

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

this is the greatest gain of all from a critical study of the Bible, that it drives us back more than ever to the spiritual basis of faith as its ultimate security and vindication. If certain lines of external evidence are weakened, it should only make us cling the more closely to the self-evidencing realities of the spiritual life. It may well be that religion is to become more experimental and intuitive, and therefore more real than it has ever been before; more a thing of the heart and less of the head; more spiritual and less dependent on

the intellect. And who can tell but that when we see some of the outward framework long deemed essential to the structure being taken away, it may be permitted, in order that faith, purified and set free, may stand still more securely in its own spiritual strength and sufficiency? And thus movements, which may be causing for a time perplexity and concern, will prove to be but 'the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are artificial, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.'

Ezekiel's Priests and Levites.

BY PROFESSOR A. VAN HOONACKER, D.D., LOUVAIN.

IN the May number of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES I have already offered a word of explanation regarding a passage in my *Sacerdoce lévitique* which appeared to have been misunderstood by Dr. König in his critique of that work in the April number (p. 300 ff.). Since then I have gone over the whole of Dr. König's article, and have come to the conclusion, after reading it, that it will not be without advantage to return once more to the subject in question, not for the purpose of studying in detail the ritual of Ezekiel—which would give rise to too many developments,—but in order to indicate clearly what are in reality the principal points in the study which I have made of this in *Sac. lévitic*. pp. 184-220.

§ i. I have set myself first of all to discover what underlies the thought of Ezekiel in the discourse of chap. 44 (*l.c.* p. 188 ff.).—In this discourse (vv. 6-8) Ezekiel reproaches the house of Israel with *an intolerable breach of the covenant and of justice* in having intrusted certain offices¹ in the temple to foreigners, and in having thus established the latter as 'keepers of the charge of Jahweh in His sanctuary' (v. 8). He presupposes that, according to law, the offices in question ought to have been held by the Levitical ministers of the cultus (not by *lay* Israelites). This is

¹ Namely, inferior offices, especially those of *porters, servants of 'the house,' killers of the victims for the service of the people*, as is plain from vv. 10^t, where Ezekiel indicates by whom the foreigners are to be replaced (cf. *Sac. lévitic*. p. 189).

shown by two considerations. (a) The formula, by which in v. 8 he refers to the dignity which had illegally been conferred on foreigners, does not suit, at least in the time of Ezekiel, any but members of the tribe of Levi; it is employed in almost identical terms by Ezekiel himself for the priests the 'sons of Zadok' (v. 15). (b) The history tells us elsewhere that, as a matter of fact, the functions of *porters, e.g.*, had not failed, before the Exile, to be discharged by officials who are sometimes included in the same list as those who belonged to the Levitical *personnel* (as in 2 K 23⁴), while sometimes they receive themselves the title of 'priests' (as in 2 K 12¹⁰).² Thus, then, Ezekiel is aware that certain inferior offices in the performance of the cultus ought to have been discharged by members of the tribe of Levi instead of being held by foreigners.

But is Ezekiel not aware at the same time that there was a class of members of the tribe of Levi who were not, by law, bound to these inferior offices? He is. In vv. 10-14 he proclaims that the members of that tribe who have been guilty of idolatrous practices are to be degraded to the rank of *porters, servants of 'the house,' killers of the victims for the service of the people*. I have insisted in the most express terms on this point: that the

² A passage to which I refer on p. 193 as having been examined in other parts of my book; see the List of Scripture Texts at the end of the volume.—The reader will find later on in the present art. (§ ii.) in what sense I consider the porters to be called 'priests' in 2 K 12¹⁰.

penalty imposed by Ezekiel upon the unfaithful Levites consisted formally in their degradation to the rank of porters, servants of 'the house,' killers of the victims (vv. 10-12, 14); that deprivation of the right to ascend the altar (v. 18) was only mentioned incidentally as the corollary or the negative aspect of the same penalty; that for Ezekiel these two things are synonymous, namely, being bound to the office of keeper of the doors, etc., and being without the right to ascend the altar (see *Sac. lévít.* p. 192 f.). It appears to me that one needs but to read the text of Ezekiel to be convinced of this.¹ Thus, then, the members of the tribe of Levi, of whom Ezekiel is thinking in vv. 10-14, were not, by law, bound to the inferior offices of porters, etc., since they are punished for their idolatry by being degraded to these same offices.

