



PROPHET, PRIEST,
and KING



The Roles of Christ in the Bible
and Our Roles Today

RICHARD P. BELCHER JR.

“The biblical offices of prophet, priest, and king are time-tested categories to make sense of Christ’s person and work. I am therefore grateful for this new volume by Richard Belcher that walks the reader through each of these three anointed offices in the Old Testament, and provides some ways that they illumine the work of Christ as the One who was anointed with the Holy Spirit beyond measure. This is a fine introduction not only to prophet, priest, and king in the Old Testament, but also to the person and work of Christ in the New.”

—**Brandon D. Crowe**, Associate Professor of New Testament, Westminster Theological Seminary

“Although Reformed theologians have long recognized the importance of the three offices of Christ, there have been few sustained works on this essential topic in the last few generations. Thankfully, Dick Belcher has stepped forward to fill this gap in biblical scholarship. With wisdom, clarity, and grace, Belcher guides the reader to a richer and fuller vision of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King.”

—**Michael J. Kruger**, President and Samuel C. Patterson Professor of New Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina

“It is common today for Christians to speak of Christ as the fulfillment of all that the Scriptures teach. Richard Belcher has shown how this is true by focusing on the developments of prophetic, priestly, and royal themes in the Bible. As delightful as this is, he has gone further. Rather than simply speaking of Christ as the fulfillment of these themes, he has also drawn out the practical implications of prophetic, priestly, and royal service for all who follow Christ. Belcher’s work points us all toward the importance of keeping the centrality of Christ in view as we address the manifold challenges that Christians face as we long for his return in glory.”

—**Richard L. Pratt Jr.**, President, Third Millennium Ministries

“The Reformation viewed the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king (*munus triplex*) as fundamentally important to the understanding of Christ’s work in redemption, and Dr. Belcher’s impressive treatment of these offices in their biblical-theological setting is essential reading in understanding their comprehensive nature. This book deftly combines biblical and pastoral insight that is most welcome in furthering our understanding of Scripture and the person and work of Christ. Enthusiastically recommended.”

—**Derek W. H. Thomas**, Senior Minister, First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, South Carolina; Robert Strong Professor of Systematic and Pastoral Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Atlanta, Georgia

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AND OUR ROLES TODAY

RICHARD P. BELCHER JR.



P U B L I S H I N G

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To Michael Dixon and Chris Sewell
Sons-in-law
Brothers in Christ
Fellow Participants in Ministry

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FOREWORD

IN *PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING: A Biblical Theology of the Offices of Christ*, Richard “Dick” Belcher takes his readers on a super-elevated rail through a well-worn track. The theme of prophet, priest, and king has been treated in numerous systematic theologies. But now all the freshness of new insights from a biblical-theological approach stimulates the reader’s mind and soul. Rather than rehearsing the all-important work of systematic theologians on these significant topics, Belcher begins at the beginning of scriptural testimony regarding the three offices, traces their development through various old covenant phases, and climaxes with new covenant consummations.

As you travel the track of ever-enriching developments of prophet, priest, and king from biblical beginnings through prophets and psalms into new covenant climaxes, expect to learn deepening truths all along the way. Belcher focuses on the correct texts, illuminates them with insightful analyses, and draws out correct conclusions. The three offices are united in Adam and Abraham. But sin disrupts, and the offices remain divided in Israel, though their functions are sometimes shared.

The prediction of a coming Prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15, 18) anticipates both the plurality of prophets and the singularity of One who is uniquely like Moses. The role of these prophets in occasionally anointing kings indicates that the ruler must govern according to God’s Word. The ministry of prayer must not be overlooked. Jesus Christ proved himself to be the Prophet like Moses by his display of might in word, prayer, suffering, and deed. The

ongoing role of the prophet's function in the church today comes to expression principally in the elder who preaches the Word.

Be prepared to learn many things about the old covenant priest, his anointing, his clothing, and his often-overlooked role as teacher of the Word. Jesus was not identified as Priest while on earth, since he was of the order of Melchizedek. Yet his purifying action of cleansing the temple disclosed his identity as High Priest over God's house.

