

A Study of Biblical Texts Pertaining to Prophet, Priest, and King: Are these Roles an “Office,” a “Vocation” or a “Function”?

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Introduction

Throughout the Bible, we read of three important types of service in the church in which God has called and anointed certain people to function: prophet, priest, and king. In the Old Testament (OT), i.e., the first covenant of grace which God established with Abraham and his descendants, these three functions were initially filled by people whom God called and equipped to serve in those capacities.¹

To understand the Bible correctly, we must read the OT in the light of Genesis 3:15 and in the light of the New Testament (NT) to which the whole OT points, beginning with 3:15. Biblical scholars call Genesis 3:15 the protoevangelium, literally: the first [proclamation of the] Gospel. Genesis 1:1-3:15 is the necessary prologue that helps us comprehend the reality in which we live and the Bible’s message about how this situation all came to be, what God has done and is doing about it, and what it all means for us, including how God has provided for us to have purpose, significance, and certified hope for our lives, the basis for which has already been established and will be completed and fulfilled all in and through Jesus the Christ.

The prologue informs us that God created a perfect world, but the unique human beings—whom he made in his image (i.e., giving us a limited form of some of his attributes which in him are unlimited, e.g., rulership [cf. 1:26]; the ability to think and reason [cf. 2:7², 16-24; Isaiah 1:18; 55:8-9; Job 38-42]; a limited, albeit genuine, amount of freedom to choose [e.g., 2:16-17])—misused those capabilities and deliberately disobeyed the one law God gave them (which one law actually enhanced their limited but genuine freedom of choice) and in so doing brought corruption, disharmony, and death, which God warned them would occur if they disobeyed.

Yet, God—who, reveals himself in the Bible, to be most holy, just, righteous and all love—was unwilling to obliterate his perfect creation, including the humans who bear his image. Even though the humans ruined his perfect world and brought on such tragic injustice, disharmony, pain and suffering, and a necessary separation between most holy

¹ Not long afterward, as sin and evil further corrupted the covenant as well as the rest of God’s creation, prophets, priests, and kings emerged whom God did not call. God revealed to his people how to tell who were his and who were not, cf., e.g., Deuteronomy 18:15-22. These false and illegitimate prophets, priests, and kings are not the subject of this paper.

² The Hebrew term revealing the newly created man as “a living being” is נֶפֶשׁ (*nephesh*), which typically means soul. In this context of the man’s creation in God’s image, *nephesh* includes man’s thoughts, feelings, and emotions.

and loving God and the humans who bear his image but have corrupted and contaminated themselves with evil, yet God out of his great love was pleased to justly judge and eradicate the evil; therefore, he immediately revealed his plan for redeeming and restoring his beautiful creation.

As recorded in Genesis 3:15, he announced in the most simple and basic manner the first of many incrementally disclosed dimensions of his plan at the times when his people were prepared and needed to know the next step in order to accomplish their covenantal obligations in his plan of redemption. The rest of the OT points to the Redeemer coming from within his covenant people, alluded to in 3:15, and whose redemption will be accomplished as a suffering servant, whom God discloses graphically as he spoke through his prophet, Isaiah (e.g., Isaiah 53).

Later in the old covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34), God revealed he was going to establish a new (καινός³ [*kainos*], i.e., renewed) covenant that would be based on the old covenant but have vital new dimensions which would—in God’s right timing—complete his plan of redeeming and restoring his original creation. One of these new dimensions pertains to each of those three functions—prophet, priest, and king—all three of which in the OT pointed to their fulfillment in the new covenant by the coming Messiah, Christ Jesus, which he has done as explained in the New Testament (NT).

All three of those functions pointed to the coming Messiah, Christ Jesus, who has existed from eternity as the second Person in the Trinity, the triune Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three distinct Beings who share one substance⁴). Our Lord’s name is very significant: Jesus means Savior, and Messiah (Hebrew) > Christ (Greek)—both mean Anointed One—include the three essential functions Christ Jesus fulfilled to accomplish our salvation and the restoration of God’s perfect creation.

Now we turn to several related and very important questions:

1. As we read God’s Word—both the OT that points to Christ and the NT that explains him and what he has done, is doing, and will do, all of which is fulfilling God’s plan to redeem and restore his creation in and through a suffering servant Redeemer—how are we to understand these three functions, prophet, priest, and king pertaining to Christ?

³ This significant Greek word meaning new is in the LXX (the designation for the Septuagint), the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT, ca. 250 B. C.

