

Lesson 7 – Mizmor 19: A Commentary on Beresheet 1-3

Goal:

Students should be able to find break down the Mizmor into sections and explain why the sections are joined. Students should will also find parallels between the Mizmor and Beresheet 1-3 and explain how the Mizmor is a commentary on Beresheet.

Activity:

1. Line by Line Explanation

Have a different student read each Pasuk and explain it as best he or she can and look for parallelism. Them bring out the following points:

Pasuk 1 – למנצח means that this Mizmor was given to or dedicated to the leader of the choir or orchestra in the Bet Mikdash. Compare how this word is used in Divere haYamim 1, 15:21.

Pasuk 2 –What poetic device is being used here? Personification. *In what way do the heavens declare God's glory?* When people look at the heavens they come to appreciate the glory of God's work. The poet projects his own experience of the heavens onto the heavens themselves as if they are praising God. *Can you find the parallelism in this Pasuk?* There is close sematic parallelism, however the order of words is reversed to for a chiastic structure: subject – verb – object // object – verb – subject. *What does this chiastic structure accomplish?* Perhaps the chiasm of Pasuk 2 is meant to focus on the center words, “the glory of God” and “His handiwork” which are the main ideas of this section.

Pasuk 3 - *Can you find the parallelism in this Pasuk?* Here the parts of speech are in the same order in the two halves. *Why did the previous Pasuk have a chiastic structure while this one has a straightforward parallelism?* The two halves of Pasuk 2 refer to the same scene; in Pasuk 3, however, they are in sequence, first comes day then comes night. The rhythm created by the repetition of the same word sequence emphasizes the predictability and necessity of the day – night cycle.

Pasuk 4 - *How do you explain the first half of this Pasuk?* The words are simple to translate but difficult to explain. The previous Pasuk just said that the heaven does make an utterance and this Pasuk now contradicts it saying that there is no utterance. Perhaps the second half of the Pasuk will shed light. *What kind of parallelism do you find here? What does the second half of the Pasuk mean?* There are two basic ways to interpret. According to the Targum, the second half qualifies the first half, meaning, “there is no utterance, there are no words, whose sound goes unheard.” In other words, every word uttered by the heavens is heard throughout the land, as Pasuk 5 continues. Radak, on the other hand, explains that the second half repeats the first half. “There is no utterance, there are no words, their voices are not heard.” According to this interpretation, this entire verse contradicts the previous one creating a tension in the mind of the reader. This tension sets us up for the profound paradox presented in the next Pasuk.

Pasuk 5 – *How does this Pasuk relate to the one before?* It says that even though the heavens physically do not utter words, they succeed in inspiring people all over the world. Pasuk 4 steps out of the metaphor and says that in reality the heavens are silent. The ability of the heavens to send an inspiring message by day and by night from one end

of the earth to the other – even though it does not say a word – is the greatest attestation to their glory and, by implication, to the glory of their Creator. The rest of this Pasuk until the end of the section focus in on the magnificent qualities of the sun.

The meaning of the rest of the Mizmor is straightforward. Ask students to scan the rest of the Mizmor for words they do not know. List these words on the board with their translations for them to remember as vocabulary words. They will analyze the rest of the Mizmor more carefully in the following sections.

2. Structure

In small groups, ask students to read through the Mizmor with an eye towards finding its structure. Have them mark off where each section begins and ends and give a title to the sections based on content. A member of each group should present its findings, although after the first couple of answers, the rest can just say they found the same thing. The answers should converge on:

2-7	Grandeur of heavens and the sun attest to God's glory
8-11	Praise and benefits of Torah
12-15	Prayer to be saved from sin

Can you explain the connections between each part? There are many possible answers to this so give students time to think. Some possibilities are:

To connect parts one and two, Rashi explains that just as the sun gives light so to does the Torah enlighten its students. Ibn Ezra explains that creation and revelation are the two ways we can come to know God. Both find that the words used to describe the Torah can also be applied to the sun, such as מאירת עינים, תמימה, and משיבת נפש.

The Unity of Mizmor 19

רש"י

(ח) תורת ה' תמימה - גם היא מאירה כשמש כמו שנאמר בסוף הענין מאירת עינים ואומר (משלי ו') כי נר מצוה ותורה אור

אבן עזרא

(ח) ולפי דעתי שהזכיר עד כה איך יוכל המשכיל למצוא עדות על האלהות ולהכיר מעשיו ואמר דוד גם יש עד אחר נכבד ממנו ויותר נאמן והיא תורת השם ועדותיו ופיקודיו ומצותיו ויראתו ומשפטיו ופירוש תורה שתורה הדרך הישרה בסימנים נזכרי' כמו תורת הצרע' והנזיר והזכיר משיבת נפש כל התורה תסיר הספק מן הנפש וטעם לאמר תמימי' כנגד השמש בעבור היות השמש תמימי' באור' ואיננה כמו הלבנה וטעם משיבת נפש כשמש כי מעת היות השמש בחצי גלגל העולה תשוב נפש רבים מהחולים הפך מה שיקרה בהיותו בחצי גלגל היורד והרופאים ידעו זה