My conclusion is that Ezekiel's discourse (44⁶⁻¹⁴) presupposes in theory² the existence of two quite distinct categories of ministers of the cultus within the tribe of Levi: the one comprising those members of the tribe on whom inferior duties

¹ V. 10. But the Levites who departed from me when Israel went astray, when they went astray from me after their idols, even they shall bear their guilt; ¹¹ they shall be in my sanctuary ministers in the offices at the gates of the house; it is they who shall kill the burnt-offering and the sacrifice, and it is they who shall stand before them to minister unto them; ¹² because they ministered unto them before their idols, and were a stumbling-block of guilt to the house of Israel; therefore I swear concerning them, saith the Lord God, that they shall bear their guilt. ¹³ And they shall not draw near to me to do the office of a priest to me, or to touch any of my holy things—the most holy things; but they shall bear their shame and abominations which they have done. ¹⁴ And I will make them keepers of the charge of the house for all the services thereof, and for all that is to be done about it. [I have followed, in this passage, with certain trifling modifications which appear to me to be required by the text or the context, the rendering of W. R. Smith in *O. T. J. C.*² p. 261.] The ministers of the house are opposed as such to the ministers of the altar (cf. 40^{46f.}) or of the sanctuary (45⁴⁻⁵).

Dr. König takes no account, in his article, of my remarks on Ezk 44¹⁰⁻¹⁴, which are, however, of the very highest importance for my exegesis. While professedly exhibiting my line of reasoning, he does not look at anything in the penalty imposed by Ezekiel, except the deprivation of the right of service at the altar (THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, *l.c.* p. 300^b, 301^b, 303^b). It is impossible, under the circumstances, for the reader to understand my argument. To appreciate properly the extent of the penalty imposed by Ezekiel upon the guilty Levites, it is necessary to consider it in the terms in which it is formulated by the prophet.

² The reader will see later on (§ iii.) in what sense and for what reason I say 'in theory.'

fell by law (since it was Levitical officials who had been improperly supplanted in the functions of porters, etc., by foreigners); the other comprising those who, by law, were not bound to those duties (since the obligation to discharge them in future constituted in their case a degradation and a punishment).³

§ ii. The same conclusion is reached by a careful comparison of the various other passages where Ezekiel speaks of the ministers of the cultus (see *Sac. lévít.* p. 194 ff.). In 48¹¹ the prophet distinguishes *priests* and *Levites* as two classes belonging to different orders. These designations have here a special sense quite fixed by usage;⁴ otherwise the prophet could not, as he here does, have opposed the *priests* as such to the *Levites* as such and have made a distinction, formulated in these terms, serve as the basis for a distribution of the sacred territory (48⁹⁻¹², 13-14). In fact, he employs elsewhere the term *Levites* in a purely genealogical sense, as in 44¹⁰, and applies it readily in this sense to the priests the sons of Zadok themselves (44¹⁵ 40⁴⁶ 43¹⁹).⁵ Under these circumstances, I repeat, the use made of the designations *priests* and *Levites* in 48¹¹ (cf. vv. 10, 13) implies a special acceptance of these titles, and one consecrated by tradition (see also 45⁴⁻⁵).—Already in 40^{45f.} Ezekiel similarly mentions a

³ I fail to see the difficulty which Dr. König professes to feel in understanding the imperfect *constituait* (*E. T. l.c.* p. 301^b), which has the same *raison d'être* as the preceding imperfects in the same clause. See, further, my note in May number, p. 383. As little do I understand Dr. König's remark (*l.c.*): 'The admission that in v. 10^b a degradation of these particular members of the tribe of Levi is announced, and the view that the very same persons were previously bound as a matter of fact to discharge the same lowly offices, contradict one another.' Certainly, any one who put forward such views, as Dr. König here disapproves, would contradict himself, but I never maintained any such position.