⁴ For more information on the triune God, including Christ Jesus’ work in creation and in the new creation as revealed in the Bible, see [Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology—With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity \(PowerPoint\)](#). See this sentence outline systematic theology PowerPoint also for further explanation of the other key Biblical concepts in this paper, e.g., covenant, new, image of God, prophet, priest, king, church.

2. How do we understand these terms pertaining to God’s old and new covenant people whom God has called—and those yet to be called—to perform these three functions that point to Christ?
3. What are prophets, priests, and kings to be called as a category? Are they offices? Are they vocations, i.e., callings? Are they ministries? Are they functions?

As do many other theologians and Bible teachers, I prefer to use Biblical terms as much as possible⁵ for constructing a theology that will help people understand God’s Word. Therefore, this preference causes me to question the term, office, which many theological and other scholars use to refer to prophets, priests, and kings. This term actually raises more questions than it answers. To begin with, the word, office, is an English word that, upon closer examination—the focus of the following pages—does not adequately translate the original Hebrew and Greek words (and their accompanying thoughtforms) that it is supposed to render, pertaining to the work of prophets, priests, and kings in the Old and New Testaments.

The course, [*Bible Digest*](#), which is an overview of the whole Bible, highlights what scholars in the field of Biblical literature refer to as major motifs of the Bible, which are key concepts that recur throughout both testaments. One key motif is the unity of word and deed. On virtually every page of God’s Word, we see a clear emphasis on deeds, not just words; doing, not just being; function, not just position, status, or title-holder; service, not just prestige; giving rather than receiving. In regard to the latter, Jesus said, “the first shall be last, and the last first.” (Matthew 19:30; cf. 20:16; Luke 22:24-27) Now, as we try to explain prophet, priest, and king as briefly—but accurately—as possible, do we see an office, a vocation, a function, or all three, or more?

In contemporary theological literature, often these three functions, prophet, priest, and king, are referred to as an office. However, we don’t read in the Bible that God called Jeremiah to the office of prophet; we read God saying, “I appointed you as a prophet...” (1:5), not “I appointed you to the office of prophet.” In any case, throughout God’s Word, the emphasis is on calling and function much more than on status/office. How should we read these terms used in the Biblical literature?

Knowing the difference between how God thinks and acts, contrasted with how people think and often don’t act or act wrongly, I’m reluctant to go along with the contemporary literature’s use of the word “office” when it’s clear throughout the Bible that God calls us

⁵ Sometimes, however, in order to teach God’s Word most effectively, a term not used in the Bible has to be constructed in order to explain as succinctly as possible important Biblical concepts. One of the oldest and clearest examples of such a term is Trinity, which term does not occur per se in the Bible—but all the concepts therein that constitute its meaning are in the Bible—which is very helpful for explaining who God is as he has revealed himself to be in his Word.

to a function, to serve, not to an office per se, which often today primarily implies and refers to one who is to be served and often receives more than gives. Recall texts such as the following.

As he taught, Jesus said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces,³⁹ and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets.⁴⁰ They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.” (Mark 12:38-40)

“So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.” (Matthew 6:2, NASB)

As indicated above, Jesus also told us to not value the pecking order mentality. On the contrary, “the first shall be last, and the last first.” (Matthew 19:30; Mark 9:35; Luke 13:30) This is a very serious message. Leaders in the church—in particular prophets, priests, and kings—must never have this perspective and “look down on” others; on the contrary our Lord is calling us to serve them...and Him in the process.

This caveat also applies to all of us who are believers in and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, thereby sharing in his prophetic, priestly, and kingly functions. See, e.g., these passages in God’s Word:

Speaking of and to the church and led by the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Peter said, “...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9; see also verses 10-12) Thus, we, who God’s Word informs us, are the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:12; 5:30; Colossians 1:24) share in his work, including his kingly and priestly functions: “a royal priesthood.” See also passages such as Revelation 3:21.

Led by the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul wrote that one of the gifts of the Spirit in the church, the body of Christ, is the gift of prophecy. (1 Corinthians 12:28-14:40; Ephesians 4:11-16) Notice that Paul urges members of the church to “desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” (1 Corinthians 14:1,30 [“be eager to prophesy”]) Thus, in addition to those Christians to whom the Holy Spirit has given the gift of prophecy, other church members can ask the Holy Spirit for that gift. Notice also in these passages how the prophetic function is to be used, e.g., “the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation...the one who prophesies builds up the church.”

(14:3,4) Also, "...prophesy...so that all may learn and be encouraged." (14:31)
These three functions are to serve others and ultimately God.

