Lesson 15 – Mizmorim 9 and 10

Goal:
Students will be able to list arguments why these two Mizmorim belong together, show that they are an acrostic, and expain why there are irregularities in the alphabetic sequence. They should be able to define the terms "form" and "content" and show how the form these Mizmorim fits their content.

Activity:
1. Read Mizmorim 9 and 10 Pasuk by Pasuk to make sure class understands any difficult words of phrases and noticing parallelism or other poetic devices. They should be able to summarize the basic messages. In Mizmor 9, the writer is surrounded by evil, his life is in danger and he calls to God to destroy the evil. In Mizmor 10, the pleas become more desperate and the writer describes the thoughts and actions of the wicked person in detail in order to invoke God to act.

2. Ask students to break into pairs for a do now:

> Try to find the acrostic structure. Circle the first letter of each Pasuk that begins with the next letter of the alphabet.
> What pattern do you notice predominates?
> What are the problems with the structure?

The regular pattern in this acrostic is to have every other Pasuk begin with a successive letter of the alphabet while the Pesukim in between can begin with any letter. This works for the first four Pesukim. Pasuk 1 begins with א followed by an attached verse at Pasuk 2. Pasuk 3 begins with ב followed by an attached verse at Pasuk 4. Pasuk 5 begins with ג but then we have a disruption. There is no attached verse for the letter ג and there is no ד verse at all. Pasuk 7 begins with ה but has no attachment. Pasuk 8 begins with ו and has three attachments of Pesukim 9-11. Pesukim 12-17 follow the regular pattern: ז, attachment, ח, attachment, ט, attachment. Pasuk 18 begins with י but has no attachment. Pasuk 19 begins with כ and has two attachements. Moving onto Mizmor 10, Pasuk 1 begins with ל. After that we are missing the next six letters. The alphabet only picks up again at Pasuk 12 with ק and an attachment. Pasuk 14 begins with ר but has no attachment. The rest of the Mizmor follows the regular pattern of ש, attachment, ת, attachment.
Do you have any suggestions about why the acrostic is all messed up? Many modern Bible scholars think the acrostic was once perfect but that it got corrupted over centuries of transmission? Do you think that is likely? It is highly unlikely that such careful scribes as the Massorites would make such glaring mistakes in a simple alphabetic pattern. Rather, these anomalies in the structure must be an original part of the composition. *Why would a writer skip letters and put different numbers of attached verses between the letters?*

3. An insightful student should realize that the place where we are missing six letters of the alphabet (an anomaly in the form) is also the place where we have a long digression

about the ways of the wicked person (an anomaly of content), Mizmor 10:2-11. Therefore, it seems that the form of the acrostic matches its content.

An alphabetic acrostic is the most structured and predictable pattern. This structure represents order and goodness in the world. When people act properly, everything is predicatable and good. However, when wicked people commit evil, this causes disruption and chaos in the world. Similarly, when the Mizmor discusses wickedness, the acrostic goes off track and becomes chaotic. But chaos is not allowed to reign forever. When people cry out and God decides to intervene, evil is destroyed and order is restored. Similarly in the Mizmor, when God is called upon to act, the acrostic structure goes back to normal. This connection between form and content works throughout the Mizmor.

The first two letters of the acrostic (א-ב, vv 2-5) are complete with one primary and attached verse each. These four verses praise God and remember past vindications. The third letter (ג, v 6) continues to recall past vindications but here we have the first mention of the word רשע. Immediately, we see a disruption in the order with a missing attached verse for ג, no verses at all for ד, and a missing attached verse for ה. Here, apparently, the mere mention of the wicked in v 6, even within a description of his destruction, also disrupts the acrostic sequence. Proper order is not restored until the letter ו which begins וי-הוה לעולם ישב; proclamation of God's everlasting sitting in judgment brings the acrostic back into proper format. God's name is a key word in the four verses of the letter ו. YHVH is the first, last, and middle word of vv 8-11. The YHVH in v 10 is the fourteenth word from the first YHVH in v 8 and also the fourteenth word from the last YHVH in v 11. Not only do we find complete primary and attached verses for the next three letters, ו even has two extra attached verses perhaps to replace the missing ג and ה attached verses. God's judgment restores the partial havoc caused by the wicked.

