

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382
103 (2), pp. 10-24, 2025

The Premises of the Israelite Kingship **Viorel-Cristian POPA**

Viorel-Cristian POPA

Faculty of Orthodox Theology "Episcop Dr. Vasile Coman", University of Oradea, Romania
Email: vios77@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study aims to present three elements as premises for the establishment of royalty in Israel: the primary covenant from the time of the biblical patriarchs, the displacement to Egypt, the exodus, and the Sinaitic covenant.

The Exodus and the wandering in the desert will be considered as a theopolitical interlude, a privileged time that has a special existence in the Jewish collective imagination. It can be considered that Egypt represents only a prologue to authentic political development, an incubator for the development of Israel in its embryonic form. Egypt is a profound theopolitical lesson for the people of Israel, one that will remain deeply engraved in the collective consciousness.

The moment of Sinai and its aftermath are particularly interesting for observing the formation of power regimes in the history of Israel.

Keywords

Covenant, patriarchs, Egypt, exodus, law, power

I. Introduction

The political history of the chosen people did not begin with the monarchy. But neither did it end with it. Rather, it constitutes an intermediate phase in the unfolding of the biblical narrative, seen both as a temporary and

circumstantial solution¹, but also as a peak of self-determination and secular power of the chosen people. Before royalty, Israel had several forms of (proto)political order, beginning with the period of the patriarchs, continuing with the displacement to Egypt, and finally with the reiteration of the Covenant on Mount Sinai and the regaining of Canaan after the Exodus.

Therefore, we will outline the primary Jewish context and the transformations that gradually prepared the chosen people to request a formal modification of the terms of the Covenant (Berit), without, however, leaving the boundaries imposed in the sacred texts. For if anything is constant in the history of Israel among the nations, it is not the concrete form of political order, but the privileged, though sometimes tense, relationship with its God. The stable element of Jewish community life is never purely political, but determined by Yahweh.

In this latter sense, we will follow the division of Israel's history into constitutional periods, each episode marking a new form of covenant between the people and God, an adaptation of the internal organization of the community to the external circumstances affecting Jewish society within its geopolitical framework. The first three constitutional periods will be highlighted, namely: the period of the patriarchs, the displacement to Egypt, the exodus, and the Sinaitic covenant². The Exodus and the wandering through the desert will be considered as a theopolitical intermezzo, a privileged time that has a special existence in the Jewish collective imagination. We will not deal here with the form of organization during the period of the Judges, but we will add it at the end of the research to the premises of the establishment of royalty in Israel.

Although this tripartite division is explicitly mentioned only in the post-biblical phase, namely in the Mishnah, the specialized literature asserts that it has been a traditional category of Jewish theopolitical thought

¹ See, in this regard, the table in the Introduction to the volume edited by Daniel J. ELAZAR (ed.), *Authority, Power, and Leadership in the Jewish Polity: Cases and Issues*, University Press of America – Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, New York & London, 1991, pp. 8-9.

² Daniel J. ELAZAR and Stuart COHEN, *The Jewish Polity: Jewish Political Organization from Biblical Times to the Present*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1985, pp. 45 și urm.

since ancient times³. Therefore, its instrumentalization in the analysis of the change of power regime is particularly useful, showing how the internal institutional balance was affected by the new circumstances, and one “crown” or another gained preponderance in the Jewish community, although each of them had a separate sphere of power and jurisdiction.

II. The primary covenant

First and foremost, for the Jews, it was Abraham. With him began the line of patriarchs and the existence of the chosen people. This is Israel’s first “constitutional” period, the first form of organization recorded in the Old Testament, which spans several centuries⁴. However, current scientific periodization considers this interval, together with the displacement of the people to Egypt, as a proto-political stage, marking rather the moments when the constitution of the people as such begins, without any pretensions of coagulating an institutionalized regime.

