

Politics - A basic Definition - the art or science of government; the total complex of relations between people living in society; the activities of the government, members of law-making organizations, or people who try to influence the way a country is governed.

Politics involves two basic concepts: power and justice. Power is the means by which people organize themselves and shape their environment in order to live. Justice offers the guidelines for using power in order to live well.¹

Genesis 1 - 2 - Creation

- The creation is God's kingdom; he is sovereign over it. God is King & Supreme Lord

- The family - Adam & Eve -
 - ◆ *Patriarchy* - The head of the home is the ruler; wife and children are in submission.
 - ◆ Adam is given a *threefold office* -
 - Prophet - names animals; speaks God's Word,
 - Priest - tend and keep the garden (I.e. God's temple workers) - holiness of life in communion with God.

¹ <https://dje.jcpa.org/books/ct-vol1-int.htm>

- King - Rule over the land/animals, subdue the earth; exercise righteous authority
- ◆ *Principle of Representation* - Adam as head (of the home and mankind). One acts on behalf of others.

Genesis 3 - The Fall

- Satan becomes Lord; A new law is inserted; Autonomy/ Children of Satan / Counter Kingdom; War & Conquest ensues.
- Disordering of the family; Tyranny is introduced (desire for your husband, but he shall rule over you). Righteous rule will now be difficult and power will be used to overthrow and oppress/suppress opposition.

Genesis 4 -

- Able's Murder - God polices, force of law
- Tribalism: families congregate and develop structure of life as clans and tribes. Likely already seeing the rise of "chiefs" in that fathers are over the tribes/clans.

- During the first epoch the patriarch was the sole repository of governmental powers. He was governor and military leader and he conducted foreign relations. He also received instructions from God and made the covenants with Him which constituted the constitutional framework for the emergent Jewish people.²
- Anarchy and Rule of Terror - Lamech's boast - doing what is right in his own eyes and excessive cruelty rules the day. Yet there is the possibility of a rising up of the people to exact some degree of justice (vengeance is 77 fold)

Genesis 6-9

- The Nephilim - Not so much demonic offspring as they are warrior/leaders (mighty men who were from of old, the men of renown). They were likely feared leaders of cities or tribes. Perhaps they could have been an alliance of cities/tribes as they are spoken of in the plural. Keep in mind that by this time the earth was likely heavily populated, having well developed cities and technology.

² <https://dje.jcpa.org/articles3/apl-ch1.htm>

- Institution of the Death Penalty - Whoever sheds the blood of man by man his blood will be shed. This implies some degree of governance as there has to be a declaration of guilt and an authority who will then execute the guilty party.

Genesis 10 - “The Table of Nations”

- Development of Cities, kingdoms, nation-states - People begin to gather and demonstrate solidarity with one another on a larger scale.
 - ◆ Nimrod (v. 10-11) - “The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen.”
 - ◆ 20 - “These are the sons of Ham, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations.”
 - A social order appears to be part of the human development. No longer just families, but a league of families which have some commonality which distinguish them and constitute nations.

Genesis 11 - Tower of Babel

- Babel = First city mentioned in the Bible (5).
- There is a cohesion of people religiously & politically; it is a theocracy of sorts, where they agree to a unified building project.
- Centralization of power and exemplifies a concerted attempt by a group of people to build a civilization based on man's autonomous thinking.

Genesis 41- Exodus - Egypt

- Egypt becomes ultra centralized under Joseph's leadership. The various lands are bought up and put under the rule of Pharaoh.
- This is probably done purposely by Joseph, who recognizes the promises given to Abraham that God's people would go to Egypt and come out. Joseph is setting the scene for Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh and the Exodus.
- Pharaoh's leadership is assumed to be under the gods. It is a despotic rule, doing what he can to

maintain power (killing Israelite babies, conscripting labor, requiring brick making).