⁴ *Sac. lévít.* p. 194. Dr. König has not observed that this remark, as is evident from the context, applies to v. 11 of chap. 48 and not of chap. 44! He sets himself accordingly to a piece of criticism which is absolutely pointless (*l.c.* p. 301^b). Nowhere in this connexion do I examine 'the list of duties to be imposed upon the degraded priests.'¹

⁵ Dr. König objects that in these passages the term *Levites* is employed in the genealogical sense (= members of the tribe of Levi). But does he not see that this is precisely what my argument supposes? See *Sac. lévít.* p. 195^{fn.} f. Dr. König has never imagined, apparently, that my intention is to maintain that in the view of Ezekiel the 'Zadokite priests' were and continued to be simple Levites subordinate to the priests, properly so called.

double category of ministers of the cultus; the technical formulæ which the prophet-priest employs there to describe these two classes, betray once more the traditional character of the institution. He distinguishes as orders subordinate the one to the other, 'the priests charged with the service of the house' (שְׁמֵרֵי הַבַּיִת, כְּשֹׁמְרֵת הַבַּיִת), and 'the priests charged with the service of the altar' (שְׁמֵרֵי מִן הַמִּזְבֵּחַ). The first as well as the second are called *priests*, but we learn (45⁴, 48^{10ff.}) that 'the priests charged with the service of the house' bore in a more special way the title of *Levites* in opposition to that of *priests*. I consider that I have shown, moreover, in various passages of my book, that in certain documents originating before the Exile or dealing with the pre-exilic history, the name 'priests' was employed also in a wide sense, being applied in common to priests properly so called and to Levitical ministers of an inferior order (Ezk 40^{45f.} compared with 45^{4f.} and 48^{10ff.} presents a striking example of this usage). It is also in this wide sense that the porters are called 'priests' in 2 K 12¹⁰ *Sac. lévitic.* p. 163 f.¹ The 'priest charged with the service of the altar' are the priests of first rank, as they are still called by Philo; the 'priests charged with the service of the house' are those of second rank (cf. *Sac. lévitic.* p. 157 ff.), *i.e.* the Levites in the restricted sense of this term.

§ iii. In the various passages I have cited,

¹ With reference to this passage Dr. König says (*l.c.* p. 302^b): '. . . What clearer proof could we have that the concept of *kōhēn* had in early times a wide range? What clearer indication of the legal basis from which Ezekiel started in sketching his programme?' As to the first of these questions, I myself hold that the concept and the name *priest* have, in certain documents, either habitually or occasionally, a wide range in this sense that they are applied in common to the Aaronites and the inferior Levites; the reader will easily find the passages in my book where this question is discussed, by consulting the Alphabetical Index, under 'Prêtre' and 'Levite.' As to the second question: (a) I have just replied to it by my remark on the first; (b) Ezekiel himself indicates clearly enough, it seems to me, the legal basis from which he starts; (c) in order to answer this question, regard must be paid to the whole data supplied by the O.T. — Dr. König adds: 'Instead of calling attention to this wider use of *kōhānīm*, van Hoonacker thinks he has discovered an opposition to it in 40⁴⁵,' etc. The truth is that van Hoonacker has never either thought or said anything of the kind. On the contrary, he finds in 40⁴⁵ a proof that the name *priest* was employed in a wide sense, in the fashion that has just been indicated.

