

Mizmor 083

Under Attack

Key Concepts

The prophet Asaph composed this mizmor to earn Hashem's sympathy and active support in a situation where the Jewish nation is surrounded by enemies, conspiring to destroy it. Aspects of this situation have occurred at various times throughout history and the mizmor is written in such a way as to have universal applicability. However, many commentators associate it with the time of the King Yehoshafat, who was also mentioned in conjunction with the previous mizmor (082).

The mizmor has four parts, in the first of which the urgency of the danger is laid out. In the second part, Asaph appeals to Hashem to come to our aid as He did in times past, using the period of the *Shoftim* (Judges) as a model. In the third and fourth parts Asaph pleads with Hashem to grant us both military and moral victory over our enemies.

Exploring the Mizmor

PART 1. SURROUNDED BY ENEMIES. Asaph appeals for help by outlining the danger that Yisrael is now facing. He speaks of enemy nations both near and far, as well as in every direction of the compass. They have one thing in common — a vicious hatred for the Jewish people. They would like nothing better to completely annihilate the national existence of Yisrael and take their Land. Asaph ascribes this hatred to their abiding hatred for the idea of one G-d that has been introduced into the world through the agency of Yisrael.

In the last three verses of this part Asaph mentions many of the enemies which conspired together to attack Yisrael at various times. Although Yisrael did not necessarily have to face them all at the same time, their sheer number is indicative of Yisrael's dependence upon Hashem.

(א) שִׁיר מִזְמוֹר לְאַסָּף: (ב) אֱלֹקִים אֵל דְּמִי לָךְ אֵל תַּחֲרֹשׁ וְאֵל תִּשְׁקֹט אֵל: (ג) כִּי הִנֵּה אוֹיְבֶיךָ יַהֲמִינוּ וּמִשְׁנֵאֵיךָ נִשְׂאוּ רֹאשׁ: (ד) עַל עֲמֶךָ יַעֲרִימוּ סוּד וַיִּתְיַעְצוּ עַל צַפּוֹנֶיךָ: (ה) אָמְרוּ לָכֹו וְנִכְחִידֶם מִגּוֹי וְלֹא יִזְכֹּר שֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹד: (ו) כִּי נוֹעְצוּ לָב יַחֲדוּ עֲלֶיךָ בְּרִית יְכַרְתּוּ: (ז) אֲהֲלִי אֲדוֹם וַיִּשְׁמְעֵאלִים מוֹאָב וְהַגְּרִים: (ח) גָּבַל וְעִמּוֹן וְעַמְלֵק פְּלִשְׁתִּים עִם יִשְׂבֵּי צוּר: (ט) גַּם אֲשׁוּר נִלְוָה עִמָּם הָיוּ זְרוּעַ לְבָנֶי לוֹט סֶלָה:

(1) A song, a mizmor by Asaph. (2) O G-d of judgment! Don't stop [Your help]; don't be still and don't be inactive; O G-d of power! (3) For behold, Your foes are agitating [to destroy us] and those who hate You have lifted their head. (4) They have been covertly plotting against Your people; they have conspired against Your treasured ones. (5) They say: "Come, let us annihilate them as a nation so the name of Yisrael will never again be mentioned." (6) For they have conspired together with one mind; they have made a pact against You. (7) [They are] the tents of Edom, the Yishmaelim, Moav, and the descendants of Hagar. (8) Geval, Ammon, Amalek, Pleshes, with the inhabitants of Tzor. (9) Even Ashur joined with them; they became the strong arm of Lot's sons.

PART 2. VICTORIES OF THE SHOFTIM. Asaph pleads for Hashem's help in general terms, using examples of His crucial role during the time of the *Shoftim* (Judges) when Yisrael faced some of the enemies mentioned in the previous part of the *mizmor*. Despite the fact that the Jewish people were often unworthy, Hashem came to their aid and the enemies were defeated. The specific *Shoftim* who were involved in these examples were Gideon and Devorah.

(י) עֲשֵׂה לָהֶם כְּמִדְיָן כְּסִיסְרָא כְּיָבִין בְּנַחַל קִישׁוֹן: (יא) נִשְׁמְדוּ בְּעֵין דָּאָר הָיוּ דְמֶן לְאֻדְמָה: (יב) שִׁיתְמוּ נְדִיבֵמוּ כְּעָרֵב וְכִזְאֵב וְכִזְבַּח וְכִצְלָמָנַע כָּל נְסִיכֵמוּ: (יג) אֲשַׁר אָמְרוּ נִירְשָׁה לָנוּ אֵת נְאוֹת אֱלֹקִים:

(10) Do to them as [You did] to Midian, to Sisera, to Yavin at Kishon Brook. (11) They were totally defeated at Ein-dor, becoming like fertilizer for the soil. (12) Deal with their nobles as [You did with] Orev and Zeev, and all their princes as [You did with] Zevach and Tzalmunna. (13) For they said, "Let us take possession of the pleasant habitations of G-d."