Thus, in the initial Covenant with Abraham, God does not imperatively prescribe any form of social organization, but only regulates the relationship between the Jewish community and its unique divinity. However, his call to the land of Canaan is made in terms of a future promise by God to raise up a whole people from Abraham’s descendants, and not a simple extended family structure, saying to him: “I will make you a great nation ... and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in you” (Gen 12, 2-3). From the moment his historical and sacred mission begins, the first patriarch is designated as the sole root of a new people, radically different from all those around him, through his distinct and separate understanding with God.

Furthermore, at this first moment, Abraham is explicitly told that the stake of such a covenant is the unshakeable faith of the future people in the one God: “I will establish my covenant between me and you and your

³ Stuart COHEN, *The Three Crowns: Structures of Communal Politics in Early Rabbinic Jewry*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p. 16.

⁴ Iain PROVAN, V. Philips LONG and Tremper LONGMAN III, *A Biblical History of Israel*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville & London, 2003, pp. 112 și urm.

descendants after you, throughout their generations, as an everlasting covenant, that I will be God to you and to your descendants after you” (Gen 17, 7). Only under these conditions does a privileged relationship between the divinity and the chosen people exist, for this is the only reason for their special calling: faith and loyalty⁵. And Abraham appears, as the “father” of this people, in the position of representative of the future nation and source of the obligations assumed in his name.

Analyzing in detail how the covenant works, it should be noted that, from a legal standpoint, it resembles the agreements that existed in the Middle East at that time, indicating a reward for loyalty by a benevolent sovereign⁶. The formulas used in the Abrahamic covenant closely reflect such legal language, but they contain a new essence, a new way for the parties to interact. Here, it is no longer a matter of two simple subordinate political subjects, but of the living God, holder of full cosmic sovereignty, who “descends” upon Himself to contract a relationship with Abraham, a simple man, who is asked to freely express his consent and to undergo a physical transformation of the body of the faithful: circumcision⁷.

Moreover, although the covenant appears as “eternal” in the language of the book of Genesis, it is renewed with each patriarch after Abraham, showing the need to update the understanding and ensure compliance with the initial terms, namely faith and loyalty. In this way, the territorial basis, the land of Canaan, promised by God to Israel, is preserved, and victory in war and prosperity can be expected. Only through continuity can the people, in their full political dimension, come into being later.

The political dimension of this covenant remains unwritten from a constitutional point of view, as the regime is not institutionalized, but allows the community to function according to unwritten, flexible tribal rules. However, we can indirectly deduce some of these from the Genesis

⁵ Daniel J. ELAZAR, *Covenant and Polity in Biblical Israel: Biblical Foundations and Jewish Expressions – Volume I: Of the Covenant Tradition in Politics*, Transaction Publishers, London, 1998, p. 132.

⁶ Moshe WEINFELD, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East”, in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1970), pp. 184-203.

⁷ David NOVAK, *The Jewish Social Contract: An Essay in Political Theology*, Princeton University Press, Princeton & Oxford, 2005, p. 41.

account, noting that the principle of transmitting the role of leader is not purely hereditary, but has a strong meritocratic dimension, depending on personal suitability for that role⁸. The episode with Jacob and Esau is illustrative in this regard, reiterating the need for the patriarch, the image of the future people, to respect the original Abrahamic covenant⁹ and be able to enter into such a privileged relationship. That is why Jacob is chosen, proving that not even Isaac can influence the transmission of the patriarchal function, but only God¹⁰.

At the same time, it can be seen that this first period is the only one in the entire history of Israel when all three crowns (ketarim) are concentrated in one person¹¹, without separation and without conflict. The patriarch, the true “icon” of the future people, embodies all authority in himself, in a plenary manner, exercising an “exclusive and hegemonic influence” over the community under the eyes of God¹². From the point of view of salvation history, this can be interpreted in a typological and symbolic key, showing the correspondence between the beginning and the messianic completion of the chosen people: only the Savior will reunite all three attributes of power, constituting the final fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. From Adam to Noah, from Noah to the Patriarchs, from the Patriarchs to Sinai, God is tirelessly searching for people¹³.

