

Conference of the research group “Political Thought in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament and Their Cultural Contexts” (Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft für Theologie; chairs Joachim J. Krause, Stefan Krauter, and Wolfgang Oswald), April 9–10, 2027, Zurich:

Status, Rights, and Duties of the Individual in the Communities of the Biblical World

Every person is part of various collectives and political entities, be it a kingdom, a city, a religious community, or an association. With each of these forms of participation, one can ask: What status does membership confer, and what rights and obligations does it entail? Acknowledging the variety of communities known from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and their cultural contexts and their development over time, and knowing well that categories such as status, rights, and duties were often not exactly defined in antiquity, we nevertheless suggest to explore the heuristic potential of these questions with regard to ancient Israel, ancient Judaism, early Christianity, and their environments. What did it mean for a person to live under the rule of the king of Israel or Judah? What about other, smaller-scale communities (city, patronage system, etc.)? What status did the various population groups have in the Judean-Benjaminite community during the Babylonian and Persian periods? What did it mean, in terms of status, to be a Jew in the Hellenistic and Roman world? What did citizenship mean in a Hellenistic polis or in imperial Rome? And what status, duties, and rights did a person acquire by becoming part of a Christian community?

Important aspects we want to explore are:

- How does one become a member of the aforementioned collectives or political entities? Through birth, descent, accession, conferral, or similar legal acts, confession ...
- Can one lose membership, and if so, how?
- Are there any prerequisites for membership? Status of the father/mother, ethnicity, legal status ...
- What obligations arise from membership? State laws, taxes, internal rules, ethical guidelines ...
- What rights does a member have? Right to speak, right to vote ...
- Are there any conflicts between different memberships?

The changes and developments that can be traced are, for instance, important in the following aspects:

- What statuses could Judeans/Israelites have? What meanings do Hebrew terms, such as *ʾiś* (man?, citizen?), *ʿāḇḇæd* (slave?, dependent?), *rēaʿ* (fellow citizen?, neighbor?, friend?), *ʾæzrāḥ* (citizen?, native?), *gēr* (stranger?, metic?), and *nākrî* (foreigner?), or Greek terms, such as *xenos*, *proselytos*, and *paroikos*, have in different social contexts?
- What requirements were there regarding a person’s origin during the monarchic era, in the Judean community of the Persian period, in Hellenistic Judaism, and in early Christianity? What was the situation in contemporaneous communities in the Greek and Roman worlds?
- To what extent did one have to follow the Torah—as civil law, as cultural heritage and custom, as individual ethics, or not at all? How did analogous legal, social, or moral obligations function in contemporary Greek and Roman communities?
- What rights of participation did a person have in the monarchic era, during the Persian period, in the Hellenistic *polis* or *politeuma*, in the Roman *res publica*, or in the Christian community?

The debate therefore concerns the relationship between the individual and the collective in the diverse social constellations from the Israelite and Judean monarchies to Christianity and Judaism in the imperial period. From a methodological point of view, the topic can be addressed from the perspective of various disciplines and under different questions: Ancient Near Eastern Studies/Ancient History, Legal History, Political Science, Sociology, Biblical Exegesis, Archaeology, and Political Anthropology.

We invite researchers from these or neighboring disciplines to submit proposals with a provisional title and a summary (200 words) before August 31, 2026, to be sent to Joachim Krause (joachim.krause@rub.de), Wolfgang Oswald (wolfgang.oswald@uni-tuebingen.de) or Stefan Krauter (stefan.krauter@uzh.ch). Papers may be given in English or German.

The conference will be held in Zurich, April 9–10, 2027. We will cover travel and accommodation fees for accepted speakers, but please be aware that, for environmental reasons, we are not allowed to cover flight tickets. For those who want to participate from far abroad, there is the possibility to join us on Zoom.