PART 3. A PLEA FOR MILITARY VICTORY. Asaph now uses poetic language to call upon Hashem's help. He uses the metaphors of wind and fire to describe the hoped for military victory that will subdue the enemies of Yisrael.

(יד) אֱלֹקֵי שִׁיתְמוּ כְּגִלְגֵל כְּקֶשׁ לַפְּנֵי רוּחַ: (טו) כְּאֵשׁ תִּבְעַר יַעַר וְכִלְהָבָה תִּלְהֵט הָרִים: (טז) כֵּן תִּרְדְּפֵם בְּסַעֲרְךָ וּבִסּוּפִתְךָ תִּבְהִלֵם:

(14) My G-d, make them be like whirling seed carriers, like straw before the wind, ... (15) like a fire burning the forest, like a flame that sets mountains ablaze. (16) So pursue them with Your tempest and terrify them with Your

whirlwind.

PART 4. A PLEA FOR MORAL VICTORY. Having anticipated military success, Asaph concludes the *mizmor* with a plea for Hashem to make the enemies of Yisrael see the error of their ways. Military victory by force of arms is not enough. He wants the enemies to recognize the truth of Hashem in the world and feel shame at having opposed Yisrael for so long.

(יז) מִלֵּא פְּנֵיהֶם קִלּוֹן וּבִקְשׁוּ שְׁמֶךָ ה'; (יח) יִבְשׂוּ וַיִּבְהָלוּ עַד וַיִּחַפְּרוּ וַיֵּאבְדוּ:

(יט) וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי אַתָּה שְׁמֶךָ ה' לְבַדָּד עֲלִיוֹן עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ:

(17) Fill their faces with shame; then they will seek Your Name, Hashem.

(18) Let them be shamed and terrified for as long as they live; then they will be disgraced and they will perish. (19) Then they [who remain] will know that You Whose Name alone is Hashem are the Most High over all the earth.

Learning the Mizmor

PART 1. SURROUNDED BY ENEMIES.

(א) שִׁיר מִזְמוֹר לְאַסָּף:

Although this mizmor is an appeal for protection in time of danger, it is also **a song** of joy — שִׁיר because it recalls the defeat of Yisrael's enemies in times past. See Part 2.) The **mizmor** — מִזְמוֹר was composed **by Asaph** — לְאַסָּף.

(ב) אֱלֹקִים אֵל דְּמִי לָךְ

אֵל תַּחֲרֹשׁ וְאֵל תִּשְׁקֹט אֵל:

O G-d of judgment — אֱלֹקִים ! At this time of our great distress **don't stop** Your continuing support of Yisrael — אֵל דְּמִי לָךְ. **Don't be still and don't be inactive** in the face of our danger — אֵל תַּחֲרֹשׁ וְאֵל תִּשְׁקֹט, **O G-d of power** — אֵל !

(ג) כִּי הִנֵּה אוֹיְבֶיךָ יַהֲמִיִּין

וּמִשְׁנֵאֵיךָ נִשְׂאוּ רֹאשׁ:

For behold, Your foes are agitating to destroy us — כִּי הִנֵּה אוֹיְבֶיךָ יַהֲמִיִּין **and those who hate You have lifted their head** — וּמִשְׁנֵאֵיךָ נִשְׂאוּ רֹאשׁ. They are

filled with self-importance and have adopted renewed plans to vanquish us. Although their hatred is for us, they are really Your enemies and we face them as Your representatives.

(ד) עַל עֲמָדָה יַעֲרִימוּ סוֹד
וַיִּתְיַעֲצוּ עַל צְפוּנֶיךָ:

They have been covertly plotting against Yisrael because we are **Your people** — **עַל עֲמָדָה יַעֲרִימוּ סוֹד**. Overcoming their differences and their mutual distrust **they** have cooperated to **conspire against Your treasured ones** — **וַיִּתְיַעֲצוּ עַל צְפוּנֶיךָ**, with the calculated aim of severing Your relationship with Yisrael.