- Religious life governs Political life - The confrontation of Moses & Pharaoh is not merely political in nature. The plagues attack the gods of Egypt, exposing the impotence of the religious-cabinet.
- Moses - God appoints Moses to be the leader of Israel.
 - ◆ Religiously he is the mediator of God's covenant.
 - ◆ Politically, he is a ruler, much like a benevolent dictator / judge (at this point; it will change)

Exodus 18 - Appointment of Elders to judge the people under Moses

- A tiered system of judges is instituted to relieve Moses of the immense slate of cases brought to him each day. The men are divided into thousands, hundreds, fifties, & tens, which likely correspond to local families/villages, larger clans, regional & tribal affiliations, national courts
- This system was specifically *republican* in nature: See Deut. 1:9-14.

Exodus 19-40 - Mt Sinai - Israel is constituted as a nation -

- A formal covenant ceremony ratifies their being a new nation under God (24)
- Israel becomes a **constitutionally based commonwealth** (an association of self-governing autonomous states more or less loosely associated in a common allegiance)
- They are given laws to order life (a constitution). Laws may have capital punishment, flogging, or exile / revoking of citizenship privileges.
- A general **sphere sovereignty** is established -
 - ◆ Priests established to head the tabernacle and religious affairs;
 - ◆ 70 elders constitute a representative governance of some sort as well as a judicial system (24:9, 14).
 - ◆ Prime Minister (aka, servant of the Lord) - Moses and Joshua, as the mediators of the covenant, have an executive role (They engage in war and enforce the laws [killing people for false worship]), as well as judicial role.

Leviticus - Kinsman Redeemer - Leviticus 25:47-55

- The book of Leviticus instituted the role of the Kinsman Redeemer. This was a man of the clan who acted, in some ways, like a police officer/sheriff. One of the kinsman Redeemer's responsibilities was investigating murders and prosecuting cases of manslaughter. He may even chase the accused if he seeks asylum in a city of refuge.