Ezekiel implies or announces that the priests charged with the service of the altar in the renovated cultus of the future, are to be only those who have remained faithful, whom he calls 'the sons of Zadok'; the priests charged with the service of the house, *i.e.* the simple Levites, are to be those who have been guilty of idolatry. The *idea*, the *theory* of the division of the tribe of Levi into two classes, is not created by Ezekiel; it is, I believe, manifestly borrowed from the institutions of the past. What belongs to Ezekiel is, so to speak, the new material which in his hands fills the framework furnished by the traditional institutions; the rule according to which he desires that in future the duties of the clergy shall be distributed. There will be, as before, priests of superior and inferior rank; but the distinction is no longer to rest upon the old *genealogical* title, it is a *moral* principle that is to decide the future assignment of sacred functions (*ib.* p. 196, 205 f.). The procedure followed by the prophet in this matter is in harmony with the character of the whole of this part of his book. It is not a reform of a practical but of an *ideal* order that he describes; and this is what explains his lack of concern as to concrete situations (*ib.* p. 206); everything in the renovated cultus, of which he traces the mysterious outlines, is to be dominated by the exigencies of the holiness of the temple and of the divine service. Not only the purifying stream issuing from the temple (chap. 47), but several other features show clearly the theoretical and ideal character of Ezekiel's ritual (*ib.* p. 197 f., 200); note, *e.g.*, the rôle attributed to the *nāsī*, the manner in which the land is to be divided among the tribes, and the sacred domain reserved in the midst, etc. (45^{1ff.} 48), the arrangements about the means of subsistence for the priests and their situation in relation to the other tribes (44²⁸⁻³⁰ 45^{1ff.} 48^{8ff.}), arrangements which are irreconcilable in practice, the omission of the Feast of Weeks, which is sacrificed to the parallelism between the two halves of the year (45²¹⁻²⁵). It is not surprising, then, that Ezekiel in his scheme takes no special account of the historical Levites, *i.e.* those whom the Law distinguishes from the Aaronites. I repeat once more, he borrows from the institutions of the past nothing more than the empty frame for his new organization of the clergy, with the result

of thus finding, on the one hand, the terms of the penalty to be imposed on the unfaithful priests, and, on the other hand, the terms of the recompense for the faithful ones.

§ iv. The fact that Ezekiel's code is not a piece of original legislation reveals itself in the clearest fashion in the numerous implicit references inherent in its arrangements, which are conceived in very general or even incomplete terms, and which imply a *familiar ritual* (*Sac. lévít.* p. 198 ff.). The question whether the latter is the *Priestly Code* is a complicated one, whose solution must be sought with the aid of the data of various kinds supplied by the literature of the O.T.¹ I believe, in any case, that the study of the relations between the ritual of Ezekiel and the 'Priestly Code' is very instructive from the present point of view. It is remarkable how in general the implicit references of which I have just spoken can be verified from the Priestly Code. Thus, e.g., Ezk 43²¹ and 44²⁹, in dealing with the rites to be practised in offering the sacrifices for sin, lay down regulations which appear to contradict one another, but which are explicable on the ground of the rules of Lv 6, 7, regarding the different cases in view. We may compare, from the point of view even of the text, Ezk 45²¹ with Nu 28^{16, 17}. The principle that Levi has no lot in Israel is logically applied by the Priestly Code in the regulations about the towns to be given to the Levites to dwell in (*Sac. lévít.* pp. 425, 427 ff.); in Ezekiel the same principle is found in a more advanced, though purely artificial combination with the assigning of a veritable territory to the members of the tribe of Levi (44^{28ff.}, 45, 48). Ezekiel is acquainted with the institution of the year of jubilee, 46¹⁷ (*Sac. lévít.* p. 201 ff.), etc.—From this point of view I have specially remarked that, if the priestly legislation affecting the organization of the clergy is made to be the outcome of the 'reform' of Ezekiel, it is impossible to understand the *double* line of Eleazar and Ithamar starting from a common source at the time of Moses.²

¹ The majority, or at least a good many, of these data are touched upon in various parts of my book; see the Alphabetical Index, esp. under 'Code Sacerdotal.' Cf. also my study on *Le lieu du culte*, etc. (1894).