In treating the topic of kingship, Belcher displays full awareness of the latest research in the structure of the Psalter. The phrases concluding Book 4 in Psalm 106 find their corresponding response in the opening phrases of Book 5 in Psalm 107. The question of a "royal priesthood" leads Belcher to a sane evaluation of the question whether David himself functions as priest as well as king in the line of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4). The Christology of Colossians 1:15 that describes Jesus Christ as the "firstborn" of all creation finds its proper framework for interpretation in Psalm 89:27, which designates David as the "firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth."

In a day in which narrow specialization torments biblical research, Belcher proves himself capable of dealing with both the technical subtleties and the broader sweeps of biblical theology. Widely read in both old covenant and new covenant literature, Belcher never loses his reader in the morass of unending interactions among contemporary scholars. Instead, he stays close to the heart of the subject, enlightening his reader all along the way. As a consequence, he has made a significant contribution to the church's understanding of the breadth and length and depth and height of Scripture's teaching on the important subjects of prophet, priest, and king.

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I BECAME INTERESTED in the topic *Prophet, Priest, and King* when I began to think through how the Psalms relate to Christ. Considering his various roles opened up avenues for reflecting on the many ways in which the Psalms and other Old Testament passages could connect to Christ. It became apparent that no one book covered all three roles in their Old Testament context and in their relationship to Christ. This book will have a chapter on each role in the Old Testament and a chapter on how Christ fulfills each role in the New Testament. There is also a chapter on the implications of these roles for the church. Study questions at the end of each chapter facilitate discussion for the use of this book in Bible studies.

Many people have assisted and encouraged me in this book's completion. I would like to thank Dr. Robert Peterson for his interest in this topic and his help in talking through the project. I am grateful to P&R Publishing for its assistance in publishing. I am very thankful to Dr. Ligon Duncan, the Chancellor of Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS), and to the board of RTS for their commitment to scholarship and for the sabbatical granted to me to finish this book. I am blessed to teach at the Charlotte campus, and I thank Dr. Michael J. Kruger for his continuing encouragement to pursue this topic and to complete this book.

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This book is dedicated to Michael Dixon and Chris Sewell. It is a blessing to have two sons-in-law who love the Lord, but it is also a great joy that both of them are ordained ministers of the gospel.

Richard P. Belcher Jr.
August 2015

ABBREVIATIONS

ANE	Ancient Near East
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
NASB	New American Standard Bible
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., <i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997)
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
<i>TWOT</i>	R. Laird Harris, et al., <i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980)
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UT	Urim and Thummim
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WLC	Westminster Larger Catechism
WSC	Westminster Shorter Catechism
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

I

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING



MANY CHRISTIANS TEND to think of Christ's work as one-dimensional. Sometimes only the priestly role is emphasized, or the kingship of Christ in his exaltation. Many times Christ's prophetic role is neglected, or his role as King in his humiliation. This can lead to a one-sided view of Christ and his work. A well-rounded view not only understands his work in light of being Prophet, Priest, and King, but also recognizes that these offices need to be seen in light of both his humiliation and his exaltation. Christians also tend to recognize the priestly role of believers, but lack teaching on the significance of the prophet and king roles for the corporate church, her leaders, and individual believers. This book will address the work of Christ in light of the roles of Prophet, Priest, and King and will then draw out implications for the church.

Historically, the Reformed faith has emphasized the roles of Prophet, Priest, and King to discuss the work of Christ. Louis Berkhof notes that although the early church fathers speak of the different offices of Christ, Calvin first recognized the impor-

tance of distinguishing them and called attention to them in separate sections of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (book 2, chapter 15).¹ Others have done the same.² The Heidelberg Catechism also uses these roles to speak of the life of the Christian (Questions 31–32). A redemptive-historical approach—emphasizing Christ’s fulfillment of the Old Testament—naturally lends itself to connecting with the roles, not just for Christ but also for his body, the church. This approach also has implications for preaching Christ from the Old Testament.

The roles of prophet, priest, and king are defined and developed as offices within the nation of Israel. But these roles are mentioned before Israel’s establishment. In fact, Abraham himself is presented as fulfilling them. A brief review of the evidence will show the importance of these roles before Sinai, will lead to a partial understanding of their meaning, and will raise the question of their origin.

