

Torah Portion Vayeilech

Shabbat beginning September 30 2022

David Kirk Dirlam

This Torah portion is the shortest of all. As our Plaut Commentary instructs, it is “read separately only when between Rosh Hashanah and Sukkot there are two Sabbaths neither of which coincides with a holy day.” The portion describes how Moses wrote down this teaching (Deuteronomy) and instructed the priests to read it every seventh year at Sukkot to all the men, women, children, and strangers gathered there. It also describes God speaking to Moses and Joshua in the Tent of Meeting, foretelling that Moses will soon die, the people will go astray, and He will abandon them. The book will confront the people as a witness, so they may return. God then charged Joshua to be strong while bringing the children into the promised land.

Thus, this shortest of readings gives two momentous instructions. First, our ancestors became among the world’s earliest and most enduring “people of the book.” It guides when we stray and need reminders of what brings us together. Next, we learn of the transition from Moses to Joshua, which also marks the transition from Torah to Nevi’im marked in our Tanakh. Thus, we are reminded to read, listen, and reflect to transition to new lives.