However, the missing ד verse is not replaced. This missing letter is of a different nature than the other six missing letters discussed earlier. The latter at least have ten verses in their place, even though those verses do not begin with the correct letters. The ד verse is completely erased. This may connect to the verses immediately before and after the spot where it should be located. Both say that the name of the wicked was wiped out - שמם מחית לעולם ועד (v 6) and אבד זכרם המה (v 7). The first phrase describes the erasing of the letter, and the following phrase states that its memory has perished. These are the only two verses in the psalm which state this idea in the past tense and not as a prayer that God should destroy the wicked. The ד verse is not replaced because it apparently represents evil and its absence represents the erasing of evil as well as its memory.

Order is restored through the letters ז, ח, and ט. But, the end of v 17 mentions רשע for a second time followed by yet another mention of רשעים at the beginning of v 18. This causes a skipping of the yod's attached verse. The first attached verse to כ, v 20, invokes YHVH with קומה ה' and this is echoed in the next verse as well – שיתה ה'. This double invocation restores order from the chaos caused by the double mention of רשע. The second attached verse for כ (v 21) serves as a replacement for the missing attached verse for י.

The acrostic continues with a primary ל verse but is abruptly interrupted by three occurrences of the word רשע in 10:2, 3, and 4 and the word רע in v 6. This meditation on evil continues for ten verses during which YHVH only appears once as the object of the

wicked man's scorn (v 3). Six letters of the acrostic – מ,נ,ס,ע,פ,צ - become garbled by this extended deliberation on the thought process of the wicked. Order is not restored until YHVH is once again invoked with the words קומה ה' in 10:12.