Prophet, Priest, and King before Israel

Abraham is called a prophet in Genesis 20, which is the first time that the word for *prophet* (*navi*, נביא) is used in Scripture. Abraham and Sarah have gone down to Gerar, and for the second time Abraham lies about his relationship to Sarah to protect his own life (see also ch. 12). King Abimelech takes Sarah into his own household, but before he can touch her, God appears to

1. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 356–57. One early church father who made use of these categories is Eusebius. “The Church History,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 1:86. The threefold office was important for Calvin as a way for faith to find a firm basis for salvation and thus to rest in Christ. David J. Englesma, *The Reformed Faith of John Calvin* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2009), 169–70. Berkhof comments that modern theology is averse to the offices because it is so in love with Christ as the ideal man, the loving helper, and the elder brother. Modern theology seems to fear that an emphasis on Christ as Mediator would dehumanize him.

2. Systematic theologies that use *Prophet, Priest, and King* to discuss the work of Christ include Robert Dabney, Charles Hodge, Herman Hoeksema, James Boice, Wayne

him in a dream. God warns him to return Sarah to Abraham or else face death for himself and his household, specifically telling him: “Now then, return the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live” (20:7).

Several things in Abraham’s life support this designation of prophet. In Genesis 12 he received a call from God, promising blessing to his family and all the families of the earth. In chapter 15 the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision. The phrase “the word of the Lord came to” is standard for describing prophetic revelation (Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Mic. 1:1), and God spoke to prophets regularly in visions (Num. 12:6; Obad. 1; Nah. 1:1; and Hab. 1:1; Amos 1:1 uses the verb “to see”). God’s interaction with Abraham in Genesis 18 portrays Abraham as an intercessory prophet as he pleads for God to withhold judgment because of the number of righteous within the city. God’s deliberation concerning whether to include Abraham reminds one of the divine council (Job 1:6; Ps. 89:7) and being brought into the prophetic circle (1 Kings 22:14–28; Amos 3:7).³ The aspect of prayer in connection with being a prophet is specifically mentioned in Genesis 20. In fact, Abraham’s intercession can save Abimelech because Abraham is a prophet, which assumes a close relationship with God (as demonstrated in ch. 18). Prayer will become a part of the prophet’s role later in Scripture through Moses (Ex. 8; Num. 12; Deut. 32), Samuel (1 Sam. 12:23), and Jeremiah (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11–12; 18:18–20). The role of the prophet is closely connected with the word of God and prayer.

Grudem, John Frame, and Michael Horton. Significant Puritans who use *Prophet, Priest, and King* include John Owen, John Flavel, Thomas Boston, and Thomas Goodwin. See also Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993); Robert Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet: A Trinitarian Theology of Atonement* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004). Geoffrey Wainwright shows that Lutherans did not continue to use *Prophet, Priest, and King*, but that Roman Catholics and Methodists have used the terms to explain the work of Christ. *For Our Salvation: Two Approaches to the Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 103–8.

3. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 216, 222.

Abraham also acts as a priest in building altars when he travels throughout the land of Canaan (Gen. 12). The first altar is built at Shechem in response to God's appearance and the affirmation of God's promise of descendants who will possess the land. Abraham builds another altar near Bethel, where he worships by calling on the name of the Lord. These altars are connected with the presence of God and could be how Abraham claimed the land as his response of faith in God's promise: one day the whole land will be the place of God's presence. Altars are also connected to worship and sacrifice, which highlights the priestly role.⁴

Other examples of the priestly role before Sinai are Noah and Job. After the flood, Noah builds an altar to the Lord and sacrifices burnt offerings. God responds to this act of worship by establishing his covenant with Noah. The story of Job reflects the patriarchal period and occurs outside the boundaries of Israel.⁵ Job functioned as a priest to his family by offering burnt offerings on behalf of each of his children in case they had sinned against God (Job 1:5). Job performed this function in his role as their father and head of the family, with the goal to "consecrate" them. The burnt offerings would restore their relationship with God and bring them into a state of holiness fit for service to God.⁶ Part of the role of the priests will be to offer sacrifices on behalf of the Israelites to bring them into a state of holiness, ensuring that God's presence will remain in their midst.

