

Lesson 14 – Mizmor 145

Goal:

Students should be able to break down this Mizmor into its sections and summarize the content of each section and of the entire Mizmor.

Activity:

1. Since this Mizmor is very familiar and does not contain many difficult words, this is a good chance to encourage students to discover the structure, progression, and meaning of this Mizmor on their own. Ask students to break up into small groups and analyze the Mizmor together looking for the following:

What is the main idea of the Mizmor?
What is the structure of the Mizmor?
What **keywords** are used in the Mizmor?
What other poetic devices do you see?
Do you see any flow of ideas or progression from beginning to end?
What else do you notice that is worth mentioning?

2. Students should be able to find many of the keywords. When they mention a key word ask them to look for every occurrence of it. If they are all near one another, this becomes a section. Once the students have said everything they have found and they begin to see the structure forming, review each key word in order from the beginning and delineate each section.

Refrains - This is the only Mizmor that opens with the word תהלה. The last verse also begins תהלת. Both of these words are from the root הלל which is the key word running throughout this and the next five Mizmorim. Pesukim 1 and 2 both end with שמך לעולם ועד. These words also end the last Pasuk only slightly expanded, שם קדשו לעולם ועד. The verb ברך occurs four times in the Mizmor in vv 1, 2, 10, and 21. Taking all these words together, we find that the first two pesukim and the last Pasuk form an envelope around the rest of the Mizmor. Since the only other occurrence of ברכ is in the middle Pasuk at v 10, this Pasuk too is linked to the opening and closing. Once we compare these Pesukim side by side we find that there is a progression from one to the next.

(א) תהלה לדוד ארוממן א-לוהי המלך	ואברכה שמך לעולם ועד:
(ב) בכל יום אברכה	ואהלה שמך לעולם ועד:
...	
(י) יודוך ידוך כל מעשין	וחסידין וברכוכה:
...	
(כא) תהלת ידוך ידבר פי	ויברך כל בשר שם קדשו לעולם ועד:

In the first two pesukim, the singer blesses Hashem by himself. In the middle Pasuk, a small group of faithful ones – חסידין bless Hashem. By the end, all creatures bless His Holy Name. We can picture someone beginning to sing by himself, then being joined by a few devotees, and finally rallying everyone to sing together. These four Pesukim act as a refrain in the beginning, middle, and end of the Mizmor.

Section 1 – Both halves of Pasuk 3 begin with גדול. The word is found again in Pasuk 6. Everything between these Pesukim also describes Hashem's greatness with words like מעשיך, גבורתיך, כבוד הודך, נפלאתיך, and נוראתיך. All of these words connote the great works of Hashem in creation and nature. They relate to Hashem as transcendent, powerful, and beyond reach. Therefore, both the keyword גדול and the content mark off Pesukim 3-6 as a section praising Hashem's greatness. (Even though גדל comes up once more in Pasuk 8, it is only an adjective there amplifying חסד.)

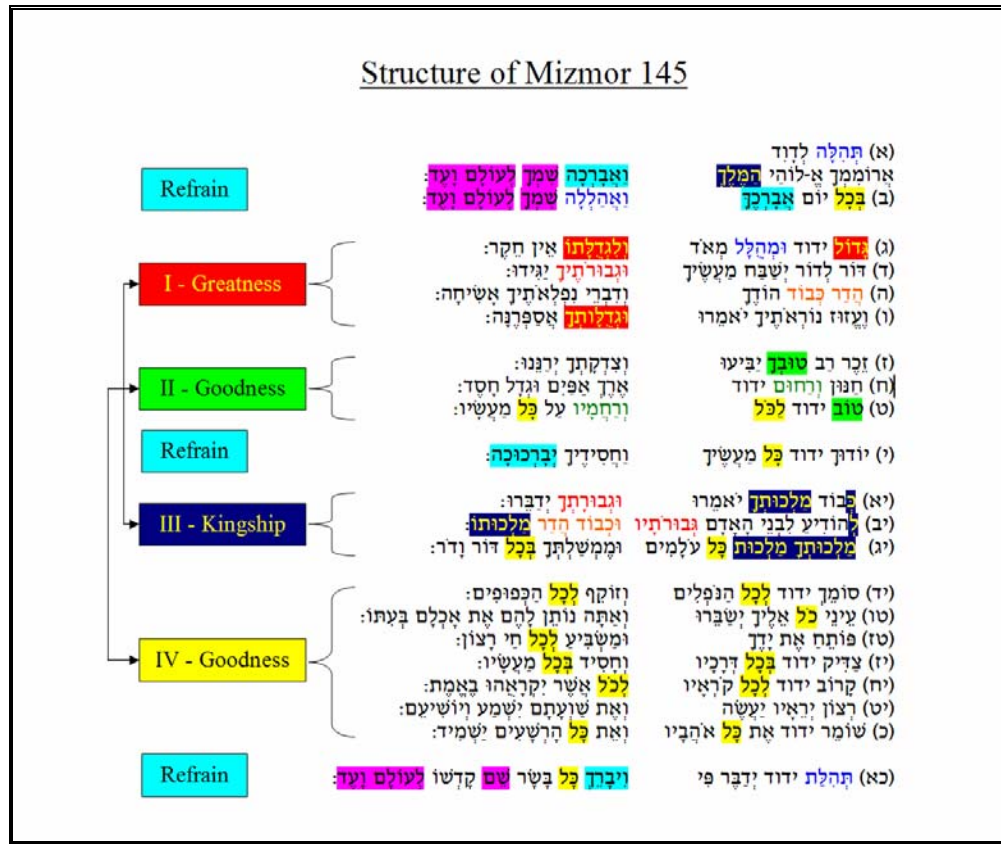
Section 2 – Pasuk 7 introduces celebration for Hashem's goodness – טובך. The word טוב comes up only once more in Pasuk 9. Everything between these words similarly praises Hashem's goodness and kindness with words like צדקתך, חנון ורחום, ארך אפים, and גדל חסד. Pasuk 8 is paraphrase of Hashem's thirteen attributes of mercy (Shemot 34:6). In this section we feel Hashem's closeness to us, His care, and His accessibility. Therefore, both the keyword טוב and the content of Pesukim 7-9 mark off these Pesukim as a section praising Hashem's goodness.