⁸ Daniel J. ELAZAR and Stuart COHEN, *The Jewish Polity*, p. 47.

⁹ Abraham’s descendants were to be, like him, among the righteous, with solid morals and always showing loyalty to God and His law. Regarding Abraham’s righteousness and its transmission to his descendants, see J. Gordon MCCONVILLE, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology*, T&T Clark, London, 2006, pp. 43 ff.

¹⁰ Daniel J. ELAZAR, “Jacob and Esau Jacob and Esau and the emergence of the Jewish people”, in: *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (1994), pp. 294-302.

¹¹ Daniel J. ELAZAR, *Covenant and Polity in Biblical Israel*, p. 126.

¹² Daniel J. ELAZAR and Stuart COHEN, *The Jewish Polity*, p. 47. Thus, through Abraham, the dialogue between the Jews and God would begin. This ongoing dialogue, “which the rest of the world listened in on”, represents the history of the Jews. Alfred HÂRLĂUANU, *Istoria universală a poporului evreu*, Editura Zarkony Ltd, București, 1992, pp. 74-76; Max I. DIMONT, *Evreii, Dumnezeu și Istoria*, transl. Irina Horea, Editura Hasefer, București, 2007, p. 33.

¹³ Andre NEHER, *Moise și vocația iudaică*, translation and notes by Țicu Goldstein, Editura Hasefer, București, 2002, p. 103.

III. The migration to Egypt

The transition from the patriarchal period to the migration to Egypt (the final moment of the proto-political interval) is made through Joseph, in the last years of the patriarch Jacob's life. The collective departure from Canaan is already made under the title of "the children of Israel" (Benei Israel) (Gen 46, 5), with God's blessing. Thus, initially, the Jewish community enters Egypt with the Pharaoh's consent and is offered refuge according to the general laws of hospitality in the East. Although they left the Promised Land, the territorial basis of the Covenant, this was done at the Lord's urging, not as a violation of the conditions, but as a preparatory phase for the full development of the people of Israel.

In fact, the end of the book of Genesis reflects the renewal of God's promise regarding the Promised Land, showing that Joseph, on his deathbed, reminds the „sons of Israel" of their future return to Canaan. However, as some commentators point out, the displacement to Egypt reveals divine providence and the broader plan of his chosen one, Joseph, more precisely to "transform a group of brothers who are at odds with each other into a unified nation"¹⁴.

Shortly after the death of the two emblematic leaders (Joseph for the Jews and Pharaoh for the Egyptians), the situation of the Jewish community, already coagulated into post-patriarchal forms, worsens significantly, marking the beginning of what Jewish commentators will call *Avdut Mitzrayim* (Egyptian slavery). As it grew in number and prospered within the Egyptian kingdom, Israel was viewed with envy and suspicion by the new Pharaoh and his subjects, its rights being annihilated and forced into slave labor. Thus, the Israelite proto-political structure is not only deprived of the promised land, but also disintegrated as a self-standing social entity.

Analyzing the new community arrangement institutionally, the crown of royalty (*keter malkhut*) is taken over by a decentralized network of "elders" (*zekenim*) and "scribes" or "officers" (*sotrim*)¹⁵. Functionally,

¹⁴ Mira MORGENSTERN, *Conceiving a Nation: The Development of Political Discourse in the Hebrew Bible*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 2009, p. 17.

¹⁵ The Romanian text, in the Anania version, is faithful to the Greek Septuagint, which

the former ensured Israel's internal cohesion during its bondage, acting as tribal leaders of extended families, but confederated in the form of an emerging people. The latter played a dual role: on the one hand, as scholars, they ensured the connection between Israel and Pharaoh (or his officials), ensuring the leadership of groups of Jewish workers¹⁶, the quality of their work, and accurate reporting; on the other hand, they were the guardians of customary law and patriarchal covenants¹⁷.