Abraham also fulfills the role of a king in defeating a coalition of armies and rescuing Lot in Genesis 14. It becomes clear that he not only is very wealthy, but also has a powerful household. Lot and Abraham separate because their possessions are so great that the

4. Although some deny the connection between altars and sacrifice because sacrifices are not specifically mentioned in the text (Cassuto, Westermann), Gordon J. Wenham points out that altars and offering sacrifices on them are integral to the worship of God. *Genesis 1-15* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 322.

5. John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 66.

6. Gerald H. Wilson, *Job* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 20.

land could not support them both (ch. 13). Lot chooses to move to the Jordan Valley, which was well watered but near Sodom. In chapter 14 Lot gets caught up in the battles of the day. A coalition of four kings from the area of Mesopotamia—led by Chedorlaomer—seek to reassert their control over five cities of the Dead Sea rebelling after twelve years of servitude. Lot and his family, who have moved into Sodom by this time (14:12), are captured and taken as spoils of war. When Abraham hears of Lot’s capture, he leads 318 men from his household to rescue Lot (v. 14). He defeats this coalition of four kings and brings back all the possessions that they had taken. Genesis 14 reads like the account of a military campaign. Abraham’s force of 318 men are “trained,” a word with military connotations in second-millennium texts.⁷ Defeating the coalition of kings involves military strategy, and Abraham negotiates with the king of Sodom when he returns with the spoils. Abraham acts like a king defending the land by defeating a powerful group of kings and rescuing a member of his household.

The Origins of Prophet, Priest, and King in Genesis 1–3

The appearance of the roles of prophet, priest, and king before they are developed and defined as offices within Israel raises the question of their origin and the possibility that they are part of the original function that God gave to human beings in Genesis 1–3. An examination of these early chapters shows that the role of ruling (kingship) is explicitly conferred on humanity and that at a minimum, the roles of priest and prophet are implicitly assumed to be part of Adam and Eve’s life.

The Role of a King

The role of ruling and exercising dominion (kingship) is explicitly stated in Genesis 1:26–28. It is clear in Genesis 1 that

7. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 147.

the creation of mankind⁸ is an act by God that sets human beings apart and gives them a special place. When God creates mankind, he uses terminology that was not used in reference to any other creation. The phrase “let us make” (v. 26) is unique and refers to God’s self-deliberation before creating humanity.⁹ The ongoing march of creation in the pattern of “God said” and then “God created” or “God made” is interrupted with “let us make” to highlight the importance of the creation of human beings. It is also significant that only human beings are created in the image of God. Although there is a lot of discussion concerning what “the image of God” means,¹⁰ it clearly sets human beings apart from the animals. Genesis 1 presents humanity as the crown of creation, set apart in significant ways.

The special place of human beings gives them a special role. Immediately after the statement that they are created in God’s image is the assertion of their function: “And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Gen. 1:26). Then, after the statement that God made mankind male and female, God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (v. 28).

The function of human beings within God’s creation is a royal one that is patterned after the God who created them. They are to reflect the image of God. He created the world and all that is in it by his power, and human beings—being male and female—are to procreate by being fruitful, multiplying, and filling the earth.

8. The Hebrew word (*adam*, אָדָם) is used in a generic sense for humanity (Gen. 1:26).

9. This section is a summary of the discussion in Richard P. Belcher Jr., *Genesis: The Beginning of God’s Plan of Salvation* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2012), 54–57. Discussions of the options for the meaning of “let us make” are found there.

10. See the discussion in *ibid.*, 55.

Marriage is later instituted for humans to carry out this mandate from God (Gen. 2:24), who sets marriage apart as the appropriate place for becoming one flesh and raising children. God also gives human beings the function of ruling over creation. This rule includes dominion, which entails a governing aspect, such as in Genesis 2 when Adam names the animals, demonstrating his authority over them. This rule includes subduing creation, which has the idea of asserting control over or making something subservient to someone else's purposes. Even before the fall, subduing creation would have been appropriate in the work that God gave Adam and Eve. Dominion would have included taking the "domesticated" life in the garden, represented by plants that need human cultivation to grow (v. 5), and the world outside the garden, represented by the plants that grow on their own.¹¹

The teaching of humanity's dominion is a debated issue, but dominion does not mean that human beings can exploit God's creation.¹² They can appropriately use creation for their own benefit and the benefit of others, but they carry out this role under the authority of God. Dominion is not an autonomous function letting humans do whatever they please.¹³ Rather, humans pattern

11. For a discussion of the relationship between Genesis 1–2 and the view that Genesis 2:5 looks forward to the cultivated plants of the garden in distinction from the plants that grow on their own in Genesis 1, see *ibid.*, 32–33.