Very significantly, notice how the contrary self-focus of many religious people, e.g., in the texts above quoting Jesus (Mark 12:38-40 and Matthew 6:2) contrast with Jesus himself, who is the perfect fulfillment of all three of these functions: prophet, priest, and king. Jesus revealed himself as the Son of Man who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45) How can we use the word office with its English denotations—and especially with its connotations contributing more confusion—to adequately explain who Jesus is, what he is like, what he did, and what he is going to do? And what he is calling us to do as we follow him?

The following list of Biblical texts—where the English word, "office," is used to translate specific Hebrew and Greek words—contains the Hebrew and Greek word meanings. Before we decide whether the English word, "office," should be used to translate those words, it is necessary to be clear on the definition of "office" in English in order to determine whether it means what the Hebrew and Greek words mean, so as to render an accurate translation and to be able to specify accurate theological categories. This principle in translation should be used when choosing the right word in any language to convey the meaning of the original Biblical word. The Hebrew and Greek definitions will be included in the exegesis of the related Biblical texts that follows.

We must also keep in mind that redefining terms is one of the many logical fallacies that are so widespread and in constant use today.⁶ Thus in the light of all the preceding, we look at the standard definition of the word, office, in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*:

Office, noun

- 1 **a:** a special duty, charge, or position conferred by an exercise of governmental authority and for a public purpose : a position of authority to exercise a public function and to receive whatever emoluments may belong to it

 b: a position of responsibility or some degree of executive authority
- 2 a prescribed form or service of worship.
 specifically, Office: DIVINE OFFICE
- 3 a religious or social ceremonial observance: **RITE**
- 4 **a:** something that one ought to do or must do: an assigned or assumed duty, task, or role

⁶ See Edward D. Seely, [Logic: A Primer on Common Logical Fallacies](#). (Accessed 12/8/2024)

- b:** the proper or customary action of something: **FUNCTION**
 - c:** something done for another: **SERVICE**
- 5 a place where a particular kind of business is transacted or a service is supplied: such as
 - a:** a place in which the functions of a public [officer](#) are performed
 - b:** the directing headquarters of an enterprise or organization
 - c:** the place in which a professional person conducts business
 - 6 **offices plural, chiefly British:** the apartments, attached buildings, or outhouses in which the activities attached to the service of a house are carried on
 - 7 **a:** a major administrative unit in some governments
British Foreign Office
 - b:** a subdivision of some government departments⁷

This author’s conclusion: Meanings 1-4 contain aspects of some of the Hebrew and Greek words translated “office.” However, they all lack the key dimension of the Biblical words: vocation—calling by God—and faithful functioning. Meaning 4b comes close to the latter (faithful functioning), but it lacks the most important dimension, the vertical, i.e., indicating the Biblical standard for determining what is faithful functioning: a criterion reference, specifically God.

Since the standard indicated in 4b is custom, that indicates a norm reference, which—when pertaining to Biblical vocation—is unbiblical, contrary to the revelation that the origin of these three vocations is from God, not from a human custom. Allowing a norm reference is also dangerous: It is what is causing huge disharmony, disruption, and disunity in the church (contrary to Jesus’ fervent prayer for the unity of the church, as recorded in John 17), most notably in the pro-LGBTQ+ activism that is trying to redefine and reinterpret Biblical texts, with a result that is contrary to God’s Word,⁸ and divert the mission of the church. This endeavor—as anything in opposition to the inspired (θεόπνευστος [*theopneustos*, literally: God-breathed, 2 Timothy 3:16]) Word of God—is a demonically driven development from Satan that can neither be affirmed, permitted, nor facilitated in the church, the body of Christ (for example, 1 Corinthians 12:27).

Also very importantly, we cannot use terms that facilitate—much less promote—a norm reference standard, absent the criterion reference standard, when the current postmodern philosophy so prominent today is so influential, thereby leaving secular people even more reinforced in their postmodern worldview that rejects any criterion, especially the Biblical criterion. Such promotion of a norm reference would also serve to weaken and retard the sanctification process in Christian’s lives, individually and corporately in the church. It would be counterproductive to the educational and other ministries of the body of Christ.

⁷ “Office,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/office> (Accessed 12/1/2024)

⁸ Edward D. Seely, “[What Is God’s Will Concerning Homosexuality? Help for Church Leaders and Others to Speak the Truth in Love](#)” (First and Second Editions; Accessed 12/8/2024) See especially Chapter One.