Section 3 – After the refrain at Pasuk 10, we find three Pesukim in a row which contain מלכות (twice in Pasuk 13). The root מלך occurs outside of this section only once in Pasuk 1. This section shares some words with Section 1 such as כבוד and גבורתיך and adds other words which are even more royal such as הדר and ממשלתך. Similar to Section 1, this section also gives off the sense of Hashem as transcendent just like a human king is beyond the reach of the ordinary citizen. Therefore, the keyword מלכות as well as the royal content of Pesukim 11-13 set off these Pesukim as praise for Hashem's kingship. Remarkably, the three Pesukim of this section begin with the letters כ, ל, and מ. When read backwards, these letters spell מלך! This further proves that these three Pesukim form a section about kingship.

Section 4 – Pesukim 14 – 20 form the last section. Everything in these Pesukim describes how Hashem provides help and sustenance to the needy (Pesukim 14-16), and responds to and protects the deserving (Pesukim 18-20). This section is summed up in its middle Pasuk (17) – “Hashem is beneficent in all His ways and faithful in all His works.” This message is similar to that in Section 2. The most predominate word in this section is כל which is repeated ten times. Although כל appears seven more times in the rest of the Mizmor, its concentration in Section 4 makes it this section's keyword. It emphasizes that Hashem is not just selectively good to some people sometimes but rather all-good all the time to all living beings. In turn, it is incumbent upon all people to seek out and love Hashem (Pesukim 15, 18, and 20).

Some philosophers speak of God as a transcendent, infinite, all-powerful being about whom we can know nothing and from whom we wouldn't expect special favors. Others think of God as a close, ever-compassionate father like figure to thinks about us and cares for our every need. In philosophy, it is difficult to reconcile these two conceptions. However, when meditating or when in a state of prayer, our emotions can often shift from one to the other and back. The four sections of this Mizmor similarly vacillate these two extremes. Sections 1 and 3 think of God as transcendent in their calls to proclaim His

greatness and kingship. Sections 2 and 4, on the other hand, think of God as near at hand as they praise His goodness.



L14 - Structure - Summary Sheet.doc

We can now trace the movement of the reader as he experiences this Mizmor. At first alone, the reader begins by thinking of God’s greatness and awesomeness in Section 1 but he doesn’t feel close to Him. Once he begins to fathom God’s mighty acts in creation, we begin to think of acts He performs for us. In Section two we begin to sense God’s mercy. The reader now reaches a higher level where he feels connected with a group of “faithful ones” in the refrain. Now he thinks about God as an infinite king in Section 3. But even a king must take care of his subjects and the infinite king provides infinite care for all beings. It is significant that the last section is the longest and most detailed. It is clearly the climax of the Mizmor and contains its most essential message.

3. There are two types of Pesukim in this Mizmor. Some Pesukim contain praise of Hashem. Other only announce an intention to praise Hashem. For example, the first two Pesukim say, “I will extol...and bless...and praise Your name...” But this is only a promise to praise in the future, not actual praise. Pasuk 3, on the other hand, is a straightforward praise “Great is Hashem...” Go through the Mizmor quickly Pasuk by Pasuk and have the class call out whether each Pasuk is praise or intention to praise. The results can be summed up as follows:

Actual Praise & Intention to Praise
in the Structure of Mizmor 145

Praise	Intention to Praise	תהילים פרק קמה
	X	(א) תהלה לדוד ארוממך א-לוהי המלך ואברכה שמך לעולם ועד:
	X	(ב) בכל יום אברכך ואהלה שמך לעולם ועד:
X		(ג) גדול ידוד ומהלל מאד ולגדתו אין חקר:
	X	(ד) דור לדור ישבח מעשיך וגבורתיך יגידו:
	X	(ה) הדר כבוד הודך ודברי נפלאתיך אשיחה:
	X	(ו) ועוזו נוראתיך יאמרו וגלותו אספנה:
	X	(ז) זכר רב טובך יביעו וצדקתך ירגנו:
X		(ח) חנון ורחום ידוד אהך אפים וגדל חסד:
X		(ט) טוב ידוד לכל ורחמי על כל מעשיו:
	X	(י) ידונך ידוד כל מעשיך וחסדיך יברכוכה:
	X	(יא) פבוד מלכותך יאמרו וגבורתך ידברו:
	X	(יב) להודיע לבני האדם גבורתי וקבוד הדר מלכותו:
X		(יג) מלכותך מלכות כל עלמים וממשלתך בכל דור ודור:
X		(יד) סומך ידוד לכל הנפלים וזוקף לכל הכפופים:
X		(טו) עיני כל אליך ישברו ואתה נותן להם את אכלם בעתו:
X		(טז) פותח את ידך ומשביע לכל חי רצון:
X		(יז) צדיק ידוד בכל דרכיו וחסיד בכל מעשיו:
X		(יח) קרוב ידוד לכל קראיו לכל אשר יקראהו באמת:
X		(יט) רצון יראיו יעשה ואת שועתם ישמע ויושיעם:
X		(כ) שומר ידוד את כל אהביו ואת כל הרשעים ישמיד:
	X	(כא) תהלת ידוד ידבר פי ויבתן כל בשר שם קדשו לעולם ועד:

Why is the Nun-Pasuk missing?

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף קיח עמוד ב

אמר רבי יוחנן: מפני מה לא נאמר נו"ן באשרי? - מפני שיש בה מפלתן של שונאי ישראל, דכתיב: (עמוס ה') נפלה לא תוסיף קום בתולת ישראל. במערבא מתרצי לה הכי: נפלה ולא תוסיף לנפול עוד, קום בתולת ישראל. אמר רב נחמן בר יצחק: אפילו הכי חזר דוד וסמכן ברוח הקדש, שנאמר (תהלים קמ"ה) סומך ה' לכל הנפלים.

L14 - Intention & Praise - Summary Sheet.doc

Do you see any pattern? Notice that most of the promises to pray are found in Sections 1 & 3 while most of the actual praise is found in Sections 2 & 4. *Why?* Since we can not know anything about a transcendent God, it is very difficult to praise Him in Section 1 & 3. All we can do is strive for knowledge of Him. Therefore, we can say very little actual praise (only one Pasuk at the beginning and one at the end) and we express our desire to praise more with statements of intent. In Sections 2 & 4, on the other, hand we speak of

God's infinite kindness to us. Examples of this in everyday life are plentiful and easily appreciated. In these sections we need only express intention to praise once and then the praise immediately pours forth.

4. The Acrostic and the Missing Nun

The Gemara in Shabbat 118b asks why the Nun-Pasuk is missing. Read the Gemara quoted in the source sheet above. *Do you find this answer convincing? What are the problems with it?* This answer is not convincing for a few reasons. Just because there is a negative Pasuk in Amos which begins with Nun does not mean that Nun is forever tainted. There are many positive Pesukim that begin with Nun and many negative Pesukim that begin with other letters. If Nun really is unusable, why is it found in other acrostic Mizmorim such as 111, 112, and 119? Furthermore, assuming that David wrote Mizmor 145 as indicated in the heading, the Mizmor would have preceded Amos by hundreds of years.

[*If this Midrash is not meant to provide a historical reason for the missing Nun-Pasuk, then what is the point of the Midrash?* This Midrash presents two ways of dealing with a troubling Pasuk in Amos. The Pasuk says that Israel has fallen and will nevermore rise. This hopeless situation is difficult to swallow and also goes against the messages of hope found in other places. In Israel, they repunctuate the Pasuk to mean, "Israel has fallen no more; rise maiden of Israel." The Babylonian Rabbis dealt with this problematic Pasuk in a different way. They use the coincidence of a missing Nun-Pasuk and the presence of the word נופלים in the next Pasuk (14) as a midrashic hook. They suggest that Mizmor 145 rectifies the Pasuk in Amos by not only leaving it out but also stating that Hashem does, in fact, lift the fallen. This is not meant as a commentary to Mizmor 145 but rather as a way to deal with the Pasuk in Amos.]

If we read through the Mizmor while paying attention to the acrostic what happens when we reach Pasuk 14? When we read סומך we realize that the Nun-Pasuk is skipped. This makes us pause before we go on. Skipping the Nun-Pasuk may be a literary device to indicate a section break. In fact, as we saw from the structure above, Section 4 is the climax and essence of the Mizmor and so it is fitting to mark a section break between it and the rest of the Mizmor. In fact Pesukim 1-13 are marked off as a unit by the envelope created by the word מלכי in Pasuk 1 and the keyword מלכות in Pesukim 11-13. The missing Nun-Pasuk also indicates a break when reading the acrostic backwards and marks the beginning of the letters מלכ of Section 3.

4. Conclusion

What is the main message of this Mizmor? The main idea of the Mizmor is a total praise of Hashem by all people at all times. This is summed up in the progression of the refrains and in the repetition of the keyword כל. *Why was acrostic structure chosen to best convey this message?* By using every letter of the alphabet, we sense that we are praising God using all possible language. It is complete praise from A to Z.

Bibliography

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