12. Blaming the Christian's view of dominion for the ecological crisis goes back to a seminal article by Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," in an appendix to Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1970), 97–116 (originally published in *Science* 155 [1967]: 1203–7). Other works that agree with this view include Norman C. Habel, ed., *The Earth Bible*, 4 vols. (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), and Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger, eds., *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008). The approach in these works denies that humans are at the center of the universe and argues that (1) the universe/earth and all its components have intrinsic worth; (2) the earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice; and (3) the earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners—rather than rulers—to sustain a balanced and diverse community.

13. James Barr, who is not an evangelical, pointed out that the great modern exploitation of nature has taken place under the reign of liberal humanism, in which human beings no longer see themselves as under the authority of a Creator. This easily leads to

this activity after God's activity in Genesis 1–2. In chapter 1 God is presented as the sovereign Creator of the universe who rules over his creation by forming and fashioning it. Mankind's dominion imitates God's rule, so that humans carry out this function under his authority. It is interesting that in chapter 2 God is presented as personally caring for his creation when he provides for all of Adam and Eve's needs. The role of human beings in chapter 2 imitates God's role as they care for and keep the garden. Genesis 1 and 2 together present a complete picture and a proper balance of humanity's role.¹⁴ Clearly, human beings have a royal calling of rule and dominion (kingship) within God's creation.

The Role of a Priest

The role of priest is not as explicit in Genesis 2 as the role of king is in Genesis 1, but the work that God gave Adam to do in the garden has priestly connotations.¹⁵ The garden of Eden is a special place of God's presence that foreshadows the later tab-

the dominance of nature with an unlimited right to dispose of it as one sees fit. James Barr, "Man and Nature," in *Ecology and Religion in History*, ed. David Spring and Eileen Spring (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), quoted in Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Treasures Old and New: Essays in the Theology of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 38. Recent works that take a mediating position between the dominion model and the stewardship model include Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2010), and Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2011).

14. For a perspective that seeks to treat the environment properly but also rejects global alarmist views and views focused on major government intervention, see "The Cornwall Declaration," in *Environmental Stewardship in the Judeo-Christian Tradition: Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant Wisdom on the Environment*, ed. Michael B. Barkey (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2000).

15. Dan Lioy, *Axis of Glory: A Biblical and Theological Analysis of the Temple Motif in Scripture* (New York: Lang, 2010), 122. He points out that before the fall, God and human beings did not need a mediator. Adam and Eve lived in the presence of God and served in the garden. This may explain why the priestly role is implicit in Genesis 1–2. John Owen denies that there was a priestly role in the garden because the role of priests must include the offering of sacrifices. *The Priesthood of Christ: Its Necessity and Nature* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2010), 40–46. Although there was no need to offer sacrifices in the garden of Eden before sin, the role of priests is broader than offering sacrifices.

ernacle and temple. It is an enclosed, protected area associated with the presence and blessings of God. A river flows out of the garden, representing the abundant blessings flowing from the place of God's presence, a picture later found in Psalm 46, Ezekiel 47, and Revelation 22. Cherubim also guard the garden when Adam and Eve are expelled.¹⁶

The garden is not only a sanctuary for fellowship with God. The two verbs used to describe Adam's work in the garden (Gen. 2:15) are also used of the priest's work in the tabernacle (Num. 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6). The verbs are *to guard* (*shamar*, שָׁמַר) and *to serve/work* (*avad*, אָבַד). Adam was placed in the garden “to work it and to keep it,” and the Levites were given to the priests to assist by keeping “guard over him [Aaron] and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister [serve] at the tabernacle” (3:7). The Levites were also to “guard all the furnishings of the tent of meeting” (v. 8) and assist the priests in the Tent of Meeting “by keeping guard” (8:26). Although there were certain things the Levites could not do in the tabernacle (v. 26), they had oversight to ensure that it was transported correctly and that its holiness was maintained, especially in relationship