Most importantly, all three terms in the OT point to Christ Jesus and are fulfilled by Him as revealed in the NT. Since believers in and followers of Christ Jesus also share in these three functions, prophet (Matthew 5:10-16; Luke 6:22-23), priest (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9), and king (Luke 22:29-30; 1 Peter 2:9), it is crucial we have a clear understanding of what they mean—and do not mean.

Conclusion: Generally, I prefer referring to the roles of prophet, priest, and king as functions and/or vocations. If the word “office” seems preferable in a relatively few passages, the emphasis should be that it is a calling to serve God and His people, a vocation for the accomplishment of God’s immediate and future purpose, leading to the culmination of His plan of redemption and the restoration of His creation in and through Jesus Christ; it is for function not status; for serving, not being served.⁹ The following is a rationale for this conclusion.

1. Prophet

The English word, “office,” is not used in the Bible to refer to a prophet. As indicated above, we don’t read in the Bible that God called Jeremiah to the office of prophet; we do read God saying, “I appointed you as a prophet...” (1:5), not “I appointed you to the office of prophet.”

2. Priest

a. English word, “office,” is used in one or more English translations of the Old Testament in some passages pertaining to priests, but the English term is not specifically or necessarily present in the Hebrew:

- 1) Exodus 28:1 (Hebrew: “...for their serving as a priest for Me [לְכַהֲנוֹ-לִי] {lĕkahnô-lî} < כָּהֵן {kāhan, to officiate as priest}]....”) KJV: “that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office”
- 2) Exodus 28:3 (Hebrew: “...for his serving as a priest for Me.”) KJV: “that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office”
- 3) Exodus 28:4 (Hebrew: “...for their serving as a priest for Me.”) KJV: “that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office”
- 4) Exodus 28:41 (Hebrew: “...and they must serve as priests for Me....”) KJV: “that they may minister unto me in the priest’s office”
- 5) Exodus 29:1 (Hebrew: “...serve as a priest for Me....”) KJV: “to minister unto me in the priest’s office”

⁹ See the comment below on Luke 1:9.

- 6) Exodus 29:44 (Hebrew: "...to serve as a priest for Me.") KJV: "to minister to me in the priest's office"
- 7) Exodus 30:30 (Hebrew: "...to serve as a priest for Me.") KJV: "that *they* may minister unto me in the priest's office"
- 8) Exodus 31:10 (Hebrew: "...to serve as a priest") KJV: "to minister in the priest's office"
- 9) Exodus 35:19 (Hebrew: "...to serve as a priest for Me....") KJV: "to minister in the priest's office"
- 10) Exodus 39:41 (Hebrew: "...for their serving as a priest") KJV: "to minister in the priest's office"
- 11) Exodus 40:13 (Hebrew: "...and he must serve as a priest for Me") KJV: "that he may minister unto me in the priest's office"
- 12) Leviticus 7:35 (Hebrew: "...to serve as priests to Yahweh.") KJV: "to minister unto the LORD in the priest's office"
- 13) Leviticus 16:32 (Hebrew: "...the priest...to serve as priest...") Leviticus 7:35 (Hebrew: "...to serve as priests to Yahweh.") KJV: "to minister in the priest's office"
- 14) Numbers 3:3 (Hebrew: "for serving as priests [לְכַהֵן] {*lěkahēn*} < *kāhan*") KJV: "to minister in the priest's office"
- 15) Numbers 3:4 (Hebrew: "then they served as priests") KJV: "ministered in the priest's office"
- 16) Numbers 3:10 (Hebrew: "they will attend to their priestly duties") KJV: "they shall wait on their priest's office"
- 17) Numbers 4:16 (Hebrew: "and the duties of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest") KJV: "to the office of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest"
- 18) Deuteronomy 10:6 (Hebrew: "there he ministered as a priest") KJV: "there... Eleazar his son ministered in the priest's office in his stead."
- 19) Deuteronomy 17:9 (Hebrew: "and you must go to the priests [who are] the Levites and to the judge who will be in those days") NASB: "So you shall come to the Levitical priest or the judge who is *in office* in those days...." (The words in italics have been supplied by the NASB; they are not in the Hebrew text.)
- 20) Deuteronomy 19:17 (Hebrew: "then the two men who have the lawsuit must stand before Yahweh before the priests and the judges who are in those days") NASB:

- “then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be *in office* in those days.”
- 21) Deuteronomy 26:3 (Hebrew: “and you will go to the priest who is in those days...”) NASB: “You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time....”
- 22) 1 Samuel 2:36 (Hebrew: “...assign me please to one of the priests...”) KJV: “...Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests’ offices,....”
- 23) 1 Chronicles 6:10 (Hebrew: כֹּהֵן [kīhēn, “he officiated as priest”] < כַּהֵן [kāhan, to officiate as priest]) KJV: “he *it is* that executed the priest’s office”; NIV, ESV: “he who served as priest”
- 24) 1 Chronicles 24:2 (Hebrew: “...so Eleazar and Ithamar became [כֹּהֲנֵי] {waykahnû, priests} < כַּהֵן {kāhan, to officiate as a priest}} priests.”) KJV: “executed the priest’s office;” NASB: served as priests NIV: “served as the priests;” NRSV, ESV: “became the priests”
- 25) 1 Chronicles 24:3 (Hebrew: “...for their duties [לִפְקֻדָּתָם] {lipqdātām < פְּקֻדָּה [p^equddāh], essentially means intervention, division, duty}} in their service”) KJV: “executed the priest’s office.”
- 26) 2 Chronicles. 11:14 (Hebrew: “...from officiating [מִכַּהֵן] {mikkahēn < kāhan}}] as a priest to Yahweh”) KJV: “from executing the priest’s office;” NASB: “from serving as priests;” NIV: “rejected them as priests;” ESV: “cast them out from serving as priests;” NRSV: “prevented them from serving as priests”
- 27) 2 Chronicles 31:15 (Hebrew: “in the cities of the priests with faithfulness [בְּאֵמֻנָה] {be’ēmūnāh < אֵמֻנָה {’ēmūnāh, steadiness, faithfulness, truth}}] to give”) KJV: “in their set office;” NASB: “to distribute faithfully;” NIV: “assisted him faithfully;” ESV, NRSV: “faithfully assisting him”
- 28) 2 Chronicles 31:18 (Hebrew: “in their faithfulness [בְּאֵמֻנָתָם] {be’ēmūāntām < ’ēmūnāh, steadiness, faithfulness, truth}}] they consecrated themselves unto holiness”) KJV: “in their set office they sanctified themselves in holiness;” NASB: “they consecrated themselves faithfully in holiness;” NIV: “they were faithful in consecrating themselves;” ESV; NRSV: “they were faithful in keeping themselves holy”
- 29) Nehemiah 13:29 (Hebrew: “...the defilement of the priesthood [כְּהֻנָּה] {kehunnāh, priesthood}; *Logos Bible Study* WORDsearch definition: ‘...this noun refers to the office of a priest and the duties of that office. Associated with this concept are the

applicable qualifications, privileges, responsibility and accountability.¹⁰] and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites”) KJV, NASB: “...they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites.” NIV: “...they defiled the priestly office and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites.” NRSV: “...they have defiled the priesthood, the covenant of the priests and the Levites.” ESV: “...they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.”

30) In many texts, the English word, “office,” is used but in reference to another vocation or function than prophet, priest, or king. For example:

- a) Judges 5:14 (Hebrew: “the ones extending the staff of a scribe”)
- b) Exodus 1:16 (Hebrew: “...when you’re serving as a midwife...”)
- c) 1 Chronicles 6:32 (Pertaining to those in charge of the service of song in the temple of Yahweh [v. 31], Hebrew: “performed their duties” < עָבְדוּהָ [‘*āvōdhāh*, work, service, forced labor]) NIV: “performed their duties;” ESV: “performed their service”)
- d) 1 Chronicles 9:22 (“those chosen to be gatekeepers at the thresholds...assigned to their positions of trust” [מִנְיָן] {*’lmûnāh*}, steadiness, faithfulness, truth])
- e) 1 Chronicles 9:26 (the same gatekeepers [NIV; ESV; NRSV], porters [KJV] as in 9:22, *’lmûnāh*)
- f) 1 Chronicles 9:31 (Hebrew: “...Mattithiah...with faithfulness [*’lmûnāh*])
- g) 1 Chronicles 23:28 (Hebrew: “...their duty [מַעֲמָדָם] {*ma ‘āmādām*} < מַעֲמָד {*ma ‘āmād*}, service, position, duty] to the side of the sons of Aaron for the service of the temple of Yahweh concerning the courtyards and concerning the chambers and concerning the purification of all the holy things and the work of the service of the temple of God”) KJV; NASB: “their office”; NIV; ESV; NRSV: “their duty”
- h) Nehemiah 13:13 (Hebrew: “...[KJV: **treasurers** {implied in the Hebrew; supplied in English translation}]...and [it was {implied in the Hebrew; supplied in English translation}] **upon them** [עָלֵיהֶם] {*wa ‘ālêhem*, < עַל ‘*al*, upon] **to divide to their brothers.**” KJV: “treasurers...and **their office** was to distribute unto their brethren.” NASB: **task**; ESV; NRSV: **duty**; NIV: **they were made responsible for.**

¹⁰ Thoralf Gilbrant, “כֹּהֵנִים,” *The Old Testament Hebrew-English Dictionary*, The Complete Biblical Library (WORDsearch, 1998).

