

וַיֵּלֶךְ

VAYELECH/AND HE WENT

Devarim/Deuteronomy 31:1-30

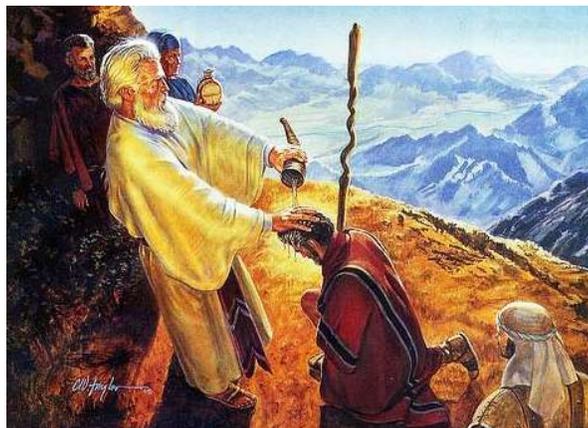
Parashat Vayelech contains the smallest number of verses, only 30, of all the parashot in the Torah. It is the parasha that usually lies between Yom Teruah and Yom Kippur. These are some of the very last words that Moshe utters before he dies, so what are the important things he wants to tell his beloved Israelites?

He begins with reassuring them, since they will soon be without him as their leader. But, they need not worry as long as they are “**strong, of good courage, and obedient to His commands.**” It is the eternal Elohim, not a man, who always goes before them and will give them success from their enemies:

Devarim/Deuteronomy 31:3 " יהוה your Elohim Himself crosses over before you; He will destroy these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua himself crosses over before you, just as יהוה has said. ⁴ "And יהוה will do to them as He did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites and their land, when He destroyed them. ⁵ " יהוה will give them over to you, that you may do to them according to every commandment which I have commanded you. ⁶ "**Be strong and of good courage**, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for **יהוה your Elohim, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.**"

“**In the sight of all of Israel,**” Moshe publicly hands over responsibility to “**Yehoshua/Joshua.**” “**All Israel**” would see the confidence that Moshe had in Yehoshua as the one to take over leadership:

Devarim 31:7 Then **Moshe called Yehoshua** and said to him **in the sight of all Israel**, "Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which יהוה has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. ⁸ "And יהוה, He is the one who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed."



Moshe then commands them to “**read the Torah**” at the “**Feast of Tabernacles,**” at the end of “**every seven years**”:

Devarim 31:10 And Moshe commanded them, saying: "At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles,¹¹ "when all Israel comes to appear before יהוה your Elohim in the place which He chooses, you shall read this Torah before all Israel in their hearing.

Then in a dramatic commissioning, יהוה makes a public appearance in the Tent of Meeting to “**inaugurate Yehoshua**”:

Devarim 31:14 Then יהוה said to Moshe, "Behold, the days approach when you must die; call Yehoshua, and present yourselves in the tabernacle of meeting, that I may inaugurate him." So, Moshe and Yehoshua went and presented themselves in the tabernacle of meeting.¹⁵ Now יהוה appeared at the tabernacle in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood above the door of the tabernacle.... **23** Then He inaugurated Yehoshua the son of Nun, and said, "Be strong and of good courage; for you shall bring the children of Israel into the land of which I swore to them, and I will be with you."

Moshe finished writing the “**Book of the Torah**” and handed it over to the Levites for safe-keeping. But his words to them do not sound exactly encouraging:

Devarim 31:26 "Take this Book of the Torah, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of יהוה your Elohim, that it may be there as a witness against you;²⁷ "for I know your rebellion and your stiff neck. If today, while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against יהוה, then how much more after my death?²⁸ "Gather to me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to witness against them.²⁹ "For I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of יהוה, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands."

I would like to focus on **verse 27**. This verse is written in what is known in Hebrew as kal vachomer – that is, an argument going from the light to the heavy. It means that what applies in a less important case will certainly apply in a more important one. The kal vachomer argument was one often used by Yeshua. Here’s one example – Matthew tells the story of a man with a withered hand who was healed. The story begins with a question:

Matthew 12:10 And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "**Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?**" -- that they might accuse Him.