16. Much more could be said concerning the relationship between the garden and the later temple. See G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 66–80; Liroy, *Axis of Glory*, 5–16. For an approach that raises questions concerning whether the garden should be understood as a temple or a place of God's presence, see Daniel I. Block, “Eden: A Temple? A Reassessment of the Biblical Evidence,” in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 3–30. Block recognizes that he is arguing against a scholarly consensus. The many possible connections between the garden and the later tabernacle/temple, which Block must seek to answer, leave the impression that there is some association between the garden and the temple. One does not have to argue that the garden is a temple, just that there are aspects of the later temple that are an essential part of the garden (in terms of God's presence and the general role of Adam). Block himself recognizes that the garden is a special place, different from the good world God created outside the garden. He also recognizes that the Eden narrative provides much of the conceptual vocabulary for Israel's sanctuary tradition.

to the people (chs. 2–4). In this way they served the priests and kept guard over the tabernacle.

The work of Adam in the garden would not have been exactly the same as the work of the Levites in the tabernacle. The work, or service, of the Levites was on behalf of the priests, to assist them in the details related to the tabernacle. The work of Adam would have included cultivating the garden to grow plants. Yet both are works of service. Significantly, the only two places where these verbs occur together are in reference to Adam’s work in the garden and the Levites’ work at the tabernacle.¹⁷ The Levites specifically served the priests, and Adam specifically served God. The work of the Levites also served the people, and the work of Adam served his wife and eventually his family and others. Here is the basis of work as a calling or vocation. The guarding of the garden refers to preserving and protecting it. If the garden is a special place of God’s presence, guarding it would include protecting the sacred space of the garden just as the Levites protected the sacred space of the tabernacle. The need for this is demonstrated when the serpent approaches Eve with the temptation to disobey God. Adam and Eve should have protected the holiness of the garden by rejecting his offer and putting him out of the garden.

The Role of a Prophet

The prophetic role of Adam and Eve can be shown in how they handle the word of God. Before Eve’s creation, God gave Adam a command: “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:16–17). Clearly, this command was passed on to Eve, because when the serpent approaches her, questioning what God had said about eating from the fruit of the trees, she responds with the command

17. Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 211–12.

that God had given to Adam: “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die” (3:3). Eve’s response to the serpent mishandles God’s command by adding the phrase “neither shall you touch it.” The serpent has raised doubts concerning whether God has their best interests in mind. Eve makes God’s command stricter by adding to it. She believes Satan’s lie that she can be like God, asserts moral autonomy to choose what is right for herself, eats the fruit, and then gives some to Adam, who also eats. Instead of trusting in God and using his command against Satan’s lie, ambiguity concerning what God said results in disobedience. Adam and Eve reject God’s word and are disobedient to God’s command, which leads to God’s judgment.

The Impact of God’s Judgment on Prophet, Priest, and King

The judgment of God has a profound effect on creation, on the first couple, and on the mandate that God gave them to fulfill (Gen. 3:8–19). Severe consequences follow when the Word of God is rejected (the prophetic role). Instead of receiving the blessings of God, Adam and Eve experience the judgment of God, which includes being cast out of the garden. They are now separated from him and will be ignorant of his purposes unless he reveals himself. Rejecting the Word of God leaves human beings on their own to establish meaning for their lives (Rom. 2). God will reveal himself to his people, but the pattern of curses following disobedience is built into the Mosaic covenant (Deut. 27–28) and lived out by God’s people throughout Israel’s history. The clear implication, which is also integral to the Mosaic covenant, is that blessings will accompany obedience to God’s Word.

Disobedience also leads to a disruption of fellowship with God, which affects the priestly role. In Genesis 3:8 God came to the garden judging Adam and Eve’s sin, but certainly he would

have also regularly come to have fellowship with them.¹⁸ Their broken relationship with God is seen when they hide themselves from his presence. Although we are not given any information about the worship of God before the fall, their broken relationship would no doubt affect it. Adam and Eve's feeble attempt to cover themselves with fig leaves is inadequate to cover their guilt and shame.¹⁹ They need God to cover them with animal skins, which implies that blood must be shed for guilt and shame to be covered. Also, instead of the privilege of guarding the garden on God's behalf, Adam and Eve are cast out. The garden is now guarded by the cherubim to keep them from reentering. Work also becomes difficult because the ground is cursed, making it hard to cultivate and produce food. The service aspect of work is disrupted because sin produces selfishness and shifting of blame when Adam and Eve are confronted by God (vv. 11–13). Work also becomes associated with pain and sweat until human beings return to the dust from which they are made. Death is part of the curse.