[L7 - Unity of Mizmor - Source Sheet.doc](#)

Nahum Sarna explains that in the ancient Near East, it was generally believed that the sun god, as the source of light (associated with good) and all-seeing (אין נסתר מחמתו) was the guardian of law and justice. This Mizmor is a polemic against such belief. The first part of the Mizmor says that the sun cannot be a god since the sun itself praises Hashem. The second part emphasizes that the law comes from Hashem by repeating six times “God’s Torah”, “God’s laws...”

To connect parts two and three, one can explain that once the writer internalizes the importance of God's laws, then he immediately recognizes his own shortcoming and prays for forgiveness.

However, there may be a better explanation for the connection between these three parts. But this requires a digression into inner-biblical exegesis, when one section of Tanakh quotes, makes references to, or comments upon, another part of Tanakh.

3. Bereshit Parallels

[Comments in brackets are less important and can be skipped if time is lacking.]

Pasuk 2 - *Of what imagery from Humash does Pasuk 2 remind you?* Creation in Bereshit 1. *What Pasuk specifically?* ויקרא א-להים לרקיע שמים in 1:1 and ויקרא א-להים לרקיע שמים in 1:8 which is the only other Pasuk in Tanakh in which the words שמים and רקיע occur together. *Can you find any other references to Bereshit?* See what students are able to come up with. Then do a line by line analysis to show correlations between the Mizmor and Bereshit.

Pasuk 3 - *For which words in Pasuk 2 do you find a parallel anywhere in Bereshit?* יום and לילה are an obvious allusion to Bereshit 1:5. The first half of the Pasuk says, "Each day brings forth an utterance (אמר)." Once we notice that each day of creation begins with ויאמר א-להים, we can translate this Pasuk as, "Each day brings forth a creative commandment (אמר) [by God]." [*Can you find any hint to יחווה דעת in Bereshit? Use your imagination. דעת reminds of עץ הדעת (2:9) and יחווה sounds like the name חווה (3:20).*]

Parallels Between Mizmor 19 & Bereshit 1-3

Creation - Genesis 1	Psalm 19	Verse
(v 1) בראשית ברא להם את השמים ויקרא א-להים לרקיע שמים (v 8)	השמים מספרים כבוד אל- ומעשה ידיו מגיד הרקיע Day 2	2
(3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26) ויאמר א-להים (5) ויקרא *לה* לאור יום ולחשך קרא לילה [ויקרא האדם שם אשתו חוה כי הוא היתה אם כל חי: (3:20) ויצמח *הוה להם מן האדמה כל עץ נחמד למראה וטוב למאכל ועץ החיים בתוך הגן ועץ הדעת טוב ורע: (2:9 and cf. 2:17)]	יום ליום יביע אמר ולילה ללילה יחווה דעת: Day 1	3
[וישמעו את קול *הוה להם מתהלך בגן לרוח היום ויתחבא האדם ואשתו מפני *הוה אלהים בתוך עץ הגן: (3:8) ויאמר את קולך שמעתי בגן ואירא כי עירם אנכי ואחבא: (3:10) ולאדם אמר כי שמעת לקול אשתך (3:17)]	אין אמר ואין דברים בלי נשמע קולם:	4
ויאמר א-להים יקוו המים מתחת השמים אל מקום אחד ות ראה היבשה ויהי כן. ויקרא א-להים ליבשה ארץ ולמקוה המים קרא ימים (9-10) ויעש א-להים את שני המארת הגדלים את המאור הגדל לממשלת היום (16)	בכל הארץ יצא קום Day 3 ובקצה תבל מליהם לשמש שם אהל בהם: Day 4	5
Day 6 [ויבאה אל האדם (2:22) על כן יעזב איש את אביו ואת אמו ודבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחד (2:24)]	והוא כחתן יצא מחפתו ישיש כגבור לרוץ ארח:	6

[L7 - Bereshit Parallels - Summary Chart.doc](#)

[Pasuk 4 – There is no obvious reference here to creation but the last two words do come up three times in chapter 3. Adam and Havah hear God’s voice but hide from making believe as if they don’t hear it (3:8, 10) which is hinted to in the words – בלי נשמע קולם – The same words are used to say that Adam listened to the voice of Havah, even though he shouldn’t have. Bereshit uses the same words for both events in order to emphasize that Adam didn’t hear God’s voice when he was supposed to but did listen to Havah’s voice when he was not supposed to.]

