



Review

## Politics in the Bible

by Paul R. Abramson  
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Reviewed by Alexandru Mălureanu

Paul R. Abramson is professor of political science at Michigan State University. He was Senior Fulbright Scholar at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Lady Davis Professor in the department of political science at The Hebrew University. He wrote numerous books like „Political Attitudes in America“, „Value Change in Global Perspective“ (with Ronald Inglehart), „Change and Continuity“ and „Elections“ (with John H. Aldrich and Davjd W. Rohde).

The author emphasizes that The Bible is fundamental to Western culture and political philosophers from Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau to modern political theorists such as George H. Sabine, Leo Strauss and Sheldon S. Wolin have drawn upon biblical examples.

It's very true that also today, most contemporary politicians display less familiarity with Scripture although many proudly proclaim themselves Christians.



Alexandru Mălureanu is PhD Student and Master of Advanced Studies in Ecumenical Studies at the Faculty of Protestant Theology, University of Geneva, Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, Switzerland

The main goal of „Politics in the Bible“ is to help readers to think critically about how the Bible illuminates understanding of justice, leadership, authority and politics.

Abramson argues that the Bible is a book that should be read even by those who don't believe it has any transcendent significance.

He says that people can choose to read it as the revealed word of God, as a source of morality, as a compilation of interesting stories, poetry and history or as a work of great literature.

We can observe that the Bible was written under specific historical conditions, but the miracles of the prophets, of Jesus and of his apostles and disciples also have no political implications.

To illustrate how people can read the Bible in different ways, Abramson discuss the example of Moses, who was not allowed to enter the Promised Land, showing how a political analysis differs from most others readings.

We know that God lets Moses to see the Promised Land, but he dies after viewing it (and after this „No man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day“, „And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face...“ Deuteronomy 34:6,10).

From religious interpretation we find that Moses was punished because he tempted God in a place without water, but from political interpretation we can see the same story differently.

The author explains, using a study of Wildavsky („The Nursing Father - Moses as a Political Leader“), why Moses is not allowed to enter Canaan in terms of political leadership. He recalled some arguments: it is important to establish that all leaders have limits and God does not want a Moses cult to develop.

By saying that there has been no prophet „like unto Moses“, Deuteronomy is also saying no prophet should arise, because the teachings of Moses can't be changed. In the final phase of his leadership, Moses introduces new laws to limit future leaders and recalling the great events of Israel's history, rather than his personal role, he inaugurated a system of checks by institutionalizing forms of leadership and by delegating authority.

Wildavsky argues the final events in Moses' life suggest that he who teaches continues to learn! Moses understood that the chief virtue in leaders is to make themselves unnecessary. To be a „nursing father“, knowing that child may die, is the essence of Mosaic leadership. Teaching that leads to learning that creates new teachers is a circular process of renewal not a linear model of leadership ( Wildavsky, pp. 188-189).

Paul Abramson says that reading the Bible politically we can understand that justice, authority and leadership are very important also in a religious context. Some biblical leaders were great men such as Moses, Joshua and David, but some were ineffective leaders such Rehoboam and Zedekiah.

He shows what makes the Bible especially interesting for political analysts: all of the leaders in the Hebrew Bible were flawed. In this fundamental way they are similar to real political leaders.

But he observed that some, especially the Hebrew prophets and Jesus Christ, had great visions of justice.

So the basic political message of the Bible is that leaders must pursue justice.

We can find many political meanings, except for the statement „Blesses are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God“ (Matthew 5:9), „which might encourage political leaders to vie for the Nobel Peace Prize“.

To sum up, the book „Politics in The Bible“ discusses selected stories from the Bible, that have political implications and also may stimulate new thinking about the Bible as a source of insight into political ideas.