(ה) אָמְרוּ לְכוּ וְנִכְחֵדֵם מִגּוֹי
וְלֹא יִזְכָּר שֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹד:

They say to one another — **אָמְרוּ**, "**Come, let us annihilate them as a nation** — **לְכוּ וְנִכְחֵדֵם מִגּוֹי**, so the name of Yisrael with its special relations to Hashem **will never again be mentioned** — **וְלֹא יִזְכָּר שֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹד**" Their ultimate intent is to do away with belief in *Hashem*.

(ו) כִּי נִוְעָצוּ לֵב יַחְדָּו
עֲלֶיךָ בְּרִית יְכָרְתוּ:

For they have conspired together with one mind — **כִּי נִוְעָצוּ לֵב יַחְדָּו**; **they have made a pact against You**, Hashem — **עֲלֶיךָ בְּרִית יְכָרְתוּ** to erase the memory of Your Name in conjunction with that of Yisrael.

(ז) אֶהְלֵי אֶדוֹם וַיִּשְׁמַעְאֵלִים
מוֹאָב וְהַגָּרִים:

They include those who dwell in **the tents of Edom** — **אֶהְלֵי אֶדוֹם**, the descendants of Yitchak's son Esav, **and the Yishmaelim** the descendants of Avraham's son Yishmael — **וַיִּשְׁמַעְאֵלִים**; **Moav** — **מוֹאָב** among the descendants of Lot; **and** the nations who were **the descendants of Hagar** — **וְהַגָּרִים**, Avraham's second wife and the mother of Yishmael. She subsequently remarried and had additional sons with another husband.

(ח) גְּבַל וְעַמּוֹן וְעַמְלֵק
פְּלִשְׁתִּים עִם יִשְׁבֵי צוֹר:

In addition there are: **Geval** — גְּבַל (a nation of Phoenician builders allied with Tzor, mentioned in *Yechezkel* 27:9 and *I Melachim* 5:32); **Ammon** — וְעַמּוֹן (descended from Lot); **Amalek** — וְעַמְלֵק (descended from Esav); **Pleshes** — פְּלִשְׁתִּים (the land of the Plishtim), **with the inhabitants of Tzor** — עִם יִשְׁבֵי צוֹר (a major Phoenician city).

(ט) גַּם אַשּׁוּר נִלְוָה עִמָּם
הָיוּ זְרוּעַ לְבָנֵי לוֹט סֵלָה:

Even Ashur (Assyria), which was relatively distant from Eretz Yisrael, **joined with them** — גַּם אַשּׁוּר נִלְוָה עִמָּם; **they became the strong arm of Lot's sons** (Amon and Moav), which were closer to us, **Selah** — הָיוּ זְרוּעַ לְבָנֵי לוֹט סֵלָה .

PART 2. VICTORIES FOR THE SHOFTIM.

(י) עָשִׂה לָהֶם כְּמִדְיָן כְּסִיסְרָא
כְּיָבִין בְּנַחַל קִישׁוֹן:

Do to them as You did **to Midian** through the agency of Gideon (*Shoftim* 7:22) — עָשִׂה לָהֶם כְּמִדְיָן. Do to them **as** you did **to** General **Sisera** of Canaan through the agency of Devorah and Barak — כְּסִיסְרָא **and as** you did to their King **Yavin at Kishon Brook** — כְּיָבִין בְּנַחַל קִישׁוֹן. Those who fled from Sisera's camp were miraculously drowned in the Kishon brook. In these battles Hashem threw the enemy into a panic and gave the victory to Yisrael. Although the people were unworthy they cried out to Hashem and showed a willingness to change. (See *ibid.* 4:12-24, 5:8-33 and 7:22.)

(יא) נִשְׁמְדוּ בְּעֵין דָּאָר
הָיוּ דָמָן לְאַדְמָה:

They were totally defeated in another battle **at Ein-dor** — נִשְׁמְדוּ בְּעֵין דָּאָר; their corpses were never buried and so **they became like fertilizer for the soil** — הָיוּ דָמָן לְאַדְמָה .

(יב) שִׁיתְמוּ נְדִיבֵמוּ כְּעַרְב וְכִזְאָב
וְכִזְבַּח וְכִצְלִמְנֵעַ כָּל נְסִיכֵמוּ:

Hashem, **deal with their nobles as** You did with **Orev and Zeev** — שִׁיתְמוּ — **נְדִיבֵמוּ כְּעַרְב וְכִזְאָב**, nobles of Midian who were quickly killed by Gideon's army (ibid. 7:25). And deal with **all their princes** as You did with **Zevach and Tzalmunna** — **וְכִזְבַּח וְכִצְלִמְנֵעַ כָּל נְסִיכֵמוּ** — who were also leaders of Midian and were killed by Gideon himself at the end of the campaign (ibid. 8:21).