Structure of Mizmorim 9 and 10

Classification	Letter	Type	Text (right-to-left)	Verse	Psalm
Superscription			למנצח עלמות לבן מזמור לדוד	1	
Normal	א	Primary	אודה י-הוה בכל לבי אספרה כל נפלאותיך	2	
		Attached	אשמחה ואעלצה בך אזמרה שמך עליון	3	
Normal	ב	Primary	בשוב אויבי אחור יכשלו וידבו מפניך	4	
		Attached	כי עשית משפטי ודיני ישבת לכסא שופט צדק	5	
Partial Disruption	ג	Primary	גערת גוים אבדת **רשע** שמם מחית לעולם ועד	6	
Total Disruption	ד	Missing			
Partial Disruption	ה	Primary	האויב תמו חרבות לנצח וערים נתשת אבד זכרם המה	7	
Normal	ו	Primary	וי-הוה לעולם ישב כונן למשפט כסאו	8	9
		Attached	והוא ישפט תבל בצדק ידין לאמים במישרים	9	
Restoring Verses		Extra	ויהי י-הוה משגב לדך משגב לעתות בצרה	10	
		Extra	ויבטחו בך יודעי שמך כי לא עזבת דרשיך י-הוה	11	
Normal	ז	Primary	זמרו לי-הוה ישב ציון הגידו בעמים עלילותיו	12	
		Attached	כי דרש דמים אותם זכר לא שכח צעקת עניים	13	
Normal	ח	Primary	חנני י-הוה ראה עניי משנאי מרוממי משערי מות	14	
		Attached	למען אספרה כל תהלתיך בשערי בת ציון אגילה בישועתך	15	
Normal	ט	Primary	טבעו גוים בשחת עשו ברשת זו טמנו נלכדה רגלם	16	
		Attached	נודע י-הוה משפט עשה בפעל כפיו נוקש **רשע** הגיון סלה	17	
Partial Disruption	י	Primary	ישובו **רשעים** לשאולה כל גוים שכחי א-להים	18	
Normal		Primary	כי לא לנצח ישכח אביון תקות ענוים תאבד לעד	19	
	כ	Attached	קומה י-הוה אל יעז אנוש ישפטו גוים על פניך	20	
Restoring Verse		Extra	שיתה י-הוה מורה להם ידעו גוים אנוש המה סלה	21	
	ל	Primary	למה י-הוה תעמד ברחוק תעלים לעתות בצרה	1	
Total Disruption	מ	Missing	בגאות **רשע** ידלק עני יתפשו במזמות זו חשבו	2	
	נ		כי הלל **רשע** על תאות נפשו ובצע ברך נאץ י-הוה	3	
	ס		**רשע** כגבה אפו בל ידרש אין א-להים כל מזמותיו	4	
	ע		יחילו דרכו בכל עת מרום משפטיך מנגדו כל צורריו יפיח בהם	5	10
	פ		אמר בלבו בל אמוט לדר ודר אשר לא **ברע**	6	
	צ		אלה פיהו מלא ומרמות ותך תחת לשונו עמל ואון	7	
			ישב במארב חצרים במסתרים יהרג נקי עיניו לחלכה יצפנו	8	
			יארב במסתר כאריה בסכה יארב לחטוף עני יחטף עני במשכו ברשתו	9	
			ודכה ישח ונפל בעצומיו חלכאים	10	
			אמר בלבו שכח א-ל הסתיר פניו בל ראה לנצח	11	
Normal	ק	Primary	קומה י-הוה א-ל נשא ידך אל תשכח ענוים	12	
		Attached	על מה נאץ **רשע** א-להים אמר בלבו לא תדרש	13	
Partial Disruption	ר	Primary	ראתה כי אתה עמל וכעס תביט לתת בידך עליך יעזב חלכה יתום אתה היית עוזר	14	
Normal	שׁ	Primary	שבר זרוע **רשע** ו**רע** תדרוש **רשעו** בל תמצא	15	
		Attached	י-הוה מלך עולם ועד אבדו גוים מארצו	16	
Normal	ת	Primary	תאות ענוים שמעת י-הוה תכין לבם תקשיב אזנך	17	
		Attached	לשפט יתום ודך בל יוסיף עוד לערץ אנוש מן הארץ	18	

Black highlight represents disruption caused by the word רשע. Blue highlight indicates the return of the normal pattern by an invocation of God's name. There is a red box around each instance of disruption and reorder.

L15 - Structure of Mizmorim 9 and 10 - Summary Chart.doc

ק has a primary and attached verse, as expected. But the word רשע appears in the ק attached verse (13). This causes ר to lose its attached verse. We then proceed to שׁ (v 15) which contains רשע twice and the word רע once. But this conglomeration of evil words is immediately stopped by the declaration in שׁ's attached verse (v 16) – ה' מלך עולם ועד.

Mention of God's kingship is able to restrain the effects caused by evil. There are no further ramifications of the evil words in v 15. This is in fact hinted to in the words of v 15, תדרש רשעו בל תמצא. If we take this phrase as being a self-referential comment about the structure of this acrostic, then we can translate as, "You will look for [the disruption caused by] רשע but you will not find it" because by the end of the psalm, God's presence is very near and does not allow the wicked to cause harm. From v 15 until the end of the psalm there are no further disruptions.

The very form of the acrostic reflects its central message. The message is that evil disrupts the natural order of the world and the ramifications of evil are far reaching. However, evil can only exist when God allows this to happen. This is poetically represented in the structure of the acrostic where any occurrence of the word רשע disrupts either the acrostic or the primary-attached verse pattern. However, an invocation of God to act – קומה ה' - or a description of God in His active role as king puts the acrostic back on track.

There are many more interesting aspects of the form, word count, and structure of this Mizmor which are described in the article by Ronald Benun, "Evil and the Disruption of Order: The Acrostics of Book One."