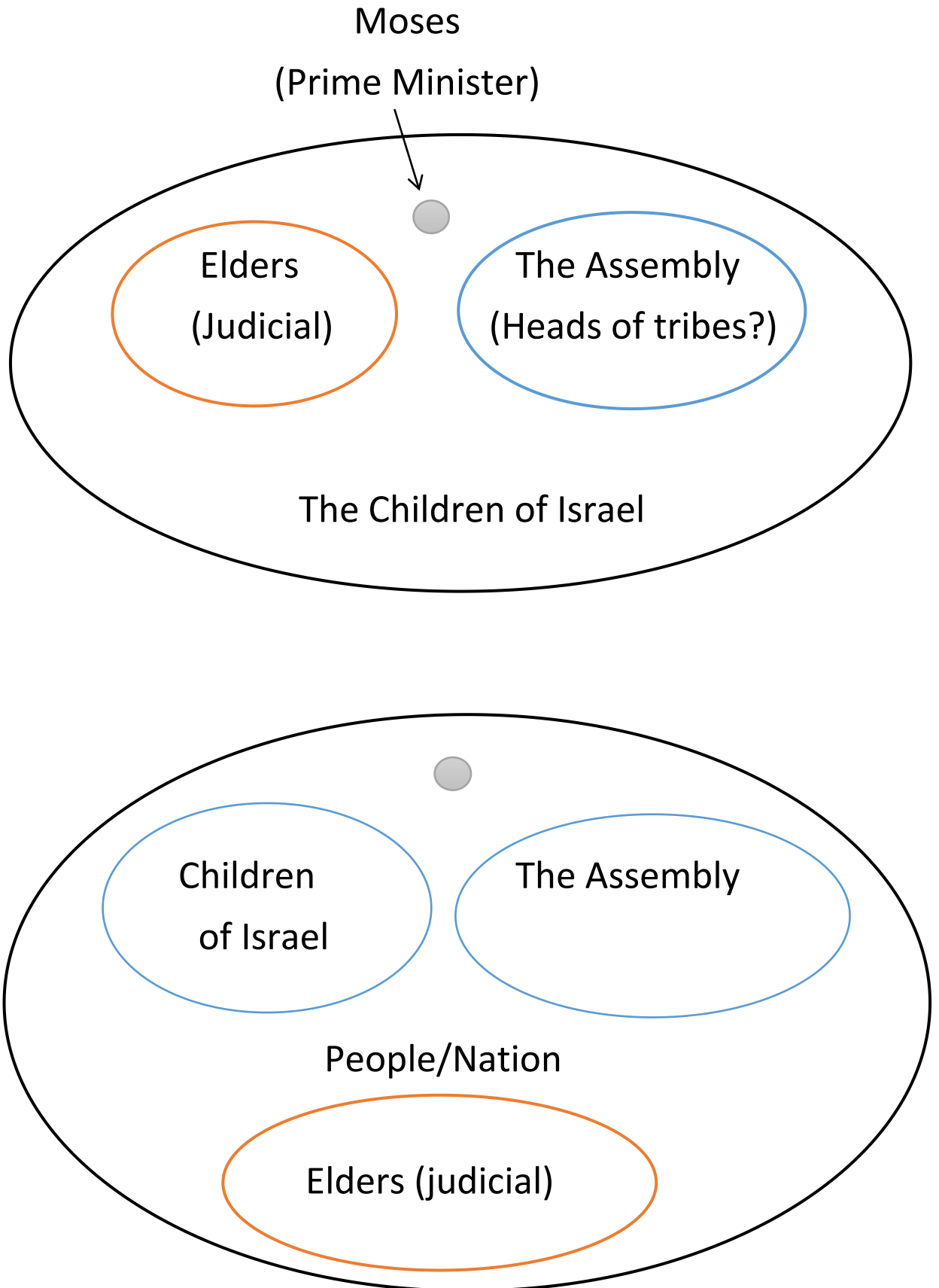
Numbers - Wilderness Wandering

- Further evidence of a representative governance is found in Numbers 14. There may be a distinction between
 - 1) the “congregation” (or “assembly” [‘êdâh]) who raises a loud voice and,
 - 2) the “people” (i.e. nation [‘am]) who weep.
 - 3) The “children of Israel” [bên yiśrâ'êl] who grumbled against Moses & Aaron
 - 4) The “assembly of the congregation of the people of Israel” [qâhâl 'êdâh bên yiśrâ'êl] - Possibly a subset of governance? A coalition of two of the above groups?