(יג) אֲשֶׁר אָמְרוּ
נִירְשָׁה לָנוּ אֵת נְאוֹת אֱלֹקִים:

For all of these nations conspired to invade us, **saying** — אֲשֶׁר אָמְרוּ — **"Let us take possession of** — נִירְשָׁה לָנוּ the Land of Yisrael whose blessed mountains and plains must surely be **the pleasant habitations of G-d** — אֵת נְאוֹת אֱלֹקִים."

PART 3. A PLEA FOR MILITARY VICTORY.

(יד) אֱלֹקֵי שִׁיתְמוּ כְּגִלְגָּל
כְּקֶשׁ לִפְנֵי רוּחַ:

My G-d — אֱלֹקֵי, let them have no rest in our land. **Make them be like whirling seed carriers** — שִׁיתְמוּ כְּגִלְגָּל, like straw that is carried **before the wind** — כְּקֶשׁ לִפְנֵי רוּחַ.

(טו) כְּאֵשׁ תִּבְעַר יַעַר
וְכִלְהָבָה תִּלְהֵט הָרִים:

Let them be **like a fire burning the forest** — כְּאֵשׁ תִּבְעַר יַעַר. Just as one tree quickly ignites the next in a dense forest, so may the enemy kill one another quickly in their confusion. Let them be **like a wind-blown flame that sets mountains ablaze** — וְכִלְהָבָה תִּלְהֵט הָרִים.

(טז) כִּן תִּרְדָּפִם בְּסַעֲרָךְ
וּבְסוּפְתָךְ תִּבְהֵלֵם:

So pursue them with Your swift-moving **tempest** — כִּן תִּרְדָּפִם בְּסַעֲרָךְ **and**

terrify them with Your intense whirlwind — **וּבְסוּפֹתַי תִּבְהַל** that is continually changing direction.

PART 4. A PLEA FOR MORAL VICTORY.

(יז) מִלֵּא פְּנֵיהֶם קִלּוֹן
וַיִּבְקְשׂוּ שְׁמִי ה':

Fill their faces with shame as they are embarrassed at their arrogance for thinking they could dispossess Yisrael from its land — **מִלֵּא פְּנֵיהֶם קִלּוֹן, then they will** sincerely regret their actions and **seek Your Name, Hashem** — **וַיִּבְקְשׂוּ שְׁמִי ה'.**

(יח) יִבְשׂוּ וַיִּבְהָלוּ עַד־יָדָי
וַיִּחְפְּרוּ וַיִּאֲבָדוּ:

If they do not fully acknowledge their sins, their insincere regrets will not be accepted. Then **let them be shamed and terrified for as long as they live** — **יִבְשׂוּ וַיִּבְהָלוּ עַד־יָדָי, then they will be disgraced and they will perish** — **וַיִּחְפְּרוּ וַיִּאֲבָדוּ.**

(יט) וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי אַתָּה שְׁמִי ה' לְבַדָּךְ
עָלְיוֹן עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ:

Then those who remain of Yisrael and the nations **will know that You** — **וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי — אַתָּה Whose Name alone is Hashem** — **שְׁמִי ה' , are the Most High over all the earth** — **לְבַדָּךְ עָלְיוֹן עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ.** They will know that they must seek refuge with You if they are to have any future and they will realize, that such renewed future can be theirs only if they render You homage without reservations.

Sources

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

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| א - רד"ק | ה - אבן עזרא, מלבי"ם, המאירי |
| ב - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, מצודות, מלבי"ם | ו - רש"י |
| ג - רד"ק, רשר"ה, נר לרגלי | ז - רד"ק, מצודות |
| ד - מלבי"ם, המאירי, בן רמוך, ספורנו, נר לרגלי | ח - נר לרגלי |

טו - רד"ק, מצודות, אבן יחייא
טז - מלבי"ם, נר לרגלי
יז - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, מלבי"ם, רשר"ה
יח - אבן יחייא
יט - בן רמוך, אבן יחייא

ט - רד"ק, המאירי
י - רש"י, רד"ק, מלבי"ם
יא - רש"י, מצודות, בן רמוך
יב - רד"ק, נר לרגלי
יג - רש"י, המאירי, נר לרגלי
יד - רש"י, מצודות, נר לרגלי

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