Therefore, Egypt can be considered only a prologue to authentic political development, an incubator for the development of Israel in its embryonic form. The time spent here marks the end of the proto-political phase of the Covenant community, and the direct experience of submission to the most authoritarian type of regime opens the eyes of each individual to the future acceptance of a social arrangement totally different from what the East of that era had to offer.

In reality, Egypt is a profound theopolitical lesson for the people of Israel, one that will remain deeply engraved in the collective consciousness, along with the deliverance granted by the Lord, and will forever prevent them from falling into a tyranny as cruel as that of Pharaoh. From this moment on, the chosen people become convinced, though often stubborn, that they are called by God, and only faith in Him will free them again and again from the hand of any earthly despot.

IV. The Exodus and Wandering in the Wilderness

When referring to the Exodus, we will not retell the entire narrative, but will focus on specific moments of theopolitical tension. More precisely,

translates sotrim as grammateis. On the other hand, Western translations that follow the Masoretic text translate this term as "officers", later transformed into assistants to the judges in the post-exilic period.

¹⁶ References to this category of Jewish leaders appear in the period before the emergence of Moses and the Sinaitic law, see Stephen M PASSAMANECK, *Police Ethics and the Jewish Tradition*, Charles C. Thomas Publisher, Springfield, 2003, pp. 13-14.

¹⁷ Daniel J. ELAZAR, "The Polity in Biblical Israel", in: Daniel J. ELAZAR (ed.), *Authority, Power, and Leadership in the Jewish Polity: Cases and Issues*, University Press of America – Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, New York & London, 1991, p. 33.

we will avoid discussing the ritualistic and purely dogmatic dimensions of the book of Exodus, as well as the content of the covenant on Mount Sinai. Therefore, we will try to find the points that directly allude to the political dimension of Israel's liberation from slavery, as well as the significance of wandering through the wilderness, without territory and without a definitively established community.

The analysis of Exodus will follow three main lines: the reasons for leaving Egypt and the authority of Pharaoh, the wandering in the wilderness, and the divine sovereignty exercised continuously during this interval, but functionally shared with Moses. Furthermore, the tripartite dynamic of God-Moses-people and the divergent plans until the crystallization of a definitive and complete covenant at Sinai will be emphasized.

In this first sense, it is worth noting that the oppression to which the Jews had come to be subjected in Egypt was not purely legal in nature, but rather "political" in nature¹⁸, affecting an entire ethnocultural community, rather than separate individuals. From guests in the land of Pharaoh, the Israelites had become captives of arbitrary treatment by the state, subjected to harsh labor that they could not understand. As the Old Testament text shows: "The Egyptians put the children of Israel to hard labor and made their lives bitter with hard work... with all kinds of work they forced them to do" (Ex 1, 14-15). The sole purpose of such treatment seemed to be the persecution of the entire community¹⁹, which the new Pharaoh feared for strategic reasons: demographics and the possibility of betrayal through alliance with an enemy power.

However, the memory of Canaan was not strong enough to generate a real liberation movement. Not even the genocide ordered by Pharaoh against male infants (Ex 1, 22) acted as a catalyst for revolt. In reality, the people of Israel endured the treatment of the Egyptian state, waiting for the Lord's initiative. And His response to their prayers did not hesitate to come, the text showing that the Jews "cried out, and their cry rose from under the burden of their labor to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And God

¹⁸ Jose S. CROATTO, *Exodus: A Hermeneutics of Freedom*, Orbis, Maryknoll, 1981, p. 18.

¹⁹ Michael WALZER, *Exod și Revoluție*, transl. Claudiu Vereș, Editura Tact, Cluj-Napoca, 2011, p. 34.

looked upon the children of Israel and made Himself known to them” (Ex 2, 23-25).

Therefore, it is God who gives the signal to break the Egyptian yoke. Liberation is by no means merely revolutionary-political, a simple impulse of the oppressed masses to revolt, but sacramental and theologically grounded. The people are turned, through anamnesis, to their primordial Covenant with God, the promise of freedom in Canaan being reactivated. And Moses is the one chosen to convey this message of salvation to both Israel and Pharaoh.