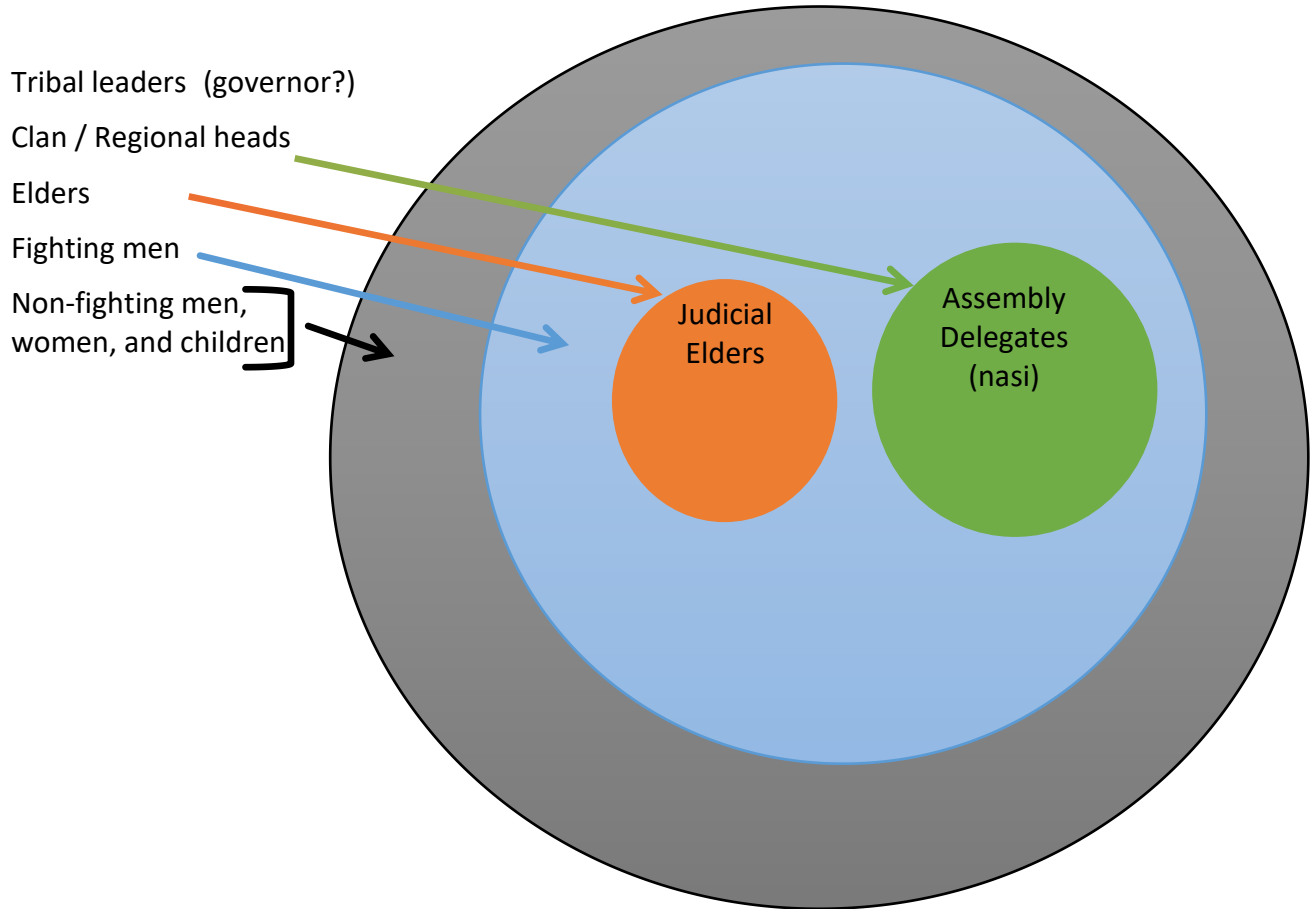
- It is recognized that not all 2 million + people could assemble before Moses when he made pronouncements. There was likely an assembly of representatives, maybe even two different groups (like a house of representatives and a senate), who would hear Moses speak and then either act on behalf of the people or transmit the messages to their constituents.
- Korah, in his rebellion (16:1-3), rises up with...
 - 1) A number of the “children of Israel” (ben yisra’el)
 - 2) 250 chiefs of the “congregation” (edah)

See Diagrams below

- Political Jockeying - Several groups rise up as conspirators and usurpers. They attempt to gain power by conspiring against Moses (Korah’s rebellion [16], Aaron & Miriam [12])



Possible breakdown of each Tribe



A List of Leaders In Israel

Nasi - prince, exalted one, rising up,
governor, captain

Rosh - Chief

Zaqen - Old, elder, senator

Shoter - From a word which means “to write,”
an officer (superintendent/ magistrate)
or overseer (Ex 5:4)

Awsteel - Nobel (Ex. 24:11)

Arrangement of People in Israel

Family / village - City
Clan - county
Tribe - State

THE “CONGRESS” OF ISRAEL

If there was a senate or house of reps, there is
no evidence that they made any new laws.

Joshua -

- The book of Joshua expresses the military side of the political system. Israel went to war with its militias (fighting men - able bodied, male citizens, 20 yrs and up)
- The political structure of Israel is witnessed in various places, particularly the last two chapters. Joshua summoned “all Israel” in the form of its representatives: its 1) elders and 2) heads, 3) judges and 4) officers (military?), to make a covenant after the lands were conquered. Josh 23-24

Judges -

- Seems to be **a time of general anarchy** as “everyone did what was right in their own eyes.”
- **Radical Libertarianism or a breakdown in the political system** which had been established in the wilderness?

Moses and Joshua had died, leaving the role of the national Prime minister vacant.

The wars that were led under Joshua may have caused strain on the political system.

Furthermore, the generation under Moses and Joshua passed away. This may have caused some

deterioration in the governance of society. If it was not an all out political anarchy, it may have been a time where the political system in place was corrupted to some degree.

Judges 4 - Barak may have been some kind of political leader (such as a military general or an elder of the people). He comes off as a limp leader, forced to go into battle by Deborah's exhortations.