Adam and Eve also specifically failed in exercising dominion in the garden (the kingly role). They did not protect the garden from opposition, and they did not exercise rule over the serpent by disputing what he said and casting him out. The exercise of dominion becomes difficult because of how sin's curse affects the bearing of children (Gen. 3:16). The mandate to multiply and fill the earth will be attended with sorrow and pain. Enmity between the two seeds, which begins in Genesis 4, includes hostile warfare between the seeds' descendants. Cain murders his brother Abel, and part of his punishment is to be a fugitive and a wanderer, sepa-

18. That God would come regularly into the garden to have fellowship with Adam and Eve is a natural implication from (1) God's creating human beings with the capacity for fellowship, and (2) the form of the verb used in Genesis 3:8 (hitpa'el of the verb *to walk*), which can imply a regular occurrence. For more discussion on the judgment aspect of Genesis 3:8, see Meredith Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1980), 102–9.

19. For a discussion of the full effect of sin and how it affects creation and Adam and Eve, see Belcher, *Genesis*, 73–76.

rated from God and other family members who represent the godly line. It is important that worship is mentioned when referring to the godly community (v. 26b). They hope that through this chosen line One will come to battle the enemy and be victorious (3:15).²⁰

God's judgment against sin greatly disrupted every aspect of life in the garden, including the mandate and roles that he had given to mankind within creation. The effect of sin on these roles necessitates defining them in a specific and clear way as part of the restoration that God begins after expelling Adam and Eve from the garden. The roles of prophet, priest, and king are formally defined in the establishment of these offices within the nation of Israel. The functions of these roles within Israel are kept separate from each other. There may be minor overlap when the priests teach the people the Word of God or the king takes on a limited role in worship and sacrifice (2 Sam. 6), but for the most part the offices are not mixed. The king is not allowed to go into the tabernacle to offer sacrifices, and when King Uzziah tries to, he is struck with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16–21). But because the original work given to Adam and Eve included prophetic, priestly, and kingly functions and the roles of prophet, priest, and king are seen in Abraham, they cannot be separated from each other in an absolute sense.²¹ This is demonstrated in how the nation of Israel is supposed to fulfill these roles and in how these roles will be united in a coming ruler.

The Mission of Israel and Prophet, Priest, and King

Israel was called by God to fulfill a particular mission to the nations, which can be described with the categories of prophet, priest, and king. Exodus 19:5–6 states that mission just before the establishment of the Mosaic covenant, when Israel will become

20. For the argument that Genesis 3:15 includes a single individual, see *ibid.*, 77–78.

21. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 364–68. He shows that the offices of Christ cannot be completely

a nation based on the law God gives to her. Three terms are used to describe Israel's unique covenant relationship: *treasured possession*, *kingdom of priests*, and *holy nation*. The first term stresses the close relationship that Israel will have to the LORD (Yahweh). *Treasured possession*, which emphasizes that Israel will become Yahweh's unique, prized possession, is also used for a king's personal treasure.²² The other two terms describe the mediatorial role that Israel will have toward the nations.²³ As a kingdom of priests, Israel will seek to extend the worship and presence of Yahweh. As a holy people, Israel will display what it means to be in a relationship with Yahweh.²⁴ Israel will fulfill this role by taking the land of Canaan and living for Yahweh in the midst of the nations. God promises to pour out abundant blessing on his people as they trust him and live in obedience to the covenant (Deut. 7:8–16). This will set Israel high above the nations (28:1–14), where she can influence them. They will see the blessing of God upon his people and be drawn to Israel to find out the source. In the process the prophetic aspect will be fulfilled as the nations are taught the benefits of the law of God (4:5–8). The kingly aspect will be fulfilled when Israel becomes a light and extends the rule of God to the nations (Isa. 49:6). All three aspects of prophet, priest, and king are bound together as part of Israel's mission.

