

PARASHAT NITZAVIM-VAYELECH

Deuteronomy 29:9–31:30

Parashat Nitzavim-Vayelech is one of seven designated Torah portions that, depending upon the number of Sabbaths in a year, is either read as two separate portions or combined to assure the reading of the entire Torah. While this volume will combine them, it will present an interpretation on each of their most important themes.

Parashat Nitzavim continues Moses' speeches to the Israelites just before they enter the Land of Israel. He tells them that God is making a covenant with them and, through them, with all future generations, fulfilling the promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The covenant will last, he warns, only if they do not worship other gods. If they forsake the Torah's commandments, devastation, plagues, and curses will afflict them. However, Moses promises that they will not be entirely forsaken. If they return to *Adonai* and take the blessings and curses seriously, God will forgive them and restore them to their land, allowing them another opportunity to conduct their lives according to the laws of Torah. God, says Moses, is setting the choice of life and death before them. They are told: "Choose life."

Parashat Vayelech begins with Moses' announcement that he is one hundred and twenty years old and no longer able to lead the people. He assures them that they will be successful in reconquering the Land of Israel and calls upon Joshua to succeed him as leader, promising that God "will not fail you or forsake you." He transmits the Torah to the priests, instructing the people to gather every seven years at the festival of Sukot to hear the reading of the Torah, which they are to study. Forecasting that the people will nonetheless abandon the laws of Torah, God gives Moses a poem to "confront them as a witness" to all they have been taught. (See Deuteronomy 32: 1–43.) Moses transmits the Torah to the Levites, asking them to place it in the Ark of the Covenant. Moses then calls the people together to hear the poem.