While the form of government that Moses instituted was to be a radical libertarianism (which may have been what was being practiced at this time), there was certainly an anarchy which was a lack of self governance.

- **Judges** were subsequently raised up on occasion. These were regional figures (not a prime minister over the entire commonwealth like Moses & Joshua) who led wars, settled disputes, and called for law obedience.
- Each of the succeeding **judges became more "ruling class"** and looked more and more like a king centralizing power in himself. Though still regional in his jurisdiction, they more and more amassed money, children/wives, and assets.

2 Samuel 8 - The Monarchy

- Essentially, Israel had been a republican system up until the time of Samuel. When the people demanded a king, they essentially expressed a desire for a complete political revolution.
- Thus, time of republic and its constitution came to an end. A second form of government was instituted in Saul, a *constitutional monarchy*.
 - ◆ Request for a king; rejection of God (his rule and timing) - the republican system that God had instituted was rejected. They were envious of the political prowess that other nations had in their centralized monarchies.
 - ◆ This was possibly driven by fear and desire to show powerful national status. It would create a standing army (no trust in God's ability to protect them and forgetting the Ebenezers that had been erected).
 - ◆ Deut 17 - Moses prophesied that this revolution would come and mitigated its impact by requiring that the king be, what we might call, "a natural born Jew." He also put

some constitutional grounds down to limit the monarch's power.

- ◆ The monarchy that was instituted was still “republican” in some sense as the people gave their affirmation (1 Sam 10:24)
- Saul was a transitional figure who worked to centralized power in himself over time, transforming the federation into a more definite monarchical system.
- Samuel's role changed from that of a judge to a prophet, who was responsible for calling the king to heed his constitutional duties/role.
- Saul likely created a police force type system and constituted what might be the first expression of a standing army. Up until this time Israel most likely had independent militias (i.e. armed citizens who were loosely organized to fight).
- **David** received his rule both by divine appointment and popular consent. Though he was God's anointed for the role, he was still “voted” into

power by the people of Judah and then, years later, by the consent of the collective northern tribes.

- David continued to utilize the old federal structure (elders ruling locally). It may have been like a parliament of sorts.

Divided Kingdom

- Under Solomon the people felt a bit of a burden due to their being conscripted to work and having to support his extensive harem. When Rehoboam came to power the federation heads sought to negotiate a reprieve. Rehoboam's refusal resulted in the Northern Tribes seceding from the Davidic dynasty and forming the nation of Israel.
- The Northern Tribes maintained the rudiments of the constitutional monarchy with the nobility acting in the federal system. However, the kingly dynasties changed regularly and the local tribal heads were gradually weakened in power.
- Due to the violations of the constitution the kings of Israel & Judah became vassals to foreign powers, until eventually they were conquered.

Post-Exile

- After the return to the land the constitution was re-established under Ezra & Nehemiah.
- The reading of the law and jettison of Gentile wives likely was a sort of ratification of the system.
- The land existed as a vassal to Persia, but the Jews were able to enjoy a great deal of personal autonomy. Instead of having a king, the region was under the rule of a governor who was a decedent of David, namely Zerubbabel.

Intertestamental Period

- Israel Independence - Mostly ruled by “priest-kings” from what I understand. Military guys who extended their military power over the nation and took the position of high priest.
- Saducees / Priestly class & Pharisees became influential leaders. The priestly nobility (Sadudcees) had some clout with the Roman governors which gave them some deal of political influence.

Conclusion:

The idea of covenant governs the political structure of the Israelite people in the Bible. Sometimes called federal (Latin *foedus*, meaning covenant), it represents the bonds that men have to other men, as well as God to men and God to the nation. Covenants in the Bible typically take some political form and serve as a constitution for the subsequent bodies involved.

Republicanism is the third political principle of biblical Israel. Understood in its broadest sense, republicanism reflects the view that the political order is a public thing (*res publica*), that is to say, not the private preserve of any single king or ruling elite but the property of all of its citizens and that political power should be organized so as to reflect this fact. Republican government involves a limitation on the powers of those given authority and some provision for the representation of public concerns as a matter of right in the formulation and execution of public policy.