The human actor in this dynamic does not appear as a perfect person or one of a different essence from the rest of the community²⁰, but as a man whom the Lord found suitable for the mission of liberating the people.

Indecisive and hesitant, Moses accepts his destiny only after he is allowed to use Aaron as his spokesman²¹. Thus, in the Jewish narrative of community leadership, there is never a single voice speaking. On the contrary, it multiplies when it comes to transmitting the words of God, always opening the people to dialogue and debate. Such human proximity, the withdrawn Moses and the communicative Aaron, creates the premises for a recalcitrant political temperament, but also for a theology of freedom. The Jewish people are freed not to be slaves to a tyrannical God, but to serve Him in a conscious and free manner. Israel’s consent is fundamental, for the Lord has chosen them to be free in faith.

That is why the great confrontation in the book of Exodus is not between Moses and Pharaoh, but between the living God, who calls man to freedom, and the self-deified tyrant, who seeks to enslave man. Moses is only the one who ensures, through Aaron, the transmission of the correct message between the two parties.

However, the transition cannot be made immediately, for the burden of freedom is immense for human beings. Medieval Jewish commentators, such as Moses Maimonides, point out that “a sudden transition from one extreme to another is impossible, as it is impossible for man, due to

²⁰ Paul JOHNSON, *O istorie a evreilor*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2019, p. 43.

²¹ Iain PROVAN, V. Philips LONG and Tremper LONGMAN III, *A Biblical History of Israel*, p. 128.

his nature, to break away from everything that is familiar to him”²², and wandering in the wilderness appears necessary in order to allow for a gradual transformation of the Jewish community.

More precisely, this formative period stretches from the crossing of the Red Sea and the departure from Pharaoh’s authority²³ to the crossing of the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Thus, the wandering in Exodus appears as a real state of exception, in which any immanent legality becomes ineffective and powerless. At the same time, the people of Israel enter into a state of pure transcendent sovereignty, under the full authority of God, albeit mediated by Moses.

Wandering in the wilderness represents a detachment from a certain type of order and a gradual, sometimes violent (Ex 32, 27-28) purification from the conceptual residues that remained imprinted in the collective mind and beyond the territory ruled by Pharaoh. For, if “from a physical point of view, the escape from Egypt is sudden, glorious, complete, from a spiritual and political point of view, it is very difficult, a matter of two steps forward, one step back”²⁴. That is why God tests and teaches his people throughout all these years, in this intermediate land, which seems to have stepped out of history and mundane space²⁵. Thus, the exodus was an act of separation and political resistance, but above all, it was a religious act²⁶.

And in the end, he only allows the “children of the Exodus”, those not structurally affected by Egyptian slavery, to cross the Jordan. This was the role of the wandering: a national crucible, an indispensable stage through which the slaves of Pharaoh are transformed into free members of the “nation” of Israel. They now become “a political society, dedicated to each other and to the covenant that binds them together. This is the achievement of the four decades in the wilderness”²⁷. Thus, although the moment of the new Sinaitic covenant took place at the very beginning of the journey through the wilderness, it took a long time for it to be internalized.

²² Moise MAIMONIDES, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, transl. M. Friedlander, Varda Books, Skokie, 2002², III, 32, p. 322.

²³ J. Gordon McCONVILLE, *God and Earthly Power*, p. 54.

²⁴ Michael WALZER, *Exod și Revoluție*, p. 59.

²⁵ J. Gordon McCONVILLE, *God and Earthly Power*, pp. 55 ff.

²⁶ Paul JOHNSON, *O istorie a evreilor*, p. 45

²⁷ Michael WALZER, *Exod și Revoluție*, p. 70.

