

## Offices of Christ: I. New Testament

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## Offices of Christ

- I. New Testament
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### I. New Testament

The christological doctrine of the “offices (*munera*) of Christ” is not developed as such in the writings of the NT. It owes its doctrinal origin to later theological reflection on the “salvific work” of Christ that makes a selection from numerous categories or titles used in the NT for interpreting Jesus – e.g., Son of Man, Son of David, Kyrios, Son of God, Lamb of God, or Savior – which conveys a certain conception of his salvific work: Jesus as king, prophet, and (high) priest.

**1. King.** When Jesus is called “king” (βασιλεύς) in the NT, it is closely related to the interpretation of him as “Christ” (χριστός) or the Jewish messiah, meaning “anointed one” (*māschiah*). “Christ” and “king,” for instance, are placed parallel in Luke 23:2. The term “anointed one” goes back to the writings of the Tanakh, which view the physical anointing of kings, priests, and prophets as symbolizing a particular association with God. However, by the 1st century BCE, the title “anointed one” was no longer linked with the concrete process of anointing. Approaches to a messianic expectation can be found in the Tanakh within the context of a theology of kingship (cf. the royal psalms Pss 2; 72; 89), wherein the king of Israel acts on behalf of and with authority from the actual King, YHWH. The prophets anticipated a future king of salvation, usually from the lineage of David (2 Sam 7:11–14; Isa 9:1–6; 11:1–11; Mic 5:1–5; Hag 2:20–23; Zech 4:1–14; 6:9–14; 9:9; on this, see Fitzmyer: 8–81; Schreiber 2015: 16–17). In Zechariah, a priestly and a royal anointed one appear together – an image of the dual reign of high priest and king. Additional references include Gen 49:10 and Num 24:17. Conceptions of a royal Davidic messiah as a divinely empowered salvific figure emerged in early Judaism.

While the prevalence of the messianic expectation in early Judaism is controversial (according to Karrer; for Charlesworth, it was only a marginal phenomenon), extensive source material shows that the title “messiah” was able to evoke a commonly known idea of a special “king” (Pss. Sol. 17; 18; Dead Sea Scrolls like 1Q28b V 20–29; 4Q161 fr. 8–10; 4Q252 V 1–7; 1 En. 37–71; 4 Ezra; 2 Bar.; “messianic” movements in Josephus; evaluation in Collins; Schreiber 2000a: 161–403, 537–54; 2015: 12–31; Fitzmyer: 82–133; Chester: 329–63, 397–423; Stuckenbruck). In essence, the messiah is a political-national

ruling figure, a “king” (cf. Pss. Sol. 17:22–25); he will enforce a reign of peace and justice for Israel, which appears as an idealized counter-image to political rule (*Imperium Romanum*, Hasmoneans, Herod). In this way, the messiah is the unique representative of God, distinguished by election and endowment (holiness, wisdom, justice) as well as authority (supernatural means of power). This basic framework was applied differently on a group specific basis: as a historically immanent expected ruler in Pss. Sol.; as an eschatological heavenly ruler in apocalyptic writings; as a double expectation of royal and a superior priestly messiah in 1QS IX 11. The application of this concept of messiah to the crucified Jesus after Easter necessitated a modification: the integration of death and resurrection into the image of the Christ Jesus (e.g., 1 Cor 15:3–5; Rom 5:6, 8; Luke 24:26), who is precisely in this way the fully empowered, unique representative of God.

References to Jesus as “king” introduce the aspect of the messiah’s political rule. This aspect is communicated early on with the phrase “newborn king of the Jews” in Matt 2:2 and also becomes important in other events of Jesus’s life, including his entry into Jerusalem, the ancient royal city of Israel (Matt 21:5; Luke 19:38); his trial before Pilate, a confrontation with a representative of the political power of Rome (Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18 par.); his *titulus crucis* (Mark 15:26 par.); and – negatively – his mocking as he hung upon the cross (Mark 15:32 par). Acts 17:7 also draws out the national-political dimension of the title “king.” As an exception, Matt 25:34, 40 shows the king functioning as an eschatological judge. The *exalted* Christ, however, is rarely called “king.” And in Rev 17:14 and 19:6, Christ acts as “King of kings” with divine power. More recent NT studies draw explicitly on Hellenistic-Roman concepts and images of an ideal king or ruler in addition to the messianic background (Schramm on the Synoptics; Mehring on John).