That mission did not primarily consist of being sent to the nations; rather, the nations would come to Israel.²⁵ This was ful-

separated from each other, but it is appropriate to make distinctions between them (see also Letham, *The Work of Christ*, 24).

22. John I. Durham, *Exodus* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 263.

23. Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 212.

24. Durham, *Exodus*, 263.

25. That Israel is not primarily sent to the nations does not deny the OT witness speaking of the Servant's bringing justice to the nations and the psalmist's desire to sing praise among the nations (Pss. 57:9; 108:3). But Israel's main witness was to draw the nations to the God she worshiped. For a discussion of the terms *centripetal* (moving toward the center) and *centrifugal* (moving away from the center) to describe Israel's mission, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker,

filled to some extent in the early reign of Solomon as the nations, including the queen of Sheba, come to see the great things taking place in Solomon's kingdom (1 Kings 10). But Solomon fell away from the Lord (ch. 11), and the kingdom divided. Israel failed in carrying out this mission, being influenced by the nations rather than influencing the nations (Isa. 2:6–7). Part of Isaiah's teaching states that in light of the failure of God's servant, Israel, to carry out the mission (42:18–19), God must raise up another Servant (49:5). An Anointed One will come to enable Israel to fulfill her mission of being a kingdom of priests (61:5–7), but until this One comes, the mission is kept alive throughout the Old Testament. It is the ideal expressed in Isaiah 2:1–5, and it is the hope of what God can still do after the exile (Zech. 8:20–23). This mission also helps explain how Zechariah 14 and (to some extent) Isaiah 65–66 describe the new heavens and the new earth, where future glories are depicted through Israel's fulfilling this mission. With the coming of Christ, the true Servant of God, the mission of God's people is no longer bound to one geographical area; the disciples are sent to the nations to proclaim the good news of salvation (Matt. 28:19–20; Rom. 4:13).

In the nation of Israel the roles of prophet, priest, and king are basically kept separate to define their meanings. But it is significant that these roles come together in both the description of Adam and Eve and the description of Israel's mission. Thus it makes sense that the Old Testament would begin to describe the coming future ruler as carrying out the combined roles (Ps. 110; Zech. 6:11–13).²⁶ These are fulfilled in Christ, who is Prophet,

2000); Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006). For a discussion of how Israel was to attract the nations, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 128–47.

26. Not everyone agrees that Zechariah 6:11–13 is setting forth the king and the priest as one individual. For the view that they are two separate individuals, see Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 336–42. For the view that the king and priest are the same individual, see Eugene H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 193–202.

Priest, and King during his earthly ministry. He fulfills them in his work of salvation and continues in these roles on behalf of his people in his ascension. The work of Christ lays the basis for restoring these roles to human beings in their service to God, to the church, and to the world.

Study Questions

1. Do you think it is true that Christians tend to think of Christ's work as one-dimensional? What role do you tend to emphasize?
2. How does Abraham exemplify the roles of prophet, priest, and king?
3. How does the role of a king manifest itself in the place that God gave to human beings at creation? What does it mean that human beings have a kingly role?
4. How does the role of a priest relate to the work that God gave Adam to do in the garden? Since the garden is a special place, what are the implications for the priestly role?
5. How do Adam and Eve exemplify the role of a prophet?
6. How did Adam and Eve fail in the exercise of these roles? What were the implications of this failure?
7. How do the roles of prophet, priest, and king relate to the mission of Israel?

THE BIBLE TELLS US that Christ has three “offices”—those of Prophet, Priest, and King. Viewed alongside his humiliation and exaltation, they provide a fully rounded understanding of his work and insight into the ongoing roles of the church.

In this biblical theology, Richard Belcher explores and defines the basic functions of prophets, priests, and kings through an analysis of key Old Testament texts before discussing their fulfillment in Christ and how they are carried out today by the church, its leaders, and individual believers.

“Belcher’s impressive treatment of these offices in their biblical-theological setting is essential reading in understanding their comprehensive nature. This book deftly combines biblical and pastoral insight that is most welcome in furthering our understanding of Scripture and the person and work of Christ.”

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“With wisdom, clarity, and grace, Belcher guides the reader to a richer and fuller vision of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King.”

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“Belcher’s work points us all toward the importance of keeping the centrality of Christ in view as we address the manifold challenges that Christians face as we long for his return in glory.”

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