V. The Sinai Covenant. Divine sovereignty and the institutional sharing of authority

The Exodus was interrupted before reaching Canaan. It was transformed into something greater when the people, at the foot of Mount Sinai, entered into a direct covenant with their God. From then on, the Exodus continued spatially and temporally for another forty years, but politically, the immutable foundations of the people of Israel as a national and spiritual entity were laid. After Sinai, the chosen people were no longer a collection of families and tribes, bound together by the promise of their forefather Abraham²⁸, but a complete nation, in the process of perfection²⁹, which had collectively and in its entirety entered into a new covenant with the divine.

In fact, for the Jewish people, this becomes the fundamental political category: the covenant (berit). After Sinai, a people is no longer bound to one power structure or another by virtue of a mythological justification, but rather, knowingly and freely, has assumed such a historical destiny, accepting the “contractual” conditions offered by God. As the biblical text shows, the entire people, not just Moses (as had been the case with the patriarchs)³⁰, entered into a covenant with God. The understanding is all-encompassing, and the Lord’s promise is explicit: “If you listen to My voice and keep My covenant, you will be My chosen people among all nations, for all the earth is Mine; you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19, 5-6). Although Moses calls only the elders of the people to him, as participants in the administrative crown (keter malkhut), the people respond to the Lord in their entirety: “Then all the people answered with one voice and said, *All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!* And Moses brought the words of the people to God” (Ex 19, 8).

From now on,

²⁸ The Sinai Covenant had its roots in the promise between God and Abraham, which in turn went back in time to the promise between God and Noah. Isidor EPSTEIN, *Iudaismul. Origini și istorie*, Editura Hasefer, București, 2001, p. 6.

²⁹ The Israelites underwent the process of maturation not only for themselves, but, by divine providence, for all of humanity that was to follow them. Paul JOHNSON, *O istorie a evreilor*, p. 45.

³⁰ In Abraham’s case, the covenant with God was personal, unlike Moses’ covenant, which was on behalf of the entire people. Paul JOHNSON, *O istorie a evreilor*, p. 30.

“forming a community with God, the bound people are more than a simple collective, more than a crowd. Each individual Jew is equidistant from God within the covenant, just as each Jew is equidistant from every other Jew within the covenant. Since the Lord stands at the center of the covenant, all intersecting lines must pass through the center”³¹.

And rabbinic tradition has retained the fact that, although theologically there is only one covenant, legally speaking, there are hundreds of thousands of covenants covering the relationships between each individual and God, as well as between the individuals who make up the Jewish people³².

On the other hand, on a concrete level, the moment of Sinai and its aftermath are particularly interesting for analyzing the formation of power regimes in the history of Israel. Looking at Moses’ role during this period, it should be noted that for a time he held two ketarim, namely the crown of the Torah and the royal crown, but the priestly crown was conferred from the beginning on Aaron and his descendants³³. Moreover, gradually, even Moses renounced bearing the entire burden of community leadership (keter malkhut), following the advice of his father-in-law Jethro to devote himself mainly to the function of teacher of divine law, and the chosen leaders to help him in the administration of civil justice (Ex 19, 18-22).

In time, he himself asks God to relieve him of the burden of civil administration, saying “I cannot bear all this people alone; it is too heavy for me”, and the Lord replied, “Gather for Me seventy men from among the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and their teachers, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and they shall stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the spirit that is upon you and put it upon them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you will not bear it alone” (Num

³¹ David NOVAK, *The Jewish Social Contract: An Essay in Political Theology*, p. 54.

³² Gordon FREEMAN, “The Rabbinic Understanding of Covenant as a Political Idea”, in: Daniel J. ELAZAR (ed.), *Kinship and Consent: The Jewish Political Tradition and Its Contemporary Uses*, Turtledove Publishing, Ramat Gan, 1981, pp. 68 și urm.

³³ Stuart COHEN, “The Concept of the Three Ketarim”, pp. 29-30.

11, 14-17). Thus, even at this early stage in the formation of the people of Israel, authority is shared horizontally (Moses-Aaron) and vertically (Moses-the chosen leaders; Aaron-the Levites), leaving pure and complete sovereignty to God alone³⁴.

