

## Biblical Books

“The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel” is primarily concerned with the biblical books of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, but occasionally reflects on the period of the judges before and the events in 1<sup>st</sup> Kings after.

**Joshua:** The book of Joshua describes the successful and complete military conquest of the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. Native peoples are either converted, driven off, or killed. The land of Canaan is divided among the twelve tribes of Israel and Joshua concludes his leadership with a speech urging the people of Israel to continue obeying G-d’s commands.

**Judges:** The book of Judges describes a difficult period in Israel’s history where the people are oppressed by foreign kings, cry out to G-d to save them, are led to victory over their oppressors by a charismatic judge, and then peace is returned to Israel for a time. This cycle repeats with different oppressors and different judges and each time the story becomes more violent and the characters involved become more morally ambiguous.

**1<sup>st</sup> Samuel:** 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel begins with Samuel, the last judge, restoring peace to Israel by defeating Philistine oppressors. The people of Israel demand a king and a monarchy to rule over them and to protect them more permanently from external threats. Samuel chooses Saul to be the first King of Israel but his flaws quickly lead to a second man, David, being anointed in his place. 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel describes the conflict between Saul and David, and, ultimately, Saul’s death.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel describes the rule of King David, who consolidates his power and expands his kingdom after the death of Saul. David reigns with great prestige and divine approval for a time until his adultery with Bathsheba leads to the unravelling of his household from within.

**1<sup>st</sup> Kings:** 1<sup>st</sup> Kings begins with the death of King David and the ascension of his son Solomon to the throne. Solomon’s kingdom is vast and he is favored by G-d. Solomon builds the temple in Jerusalem. But Solomon’s many marriages to foreign women results in him losing G-d’s favor and his kingdom declines in his waning years. After his death his kingdom is split into two, with Israel in the north, and Judah in the south. 1<sup>st</sup> Kings describes major events in the history of both kingdoms, culminating in the career of Elijah the prophet.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Kings:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings continues describing major events in both Israel’s and Judah’s kingdoms and several hundred years of time pass. Eventually the Assyrian Empire destroys northern Israel but southern Judah is saved by divine intervention. However, a few generations later the newly risen Babylonian Empire marches on Judah and captures Jerusalem. 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings ends in tragedy with the people of Israel in exile in Babylon and the last in the line of Davidic kings captured and executed.

## Main Arguments

Listed below are the three primary arguments of “The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel”

1. Sovereign power leads to a confusion of means and ends. Rather than means (power, wealth, influence) being used to achieve ends (peace, faith, love, life), ends are used to acquire and preserve means.
2. There are two prominent “faces” or motivations for political violence: insecurity and entitlement. Both result in increasing isolation from oneself and from others and both inevitably feed into and fuel one another.
3. Political violence is often executed through long chains of intermediaries which dilutes individual responsibility for the violence and exacerbates the collateral effect of the violence.