

## **Parashat Nitzavim (29:9-30:20)-Vayeilech (Ch. 31)**

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### **Double Parashah Outline**

The Covenant Ceremony: **Nitzavim** (29:9-28)

- Who participates in this ceremony and covenantal commitment (vv. 9-14)
- Concealed offense (worshipping other Gods) and punishment (vv. 15-20)
- Collective Judgement's impact on the Land (vv. 21-27)
- Concealed sins vs. collective sins (v. 28)

Repentance: moving from judgement to salvation (30:1-10)

Life or Death/Blessing or Curse (30:11-20)

- This instruction is not beyond reach (30:11-14)
- A Charge: Choose Life & Prosperity, not Death and Adversity (30:15-20)

**Vayeilech** Moshe -

Moses goes to assure Israel of success (31:1-13)

- Moses prepares change of leadership to Joshua (vv. 1-5)
- Encouragement - strength and resolve (vv. 6-8)
- Moses "writes the Teaching" (vv. 9-13)

God rebukes Israel, that they will go astray (31:14-23)

Moses completes the writing and gives instructions for placement in the Ark (31:24-27)

Moses introduces his poem as warning (31:28-30)

### **Structural Issues and Major Themes**

**Nitzavim:**

- Inclusivity: everyone is a part of the covenant, now and for generations.
- Private (concealed) sins vs. Public (overt) sins - who knows and who is responsible?
- **תשובה** *T'shuvah* (Repentance) (30:1-10) and **קרוב** *Karov* (Close) (30:11-14)
- Choice and consequence

**Vayeilech:**

- God's Rebuke: an abrupt shift in theme and tone - indicative of a second textual tradition:  
1) God and Israel in harmony post-Moses; 2) Israel becomes estranged from God.
- Moses writes down the law 31:9-13 and then later writes down a poem
  - what are the meanings of these two compositions?

**Un'taneh tokef  
k'dushat hayom...**

**ונתנה תוקף קדושת היום**

Let us proclaim the sacred power of this day; it is awesome and full of dread. For on this day Your dominion is exalted, Your throne established in steadfast love; there in truth You reign. In truth you are Judge and Arbiter, Counsel and Witness. You write and You seal, You record and recount. You remember deeds long forgotten. You open the book of our days, and what is written there proclaims itself, for it bears the signature of every human being....

Just as the shepherd seeks out his flock, and makes the sheep pass under the staff, so do you muster and number and consider every soul, setting the bounds of every creature's life, and decreeing its destiny....

This is Your glory: you are slow to anger, ready to forgive. It is not the death of sinners you seek, but that they should turn from their ways and live. Until the last day You wait for them, welcoming them as soon as they turn to you. (Gates of Repentance pp.107-109, attributed to Rabbi Amnon of Mayence)

**Deuteronomy 30:15-20**

15 ראה נתתי לפניך היום, את-החיים ואת-הטוב, ואת-המות, ואת-הרע...

15 See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity.

16 for I command you this day, to love your God, to walk in God's ways, and to keep God's commandments, God's laws, and God's rules, that you may thrive and increase, and that your God may bless you in the land that you are about to enter and possess.

17 but if your heart turns away and you give no heed, and are lured into the worship and service of other gods,

18 I declare to you this day that you shall certainly perish; you shall not long endure on the soil that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life – If you and your offspring would live –

20 by loving your God, heeding God's commands, and holding fast to God. For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure upon the soil that God swore to your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them.

(Trans. *The Torah: A modern Commentary*, URJ Press)

RASHI - "Choose Life":  
[God says: "Even though you have free choice, nevertheless,] I instruct you to choose the portion of life." It is like a man who says to his son, "Choose for yourself a fine portion of my estate," and then directs him to the best portion, saying to him, "This [is the portion which] you should choose for yourself!" And regarding this, the verse says, "The Lord is my allotted portion and my cup; You guide my destiny" (Ps. 16:5). [The last clause, **אתה תומיך גורלי**, literally means "You laid upon my lot." That is to say:] "You laid my hand upon the good lot, saying, "Take this for yourself!"

**In Deut. 30:11-14** we read, "Surely this Instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens...nor is it beyond the sea. Rather, the thing is very close to you - in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it."

- How is repentance challenging?
- What does repentance require of our own self; of others?
- Why does the text describe the task in these terms (not higher than heaven...not across the sea, etc.)?
- How do we re-interpret the literal translation of live/death, reward/punishment?