Therefore, even in the constitutional arrangement of this state of exception, Moses himself will play a central role, but always secondary to God. If divine sovereignty (*malkhut shamayim*) is explicitly professed throughout the text of the Torah, showing the true peak of the theopolitical hierarchy in ancient Israel, Moses is called “the servant of God” (*Ebed Yahweh*). This exceptional function, of representing the divinity before the people and the people before God, is temporary in nature, dictated by the imperatives of the coagulation of the people, and attributed, throughout Jewish history, only to Moses and Joshua.

Ebed Yahweh is chosen by the Lord, but the people also express their consent to be represented and led, to a limited extent, by him (Ex 14, 31). The function of “servant of God” appears as an initial concentration of increased power, indirectly reflecting the unique sovereignty of the Lord, in order to meet the needs of constitutional development. *Ebed Yahweh* is tasked with the initial balancing of power within Israel, in the exceptional situation of wandering in the wilderness (Moses) and the military occupation of the land of Canaan (Joshua). His function is required by the turbulent political context itself, by the danger of the disintegration of the people. Therefore, once the territorial base (the promised land) is won and consolidated, the authority of *Ebed Yahweh* can be dissipated into several structures³⁵. His role is to shepherd the people in times of crisis, to preserve their integrity, and not to perpetuate a certain permanent constitutional structure.

The Torah is not concluded by Deuteronomy, but crowned. Deuteronomy is a recapitulation of the entire law, a definitive restoration and consolidation of the covenant in the Jewish collective consciousness. Before the people enter Canaan, Moses calls them to remind them of their destiny, of what they should accomplish once the occupation of the

³⁴ Paul JOHNSON, *O istorie a evreilor*, p. 55.

³⁵ Daniel J. ELAZAR and Stuart COHEN, *The Jewish Polity: Jewish Political Organization from Biblical Times to the Present*, p. 65.

promised land is complete. Israel is shown the community it must form, the privileged place it occupies, reminding it of the slavery from which it has escaped and the ease with which it can fall back into slavery and sin.

In this sense, some authors have pointed out that Deuteronomy

“contains a charter for the nation, and in this notion of nationhood there is a concept of political responsibility that addresses both the political body and the individual, the existence of Israel as a nation being subordinate to the broader idea that there is a divine purpose for the entire created order, which is permeated by God’s justice and righteousness”³⁶.

More specifically, the final part of the Torah revisits all the political themes of the exodus from Egypt, the entire promise of freedom and the historical mission of the people of Israel, providing them, in summary, with a constitutional framework for the future Jewish statehood.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that, in concrete terms, while the first orders revealed by Moses to the people were intended for a nomadic, wandering situation, Deuteronomy provides rules that can support a community settled within firm borders and with a clear internal division of spheres of influence. In fact, the fundamental reality of the Sinai Covenant is that the Lord gives Israel a mission and an essential connection with Himself, rather than a static form of government. As long as this sacred relationship is correctly understood by Israel, the people are free to adjust their institutional balance in any way they see fit. If we add to the above the institution of the Judges, we can say that the premises for the establishment of kingship in Israel were created.

We can also see that the theopolitical-legal complexity of the concept of berit in the Jewish tradition reinforces the idea of mutual responsibility

³⁶ J. Gordon McCONVILLE, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology*, p. 74.

between individuals bound together before God, a contractual connection that does not allow a single member of the people to be harmed without the whole nation being harmed and without the name of the Lord being defiled by such an act. Therefore, the covenant becomes a constitutional form of association, which is implicitly inviolable, being guaranteed by God and His final judgment.

We also note that from a marginalized community, enslaved by Pharaoh and deprived of all dignity, Israel becomes the privileged subject of human history. This covenant people accomplishes the radical transformation that the Lord desired in the general economy of salvation. Thus, the covenant fulfills both a political and cultic function for ancient Israel, but also a soteriological role for all humanity.