- i) Psalm 109:8 (Hebrew: “...the wicked...may his days be few his office or duty [תִּקְדָּתוֹ {*pēqdātô*} < הִקְדָּהוּ {*p^equddāh*}, essentially means intervention, division, duty; also translated office, officers] may another take”) KJV; NASB: “let another take his office; ESV: “may another take his office;” NIV: “may another take his place of leadership.” Significantly for this discussion, the receiver of this imprecation is not identified; we do not know that it was a prophet, priest, or another king.

Even more significantly, the Holy Spirit led the Apostle Peter to reveal that David’s imprecation in this text is an example of the hermeneutical principle called prophetic foreshortening—more colloquially called “near and far fulfillment—a reference to a current matter but also a related matter much farther into the future. We read in the NT that the related matter in this prophecy was fulfilled in the case of Judas. (Acts 1:16-20)

David does not identify the person in his imprecation. Therefore, hermeneutical justification is lacking for using this text as support for applying the word, “office,” to prophet, priest, or king.

- j) Isaiah 22:19 (Hebrew: “I will shove you from your office [מִמַּצְבֵּיךָ {*mimmaṣṣābekā*} < מַצְבֵּי *matstsāv*, place, position, garrison}] and from your position will destroy you”) The reference is to Shebna (22:15), “who is in charge of the royal household” (NASB), also translated “master of the household” (NRSV; cf. ESV) and “who is in charge of the palace” (NIV), not to a prophet, priest, or king.
- k) Ezekiel 44:13 (Hebrew: “they [the unfaithful Levites who went astray far from God and wandered after their idols {44:10}] will not approach Me to serve [לְכַהֵן {*lēkahēn*} < כָּהֵן {*kāhan*, to officiate as a priest}] as a priest to Me and to approach all my holy things to the most holy place....”) KJV: “to do the office of a priest unto me...;” NASB: “to serve as a priest to Me...;” NIV: “to serve me as priests....” Cf. ESV; NRSV.
- l) In other texts, the English word, “office,” is used but in reference to an office in another country, e.g., the Egyptian office (Hebrew: כֶּן *kēn*) of cupbearer to Pharaoh. (Genesis 40:13) Those references are not included in this paper.
- b. English word, “office,” is used pertaining to the priesthood; the Hebrew is כְּהֻנָּה {*k^ehunnāh*, priesthood).

Used fourteen times in the Bible with the meaning “priesthood,” this noun refers to the office of a priest and the duties of that office. Associated with

this concept are the applicable qualifications, privileges, responsibilities and accountability.

K^ehunnāh refers to the priesthood of Aaron and his male descendants. The priesthood was their perpetual inheritance (Exo. 29:9; 40:15; Num. 25:13), as a gift from the LORD (Num. 18:7). It refers to the duties of their ministry as priests (Num. 3:10). The office had privileges coveted by others (Num. 16:10; 1 Sam. 2:36).¹¹

- 1) Exodus 40:15 (Hebrew: “...and they must serve as priests for Me and their anointing must be for a priesthood (*K^ehunnāh*) lasting to [all] generations”) KJV: “minister unto me in the priest’s office”
 - 2) Numbers 18:7 (Hebrew: “you and your sons with you will attend to your priesthood [*K^ehunnāh*] for all the matters of the altar and to the inside of the curtain and you will serve in the service I will give your priesthood [*K^ehunnāh*] [as] a gift.”) KJV: “thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest’s office for every thing of the altar, and within the veil; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest’s office *unto you* as a service of gift”
- c. The English word, “office,” is used in one or more English translations of several texts in the New Testament, where it is not present in the Greek:
- 1) Luke 1:8 (Greek: “...in fulfilling his priestly service [ἱερατεύειν {*hierateuein* < ἱερατεύω {*hierateuō*, to perform the service of a priest}]...”) KJV: “while he executed the priest’s office;” NASB: “while he was performing his priestly service;” NIV: “was on duty and he was serving as priest;” ESV: “while he was serving as priest;” NRSV: “when he was serving as priest”
 - 2) Luke 1:9 (Greek: “according to the custom of the priestly service [ἱερατείας {*hierateias*} < ἱερατεία {*hierateia*, priesthood, priestly office}]) KJV: “According to the custom of the priest’s office;” NASB: “according to the custom of the priestly office;” NIV; ESV; NRSV: “according to the custom of the priesthood”

A quizzical note in the Logos word study section states, “This word carries a strong emphasis on the activity of the priest. Thus, in referring to the “priestly office” it denotes the actual service and performance of the functions of the priest.¹² Nevertheless, it does emphasize the dimension of service.