Pauk 5 – *Do any words in this Pasuk sound familiar from Bereshit?* ארץ refers to the creation of land on the third day of creation. The root of קום, meaning voice (see Sarna p. 80 note 26), is also the root of יקוו and מקוה in Bereshit 1:8-9. In Bereshit, these words refer to the gathering of the waters which reveals the land on the third day. The mention of שמש refers to its creation on the fourth day. The image of the heavens as a tent for the sun is also based on Bereshit which repeats three times that Hashem placed the sun and stars within the heavens (1: 14, 15, 17).

[Pasuk 6 – Besides referring to the sun, the groom here can also hint to the creation of Adam who is the first groom once Hashem creates a wife for him.]

At this point, take a break and review the parallels from the perspective of Bereshit. Go through each day of creation and show how the Mizmor makes reference to something

which was created on each day. The introduction of Bereshit 1:1-2 is parallel to the opening of Mizmor 19:2a. Then the establishment of day and night of day 1 is presented in Mizmor 19:3. The creation of the רקיע on day 2 is referred to in Mizmor 19:2b - ויעש ומעשה ידיו מגיד הרקיע = להם את הרקיע. The creation of land on day 3 is referred to in v 5 - בקצה תבל and בכל הארץ. The same day's creation of sea may be hinted to in the word קום of v 5 in the psalm which sounds the same as יקוו and מקוה (Gen 1:9,10). The creation of the sun on day 4 appears in v 5 as well - לשמש שם אהל בהם. The activity of day 5 is not mentioned. V 6 describes the creation of man on day 6.

Pasuk 7 – This Pasuk states that nothing can hide from the heat of the sun. The ability of the sun to heat the earth was the source of the pagan belief that the sun-god judges all actions. In Bereshit, it is Hashem who sees all while Adam tries to hide from His anger (3:8). (חמתו, meaning its heat, can also mean his anger.)

Pasuk 8 – The Torah has the ability to restore life – משיבת נפש. *What image from the continuation of the Gad Eden story do these words conjure up?* The עץ הדעת. The ability of Torah to restore life contrasts with the tree of knowledge which brings death to those who eat it (2:17; 3:3,4,19,22). The Torah also makes the simple wise – מחכימת פתי. Havah similarly thinks of the tree as desirable as a source of wisdom – נחמד העץ להשכיל (3:6). פתי is one who requires instruction and is the opposite of ערום (Mishle 1:4). Since the נחש is described as ערום (Bereshit 3:1), פתי can refer to Adam and Havah. However, instead of seeking forbidden knowledge they should have turned to God's Torah for wisdom.

Pasuk 9 – Hashem's laws rejoice the heart – משמחי לב. Bereshit does not use the word שמחה to refer to the tree but does say generally that Havah thought it was "good for eating." The commandments of Hashem enlighten the eyes – מאירת עינים. *Does this remind you of the tree of knowledge? Find a relevant Pasuk.* The נחש first promises that once they eat from the tree their eyes will be opened - ונפקחו עיניכם (Gen 3:5). הוה then sees that the tree is a delight to the eyes - ותרא האשה כי...תאוה הוא לעינים (ibid v 6). After she and her husband eat from it their eyes were in fact opened and they perceived that they were naked – ותפקחנה עיני שניהם וידעו כי עירמים הם (Gen 3:7). The word commandment, מצות, can also refer to God's original commandment not to eat from the tree, ויצו י-הוה... (2:16).

