׁכָה יִתְהַלְכוּ

יְמוּטוּ כָּל מוֹסְדֵי אֶרֶץ:

Hashem reflects upon the guilt of the judges: **They do not know** that there is a Judge above them **nor do they understand** the seriousness of their perversion of justice — **לֹא יָדְעוּ וְלֹא יָבִינוּ**. **They walk in darkness** for their eyes have been blinded by graft — **בַּחֲשֵׁכָה יִתְהַלְכוּ**, **while all the foundations of the earth totter** — **יְמוּטוּ כָּל מוֹסְדֵי אֶרֶץ**. Their perversion of justice undermines the very foundations of the earth.

(ו) אֲנִי אֶמְרָתִי אֱלֹקִים אַתֶּם

וּבְנֵי עֲלִיוֹן בְּלַבְכֶם:

I had said to them — **אֲנִי אֶמְרָתִי**, "**You were meant to be angelic** in your moral rectitude — **אֱלֹקִים אַתֶּם**. **You are all sons of the Most High** — **וּבְנֵי עֲלִיוֹן בְּלַבְכֶם**, for the office of judge is the calling closest to G-d. It is G-d's work that you do (*Devarim 1:17*), and so you could have been eligible for immortality."

(ז) אָכֵן כְּאָדָם תָּמוּתוֹן

וּכְאַחַד הַשָּׂרִים תִּפְלוּ:

But you will die like like ordinary mortal **man** — **אָכֵן כְּאָדָם תָּמוּתוֹן** for you view your office as a symbol of power. **And so you will fall** from your high position **like one of the world's princes** — **וּכְאַחַד הַשָּׂרִים תִּפְלוּ** who rule harshly, crushing and exploiting their subjects.

PART 4. AN APPEAL FOR DIVINE INTERVENTION.

(ח) קוּמָה אֱלֹקִים שְׁפֹטָה הָאָרֶץ

כִּי אַתָּה תִּנְחַל בְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם:

Asaph appeals to Hashem to take action against the corrupt judges: **Arise, O G-d, judge the earth** — **קוּמָה אֱלֹקִים שְׁפֹטָה הָאָרֶץ**, **for it is Your heritage** to care for **for the oppressed among all the nations** — **כִּי אַתָּה תִּנְחַל בְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם**.

Sources

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

ה - רש"י, אבן עזרא, ספורנו

ו - מצודות, ספורנו, רשר"ה

ז - רד"ק, המאירי, נר לרגלי

ח - רש"י, רד"ק, אבן יחייא

א - רש"י, מצודות

ב - רד"ק

ג - רש"י, אבן עזרא

ד - רד"ק, מצודות, ספורנו, אבן יחייא

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