

Deuteronomy 1:9-15

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Moses recounts the story of Israel's journey from Mount Horeb (Sinai). He had the people choose wise and respected men and appointed them as leaders because the Israelites had become so numerous.

As Moses was recounting the history of the people of Israel, he reminded them of the time when he initiated a change in leadership due to the numerical growth of the nation ([Exodus 18:13-27](#)). Such a growth directly reflects the promise God made with Abraham in [Genesis 15:5](#), namely that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky ([Genesis 17:2](#); [Exodus 1:7](#)). Thus, the population growth is seen as a blessing from the LORD.

Nevertheless, such a numerical blessing brought its own practical problems as it relates to administration and management. Therefore, Moses asked the people to *choose from among their number wise and discerning and experienced men from their tribes*. He then appointed selected men who met these three qualifications to serve as heads over various tribal groups. Moses bestowed his authority upon the heads selected by the people.

At Mount Horeb, God had set up the first pillar for Israel to be a self-governing nation by giving them the law. The Ten Commandments made clear that God, and only God was the giver of the law. Man does not have the authority to give the law. That is made clear by the first five commandments. The last five make it clear that the main thing God decrees that men do was to treat one another as they would like to be treated themselves. To respect the individual sovereignty of each person. The third pillar of self-governance was included in the Ten Commandments, when God commanded each person to honor the possessions of others. Not to steal their goods. But private property will not be fully instituted until they enter the Promised Land and have property to possess.

Moses instituted consent of the governed as the second pillar of self-governance when he had the people choose their rulers. God could have chosen. Moses could have chosen. But Moses ordered the people to choose. These men were to be *wise, discerning, and experienced*. Moses did not

impose the rulers, but he did advise the people what characteristics to seek when choosing who should judge them.

The first attribute, “wise,” comes from the Hebrew word *chokmah* which is generally defined as the ability to do something skillfully ([Exodus 31:6](#)). As such, Moses used this word to refer to those men who could skillfully apply the principles of life with the purpose of implementing mature and godly character ([Proverbs 2:1-10](#)). The second term, “discerning,” refers to understanding, intelligence, or insight, and is often used as a synonym for the word *wise*. The third adjective, “experienced,” is derived from a verb which means “to know.” It could also be translated as “respected.” Hence, the use of this verb in the passive voice here suggests that those leaders were required to have good reputation and to be well known to the community in which they were to serve.

Moses reminds the people that they agreed with this arrangement, saying *the thing you have said to us to do is good*. Therefore, Moses implemented the plan. He did it in a pyramid fashion, appointing *leaders of thousands and of hundreds, of fifties and of tens*.

The function of these leaders was both military and civil, as indicated by the terms used to describe them in verse 15. In fact, the word translated in the NASB as *leaders* primarily refers to military commanders. This military aspect can even be seen in the way Moses divided the list (by thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens). The *officers* at the end of the verse were probably the subordinate officials who served as scribes or secretary to assist the judges and other high rank *officers* ([Numbers 11:16](#)). These were the officers that Joshua later commanded to organize the people for marching ([Jos. 1:10](#)).

Biblical Text:

⁹ “I spoke to you at that time, saying, ‘I am not able to bear *the burden of you alone*. ¹⁰ The Lord your God has multiplied you, and behold, you are this day like the stars of heaven in number. ¹¹ May the Lord, the God of your fathers, increase you a thousand-fold more than you are and bless you, just as He has promised you! ¹² How can I alone bear the load and burden of you and your strife? ¹³ Choose wise and discerning and experienced men from your tribes, and I will appoint them as your heads.’ ¹⁴ You answered me and said, ‘The thing which you have said to do is good.’ ¹⁵ So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and appointed them heads over you, leaders of thousands and of hundreds, of fifties and of tens, and officers for your tribes.