You will not find a verse anywhere in the Bible where healing on the Sabbath is against the Torah, but by 1st century rabbinic standards, a Sabbath healing was not permitted unless a person's life was in imminent danger. Yeshua answers with a kal vachomer interpretation:

Matthew 12:11 Then He said to them, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift *it* out? ¹² **"Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep?** Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

So now let's take another look at the kal vachomer argument of **Devarim 31:27**:

Devarim 31:27 "for I know your rebellion and your stiff neck. **If today, while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against יהוה, then how much more after my death?**

- If today, while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious
- Then how much more after my death?

Moshe makes the point that since the children of Israel had rebelled and strayed against the Torah's instructions while he was with them guiding them and leading them in its requirements, then "**how much more**" would they stray from it "**after his death**"? The truth is, during the days of Moshe, it was much easier for them to gain understanding of a particular matter of Torah. They could just ask their question of Moshe or the assigned leaders and get an answer. If the matter was too confusing, the High Priest would give an answer that came from יהוה through the Urim and Thummim. Later it would become more difficult to interpret Torah, as the Israelites often justified their behavior based on their own interpretations.

Moshe describes them in **verse 27** with two words:

- Rebellious (מְרִי – m're)
- Stiff-necked (עֲרֵף קָשֶׁה oreph kasheh)

As a nation, Israel is often described as being "**rebellious**" (מְרִי – m're) against יהוה's commands as He led her in the wilderness, towards the Promised Land.

Devarim 9:7 " Remember! Do not forget how you provoked יהוה your Elohim to wrath in the wilderness. From the day that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been **rebellious** against יהוה.

Psalm 78:8 And may not be like their fathers, A stubborn and **rebellious** generation, A generation *that* did not set its heart aright, And whose spirit was not faithful to El.

Psalm 78:40 How often did they **rebel** against Him in the wilderness, *And* grieved Him in the desert!

Yet in the midst of Israel's "**rebellion**" and following Elohim's subsequent anger, they will "**remember the days of old.**" In fact, they will remember "**Moshe.**" They will look for the One who put His "**Holy Spirit within them.**"

Isaiah 63:10 But **they rebelled** and grieved His Holy Spirit; So **He turned Himself against them as an enemy**, *And* He fought against them. ¹¹ Then **he remembered the days of old, Moshe** and his people, *saying*: "Where *is* He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of His flock? **Where is He who put His Holy Spirit within them?**"

The other words used to describe the future Israelites are "**stiff-necked**" (עֲרֵף קָשֶׁה oreph kasheh). It is sometimes translated as "**stubborn.**" That literally is a trait that signifies going one's own way. Rather than yielding to the designated authority, a "**stiff-necked**" person follows his own path, makes his own rules, and lives by his own values.

Proverbs 16:25 There is a way *that seems right to a man*, **But its end is the way of death.**

Isaiah 5:20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! ²¹ **Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And prudent in their own sight!**

Proverbs 21:2 Every way of a man *is* right in his own eyes, But הָהָרַף weighs the hearts.

When the Israelites turned away from Yah's commandments and began to worship the golden calf, הָהָרַף describes them as "**stiff-necked**":

Shemot/Exodus 32:9 And הָהָרַף said to Moshe, "I have seen this people, and indeed it *is* a **stiff-necked** people!"

In order to stop being "**stiff necked,**" the Israelites were told to "**circumcise their hearts**":

Devarim 10:16 "Therefore **circumcise the foreskin of your heart**, and **be stiff-necked no longer.**"

During the time of the **Judges**, the chosen people went around and around repeating the same behavior, "**stubbornly**" doing their "**own thing**":

Judges 2:19 And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. **They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.**

"**Rebellious**" and "**stiff-necked.**" These words have been used to describe Israel, from the time they left Egypt, now, and into the future. Sadly, as part of Israel, that also is pretty descriptive of us. What

is the solution? יהוה, in His mercy, has given the solution as the 613th and final commandment of the Torah:

Devarim 31:19 "Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel.

The actual Song of Moshe, which we will study next week is the antidote. The song won't sugar coat our faults, but it will be a "witness" of His overriding mercy and His faithfulness to the covenant. And "all the words of this Torah"...**this is life**:

Devarim 32: 45 Moshe finished speaking all these words to all Israel, ⁴⁶ and He said to them: "Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which **you shall command your children to be careful to observe -- all the words of this Torah.** ⁴⁷ "For it *is* not a futile thing for you, because it is your life

Shabbat Shalom!

Ardelle