Tree of Knowledge - Genesis 2-3	Psalms 19	Verse
וישמעו את קול *הוה להם מתהלך בגן לרוח היום ויתחבא האדם ואשתו מפני *הוה אלהים בתוך עץ הגן: (3:8) ארוה... (3:14-19)	מקצה השמים מוצאו ותקופתו על קצותם ואין נסתר מחמתו: תורת *הוה תמימה משיבת נפש	7
ביום אכלך ממנו מות תמות (2:17) פן תמתון (3:3) לא מות תמתון (3:4) ואל עפר תשוב (3:19)		8a
ועתה פן ישלח ידו ולקח גם מעץ החיים ואכל וחי לעלם (3:22) ונחמד העץ להשכיל (3:6)	עדות *הוה נאמנה מחכימת פתי פקודי *הוה ישרים משמחי לב מצות *הוה ברה מאירת עינים	8b
ותרא האשה כי טוב העץ למאכל וכי תאוה הוא לעינים ונחמד העץ להשכיל ותקח מפריו ותאכל ותתן גם לאישה עמה ויאכל: (3:6) ויצו *הוה להם על האדם לאמר מכל עץ הגן אכל תאכל: (2:16) כי ביום אכלכם ממנו ונפקחו עיניכם והייתם כא-להים ידעי טוב ורע (3:5) ותרא האשה כי טוב העץ למאכל וכי תאוה הוא לעינים (3:6) ותפקחנה עיני שניהם וידעו כי עירמם הם (3:7) ויתחבא האדם ואשתו מפני *הוה א-להים (3:8) ועתה פן ישלח ידו ולקח גם מעץ החיים ואכל וחי לעלם (3:22)	יראת *הוה טהורה עומדת לעד משפטי *הוה אמת צדקו יחדו הנחמדים מזהב ומפז רב ומתוקים מדבש ונפת צופים: גם עבדך נזהר בהם בשמרם עקב רב:	9a
ותרא האשה כי טוב העץ למאכל וכי תאוה הוא לעינים ונחמד העץ להשכיל ותקח מפריו ותאכל ותתן גם לאישה עמה ויאכל: (3:6)	שגיאות מי יבין מנסתרות נקני: גם מזדים חשך עבדך אל ימשלו בי אז איתם ונקיתי מפשע רב:	9b
ויקח *הוה א-להים את האדם וינחהו בגן עדן לעבדה ולשמרה (2:15) ואיבה אשית בינך ובין האשה ובין זרעך ובין זרעה הוא ישופך ראש ואתה תשופנו עקב (3:15) ויתחבא האדם ואשתו מפני *הוה א-להים (3:8)		10a
אל האשה אמר הרבה ארבה עצבוניך והרנך בעצב תלדי בנים ואל אישך תשוקתך והוא ימשל בך (3:16) הלוא אם תיטיב שאת ואם לא תיטיב לפתה חטאת רבץ ואלריך תשוקתו ואתה תמשל בו (4:7)		10b
		11
		12
		13
		14

Pasuk 10 - Fear of Hashem is pure and stands forever. Adam fears Hashem when he hides from Him. But his is an immature fear, thinking that Hashem will not see him. True fear would have prevented Adam from sinning and could have brought him everlasting life – which is hinted to in the words *עומדת לעד*. There is no obvious connection to Bereshit in the rest of this Pasuk.

Pasuk 11 – *What is considered more desirable (נחמד) than gold and sweeter than honey? Torah. What did חוה desire more than anything? To eat from the tree. She saw that the tree was “desirable (נחמד) to look at and good for food” (2:9). The Mizmor comes to prevent us from making the same mistake of believing that anything else is more desirable than Torah.*

Pasuk 12 – *What is the consequence of keeping the commandments?* Great reward – עקב רב. This contrasts with the great punishment for not keeping them seen in Bereshit.

Pasuk 13 – This Pasuk is a request to be cleaned from hidden sins, a reference to Adam's attempt to hide from God.

Pasuk 14 – This Pasuk refers to purposeful sins, זדים, and great sin, פשע רב. *What great sin does this refer to?* Eating from the tree in Gan Eden. There is also a request that sin should not have control over me – אל ימשלו בי. God similarly tells Cain that he can control sin – ואתה תמשל בו (Bereshit 4:7).

Pasuk 15 – This is a conclusion in which the writer prays that his words פי אמרי should come before God similar to the אמר of the heavens in Pasuk 3.

4. *Look for the names of God throughout the Mizmor. Which name is used in each section?* The first section uses א-ל while the other two use י-הוה. *Can you explain why?* Bereshit chapter 1, which is parallel to part 1 of the Mizmor, uses א-להים while the next two chapters, which are parallel to the next two sections of the Mizmor, use י-הוה.

5. *What is the overall message of the Mizmor?*

Mizmor 19 begins with the experience of the grandeur of the heavens. This leads the writer to appreciate God's glory. But God is not only the Creator, He is also the Commander. Once man appreciates the grandeur of creation, he begins to contemplate his role within creation. The Mizmor explains that following the Torah leads to ultimate happiness. Upon this realization, the writer prays for forgiveness for past sins.

What does it tell us about Bereshit 1-3?

Bereshit begins with an objective, day by day, account of creation. Creation ends with the creation of man who is given responsibilities to watch over creation and is given one commandment. However, man violates that commandment and is punished. Mizmor 19 comments upon each of these stages. Mizmor 19 turns the narrative of Bereshit into poetry by presenting the reaction of one who looks upon creation. The Mizmor draws out the emotional response implied by creation. The proper next step, as given in the Mizmor, is to learn wisdom from God's teachings and follow his commandments. The Mizmor presents the ideal situation. Bereshit, on the other hand, presents the more negative reality. Man did not seek God and did not keep his commandment, but instead sought after whatever he desired. The Mizmor encourages us to learn from the mistakes of man in Bereshit and act properly. Instead of hiding from past sins, we must acknowledge them and ask for forgiveness. Instead of seeking that which seems desirable in our eyes, we should follow Torah which brings ultimate happiness.

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