The Gospel of John gives special meaning to the narrative pattern of Jesus as “king” (Schreiber 2000b; 2015: 202–4; Stovell; Kim). In John 1:49 the confession of Jesus as “messiah” (1:41) is followed by the confession of Jesus as “son of God” and “king of Israel.” When Jesus is called “savior of the world” (4:42), and with his act of feeding of the 5,000 (6:15), which is reminiscent of Moses’s feeding the people in Exodus, the king, Jesus, takes on the tasks of a ruler in an ideal way, especially reminiscent of a Roman emperor who is a benefactor and bringer of peace as well as the provider of food (grain). Moreover, the discourse of the good shepherd in John 10:1–18 uses a common image of the shepherd as a good ruler who provides protection and care for his people. It is specifically at Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem (John 12:13, 15), and at his interrogation before Pilate (18:33, 39; 19:3, 14–15), that the motif of the political king emerges explicitly. This narra-

tive motif reaches its climax when Jesus corrects political power by the function of God's revelation in 18:36–37. Within this light, the *titulus crucis* is understood differently (19:19, 21): Jesus is king without asserting his power.

**2. Prophet.** The designation of Jesus as “prophet” (προφήτης) appears primarily in the Gospels and Acts and refers to the proclamation and destiny of the earthly Jesus. Against the background of OT and early Jewish ideas, three primary motif-clusters become evident in these texts: (1) divine authority, (2) eschatological prophet, and (3) the killing of God's prophet.

(1) The Gospels show Jesus having divine authority which resembles the authority given to Israel's prophets through his (miraculous) ministry and proclamation. Thus, in Luke 7:16, 39, Jesus the prophet is able to raise a dead young man (cf. Elijah in 1 Kgs 17:17–24; Elisha in 2 Kgs 4:32–37) and he possesses supernatural knowledge. Luke 4:25–27 also compares Jesus's salvific work among non-Israelites with the prophets Elijah and Elisha (1 Kgs 17:9; 2 Kgs 5:14). Moreover, Luke 24:19 summarizes Jesus's entire appearance as that of a “prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.” After Jesus's entry into Jerusalem, the crowd in Matt 21:11, 46 opines, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.”

(2) The Gospels and Acts also present Jesus as an eschatological prophet with great authority. In ancient Judaism, there were expectations that Elijah would return as the forerunner of God's end times (Mal 3:23–24; Sir 48:10; 1 Kgs 19:2, 10; Mark 9:12), or that an eschatological prophet like Moses according to Deut 18:15, 18 would appear (1QS IX 9–11; 4Q175 I. 5–8). Acts 3:22 and 7:37 explicitly connect Deut 18:15, 18 to Jesus. Mark 6:14–16 par. and Mark 8:27–28 par. also record people's beliefs that Jesus is John the Baptist raised from the dead, Elijah, or one of the prophets, or, as Luke 9:8, 19 clarifies: “one of the prophets of old had arisen.” At his inaugural address in Nazareth in Luke 4:18–21, Jesus identifies himself as the one anointed by the Spirit of the Lord from Isa 61:1–2 (LXX), an end-time prophet with authority to preach the gospel to the poor. At Jesus's transfiguration on the mountain in Mark 9:2–8 par., Elijah and Moses appear alongside Jesus, who thus stands as God's revealer on par with the two end-time prophets. Furthermore, the Gospels repeatedly show that Jesus's significance transcends the role of “prophet” as beloved “Son” (Mark 9:7; cf. Schreiber 2015: 159–60) or as Christ, as Messiah both in Peter's confession (Mark 8:29 par.) and the conversation on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:26).

(3) Finally, the Gospels and Acts interpret Jesus's death in light of the fate of Israel's prophets. A well known motif was that Israel persecuted and killed God's prophets and this functioned as an intensifi-

cation of the reproach of being unfaithful to God's instruction (Neh 9:26; 1 Kgs 19:10, 14; 2 Chr 36:15–16; cf. Jer 2:30; Jub. 1:12–13; Josephus, *Ant.* 9.265–266). This motif is used to interpret the death of Jesus and the violent opposition to him in Israel in Matt 5:11–12 par.; 23:30–31, 37 par.; Mark 12:1–9 par.; Luke 4:24; Acts 7:52 (cf. 1 Thess 2:15; Rom 11:3).