¹¹ Thoralf Gilbrant, “כֹּהֵנִי,” *The Old Testament Hebrew-English Dictionary*, The Complete Biblical Library (WORDsearch, 1998).

¹² Thoralf Gilbrant, “ἱερατεία,” *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary*, The Complete Biblical Library (WORDsearch, 1991).

- 3) Hebrews 7:5 (Greek: “And indeed the ones from among the sons of Levi, receiving the priesthood [ἱερατεῖαν {*hierateian*, priesthood} < ἱερατεία {*hierateia*, priesthood, priestly office}], have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law,...”)

A Greek lexicon clarifies the meaning of *hierateia*. “This word carries a strong emphasis on the activity of the priest. Thus, in referring to the ‘priestly office’ it denotes the actual service and performance of the functions of the priest. See Luke 1:9; Hebrews 7:5.”¹³

Thus, even when the word, “office,” is used, it connotes active service, not simply status. Here we have an important elucidation and application of the major motif or theme of the unity of word and deed (*op cit. Bible Digest Notebook*) that occurs throughout the Bible: behavior belongs with belief. “Belief” without corresponding behavior is hypocrisy and is strongly condemned in the Bible (cf., e.g., Matthew 23; James 2:26).

Hebrews 7:5 KJV: “And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment....” NASB: “And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest’s office have commandment in the Law....” NIV: “Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to....” ESV: “And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law....” NRSV: “And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law....”

- 4) Hebrews 7:20 (Greek: “And by how much not apart from swearing of an oath,”) KJV: “And inasmuch as not without an oath *he was made priest:*” NASB: “And inasmuch as *it was* not without an oath” NIV: “And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath,” ESV: “And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath;” NRSV: “This was confirmed with an oath; for others who became priests took their office without an oath,....”
- 5) Hebrews 7:23 (Greek, R.C.H. Lenski translation: “And they are more [in number], having become priests in consequence of being prevented by death from continuing to remain;” KJV: “And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death.” NASB: “The *former* priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing,” NIV: “Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office;” ESV: “The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office;” NRSV: “Furthermore, the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office;”

¹³ Thoralf Gilbrant, “ἱερατεία,” *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary*, The Complete Biblical Library (WORDsearch, 1991).

- 6) In some texts, the English word, “office,” is used but in reference to another vocation, function than prophet, priest, or king. For example:
- a) Acts 1:20 (in the most pertinent part of this verse for the present subject Peter quotes Psalm 109:8b, Greek: “...and let another take his office” [ἐπισκοπή {*episkopē*, noun: visitation, as in LXX |Greek translation| of Psalm 109:8 |108:8 in the LXX|; inspection; position or office as an overseer or bishop}] KJV: “his bishoprick let another take;” NASB: “LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE;” NIV: “May another take his place of leadership;” ESV: “Let another take his office;” NRSV: “Let another take his position of overseer.”)
 - b) Romans 11:13 (Greek: “...I am the apostle of [the] Gentiles, I glorify my service [δουκονία {*diakonia*, service, ministry}] KJV: “...in as much as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office”; NASB: “Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry;” NIV: “Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry;” ESV: “Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry;” NRSV: “Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry”)
 - c) Romans 12:4 (Greek: “For even as we have in the one body many members but not all members have the same function [πρᾶξις {*praxin*} < πρᾶξις {*praxis*, function, activity, act, deed}. Of much significance in this text, Paul places *praxin* as the last word, a way the Greek indicates emphasis.];”) KJV: “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office;” NASB: “For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function;” NIV: “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function;” ESV: “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function;” NRSV: “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function”)
 - d) 1 Timothy 3:1 (Greek: “Faithful [is] the word: if anyone aspires to overseership [ἐπισκοπή {*episkopē*, noun: inspection; oversight; visitation; overseership; position or office as an overseer or bishop; interposition, as in Luke 19:44}¹⁴], he is desirous of a work of good.” KJV: “This *is* a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.” NASB: “It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*.” NIV: “Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.” ESV: “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.” NRSV: “The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task.”)