Among the interpretations of Jesus as prophet, John's didactic or instructive use of the title “prophet” stands out. In this view, the recognition of Jesus as a prophet serves to lead the reader into a deeper understanding of Jesus as the unique one who reveals God. When Jesus's miraculous knowledge identifies him as a prophet, he subsequently declares himself to be the authentic revealer of God, the Christ/Messiah (John 4:16–19, 20–26; cf. 7:40–43). Similarly, where the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 in John 6:14 points to Jesus as the “prophet coming into the world,” 6:15 heightens this by the crowd's desire to make him “king.” “Prophet” and “king” point to different interpretations of the miracle (contra Meeks: 91–93, 99, 112–31: the figure of *one* prophet-king). The subsequent discourse on the bread of life clarifies Jesus's role as the bringer of salvation (6:26–58). Moreover, Jesus's miraculous authority to heal a man born blind reveals him as a prophet (John 9:17), however, the deeper insight into Jesus's claim to be the “light of the world” (8:12; 9:5) is followed by the confession that he is the “Son of Man” (9:35–38).

**3. Priest.** Only Hebrews describes Jesus's soteriological significance with the image of the heavenly high priest (ἀρχιερέυς; esp. Heb 4:14–10:31; see Schreiber 2015: 137–147). As Heb 5:1–4 itself elaborates, the image of the heavenly high priest derives from the ancient cult practice of (high) priests offering sacrifices in a way pleasing to God to deliver people from transgressions and sins. This applies to the Jewish high priest at the Jerusalem temple of YHWH, as well as to priests in the Hellenistic-Roman cults – e.g., the Roman emperor as *pontifex maximus* of the state cult. Offerings of gifts and sin offerings are supposed to make the cult deity merciful and bring about reconciliation for transgressions that had taken place.

Hebrews expresses the special and unique nature of Jesus the high priest by recourse to the enigmatic figure of the priest-king Melchizedek, mentioned only twice in the OT (Ps 110:4 in Heb 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:17, 21; Gen 14:17–20 in Heb 7:1–28). Analogous to Melchizedek, the following made it possible to characterize Jesus as high priest: direct descent and appointment by God; unique, heavenly proximity to God; eternal duration of his ministry; sinlessness as well as his soteriological function (cf. Heb 5:5–6, 10; 7:20–21; 8:1; 9:1–28; 10:1–18). Just as Melchizedek appears as a priest and a king (Gen 14:17–20), so too the royal and priestly dignities become united in

Jesus (cf. Ps 2:7 in Heb 5:5; Ps 110:1 in Heb 10:10–13). Despite his heavenly majesty, Jesus the high priest sympathizes with his people, for in his earthly life he shared in human existence as well as in its hardships and temptations (4:15; 5:1–10). Because he himself experienced suffering and death, he was able to overcome death, humankind's greatest enemy, and, as a "merciful and faithful high priest," reconcile the sins of the people (ἱλάσσομαι; 2:14–18). Free access and direct relationship with God are now open to his own (4:16; 10:19).

Central to this high priestly image is the metaphor of Jesus's death as a sacrifice (Heb 7:23–28; 9:11–14, 23–28; 10:1–18; see Eberhart: 131–56; Gäbel: 254–310). As a *once-for-all* sacrifice (ἐφάπαξ, "once for all": 7:27; 9:12), it surpasses and cancels the daily or annually repeated sacrifices (sin offerings in the Jerusalem temple; Yom Kippur according to Lev 16). Christ, in his death ("by means of his own blood," 9:12) and exaltation (9:11, 24) *uniquely* crosses the boundary into the heavenly sanctuary, opening access to God's presence forever.

Moreover, Jesus did not simply offer any sacrifice, but instead offered himself (7:27; 9:14; 10:10). The self-sacrifice of Jesus, the heavenly high priest, rendered all cultic sacrifices and acts moot and opened up an enduring means of advocacy for his own (7:24–25). The fact that they have *no* cult, *no* sacrifices, and *no* priests distinguishes Christ-communities from the world in which they live. Their worship takes place directly with God in heaven through their relationship with Christ.

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