¹⁴ *The Analytical Greek Lexicon: An Alphabetical Arrangement of Every Occurring Inflexion of Every Word Contained in the Greek New Testament Scriptures* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons Limited, Undated), p. 160.

- e) 1 Timothy 3:10 (Greek: “And these also let them be proved first, then let them serve [διακονείωσαν, {*diakoneitōsan*} < διακονέω {*diakoneō*, verb: serve, wait upon tables, minister, help, serve as deacon}], being without reproach.” KJV: “And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being *found* blameless.” NASB: “These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.” NIV: “They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.” ESV: “And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.” NRSV: “And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons.”
- f) 1 Timothy 3:12,13 (Greek: “Let deacons [διάκονοι {*diakonoi*} < διάκονος {*diakonos*, noun: servant, waiter, deacon}] be husbands of one wife, presiding well over children and their own homes. ¹³For the ones having served [διακονήσαντες {*diakonēsantes*, participle, having served}] well....” KJV: “Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. ¹³For they that have used the office [as seen above, “office” does not occur in the Greek] of a deacon well....” NASB: “Deacons must be husbands of *only* one wife, *and* good managers of *their* children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons....” NIV: “A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. ¹³Those who have served well gain....” ESV: “Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³For those who serve well as deacons....” NRSV: “Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well; ¹³for those who serve well as deacons....”

3. King

- a. The English word, office, does not occur together with the word, king, in the Bible. In one text, 2 Chronicles 24:11, the Hebrew reads: “...brought the box to the officers [פְּקִידֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ (*p^equddāh*, officers, intervention, division, duty)] of the king....” KJV: office; NASB: officer; NIV: officials; ESV, NRSV: officers) Furthermore, here *p^equddāh* is not referring to the king but to others in his service.
- b. The solely¹⁵ human kings, while holding an authoritative position, were still to be servant leaders. (Cf., e.g., 1 Samuel 12:14) The Hebrew verb, מָלַךְ (*mālakh*), means to reign, and the most common form of the verb (Qal) denotes functioning as a monarch. Most importantly, the king reigns by divine appointment and serves God, whether or not he acknowledges that fact. The king functions under and is accountable to God, who is the ultimate King of kings (1 Timothy 6:15). Essentially, the ancestral line of Israel’s main king, David, is the human lineage of the Messiah, Jesus (cf., e.g., Luke 1:32), who

¹⁵ The word solely here is used to distinguish between the kingship of Jesus (who is 100% human as well as being 100% divine) and human kings whom the Bible presents as only—i.e., solely—human.

redeemed and is restoring God's original creation. The king is to be a servant leader. He serves God.

- c. In fact, Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14; 19:16), under whose feet everything else in all creation exists (Ephesians 1:22; 1 Corinthians 15:27-28), revealed himself to be one who came to serve, not to be served (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45). Notice also that Jesus said "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36) His kingdom is his active rule in the hearts and minds of all of us who believe in and follow him. Scripture describes his kingship not as a static office but as a relationship with his people, whom he is actively and continually blessing, e.g., by bringing us into an eternal relationship with God, healing those who are ill, exorcising demonic beings, comforting those who mourn, giving us the peace that transcends understanding, among much else. (Cf., e.g., Matthew 4:23; 11:4-6) Part of the "much else" is yet to come. Jesus' kingdom is here (Luke 17:21) but not yet in its fullest; that will occur when he returns in his second coming. "Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power." (1 Corinthians 15:24)

For the above reasons, the current English word, office, with its contemporary denotations and connotations, does not adequately convey what God's Word is teaching about these three key aspects of Christ's work, and derivatively our work as the body of Christ. "Office" is not, therefore, the best word to explain these Biblical truths, and it is surely at least one of the reasons why the word does not occur in the original OT Hebrew and NT Greek in the explanation of the prophets, priests, and kings whom God called, the work of whom pointed to Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, the human-divine prophet, priest, and king, the suffering servant who redeemed and who will restore his creation in the parousia, Jesus' second coming. (Revelation 21:1ff.; John 1:1-3a; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16ff.; Ephesians 1:10; Hebrews 1:2,8)

What word(s) can we better use than "office"? For the above reasons, I prefer the English word function for communicating the Biblical meaning of prophet, priest, and king. At the same time, we can also employ related functional—non status—words such as ministry and service (Greek in, e.g., Matthew 28:20: διακονέω [*diakoneō*, serve, minister, help]). The term, vocation, is a key term, and can be used with these three functions, as long as the basic meaning of the term, calling (< Latin, *vocāre*, to call), is clearly referring to God's calling, gifting and equipping of us for service and not for status.