² *Sac. lévít.* p. 204 f. I have, however, carefully avoided saying what Dr. König (*E.T. l.c.* p. 303^a) attributes to me, namely, that if the organization of the clergy laid down in the Priestly Code had consecrated the reform of Ezekiel, 'it would have named only Zadok as the ancestral head of

All this, however, is not meant to imply that I believe the Priestly Code to have been reduced to definite shape by the time of Ezekiel, or that nothing was added to it afterwards. On the contrary, I have expressed the opinion (*ib.* pp. 126, 209 f., 433 ff.) that the episode of the punishment of Korah (Nu 16) was the echo of the difficulties occasioned during the Exile by the reform which deprived the Levites of the privileges with which they had become endowed in course of time until they found themselves almost on a level with the priests (cf. *Sac. lévít.*, deuxième section, chaps. 1 and 2 *passim*), a reform which reduced them again to their legal status.

§ v. The programme of Ezekiel was in no way and to no extent the point of departure or the rule by which, during the Exile and afterwards, the reorganization in the ranks of the clergy was worked out (*ib.* p. 208 ff.). The *Nethânîm* and the *Sons of Solomon's servants* reappear on the scene at the Return, as if Ezekiel had never demanded the exclusion of foreigners from the service of the temple; the 'Levites,' the 'porters,' and the 'singers' form in certain respects groups as distinct from one another as from the priests; and these groups rest entirely upon genealogical titles (cf. esp. Ezr 2⁶²), even in the case of those who had remained in the East (Ezr 8^{2, 18}). No one after the Exile knows the 'sons of Zadok,' etc.³ It is frequently supposed that the 'sons of Zadok' represent in Ezekiel the clergy of the temple at Jerusalem in opposition to the priests of the *bāmôth*; but was it not the clergy of the temple that had been the chief offenders in the abuse so severely condemned by Ezekiel, namely, the admission of foreign servants into the sanctuary? Is it not in the temple itself that Ezekiel is a witness of the vilest idolatry (chap. 8)? It is more probable, it seems to me, that the 'sons of Zadok' are a symbolical creation of the prophet (*Sac. lévít.* p. 210).—It is quite true in general, as Dr. König says, that the 'meaning of a prophetic utterance cannot be made to depend upon whether it was effectual or not' (*E.T. l.c.* p. 303^b). But in the actual case this consideration helps us

the priests!' Nor have I lost sight of the circumstance that the family of Eleazar was divided into sixteen classes, and that of Ithamar into eight (*ib.* p. 213 ff.).

³ On the small number of Levites mentioned in the list of the companions of Zerubbabel, see *Sac. lévít.* pp. 65 f., 212 f.

to fix the purely ideal character of the prophecy, and this is of importance for the exegesis.

The above is a summary analysis of my study on the priests and Levites of the Book of Ezekiel.

The question may be addressed to me whether it would not have been simpler to discover in 44^{10ff.} the announcement of the reform whereby the non-Aaronite Levites were deprived, during the Exile, of the considerable prerogatives assured to them by usage under the Monarchy. This explanation, according to which the 'sons of Zadok' would represent the Aaronite priests, has two advantages: (a) it accounts for the distinct employment of the terms *Levites* and *priests* respectively in v.¹⁰ and v.¹⁵; (b) it permits us to discover in Ezekiel's announcement a practical scope and aim. But, although at first it appears simpler, I am not disposed to accept of this explanation. In the first place, in view of the general character of Ezk 40 ff., there is no real interest in discovering an explanation which permits us to recognize a practical aim in the prophet's announcement (see above, § iii.). As to the employment of the terms *Levites* and *priests*, we must note the difference between 48¹⁰⁻¹³ and 44^{10.15}; in the latter Ezekiel opposes to the priests the 'sons of Zadok,' not the Levites as such, but the Levites 'who departed from me,' a definition which allows us to understand the term 'Levites' in a wider sense, as = 'members of the tribe of Levi.' Or, if necessary, we might suppose that in v.¹⁰ the prophet used the term 'Levites' in the restricted sense by a kind of prolepsis, in order to indicate the rank to which he would have the

guilty priests reduced.—Here, on the other hand, are the principal reasons which forbid my accepting the explanation just referred to. (1) On this hypothesis we should have to hold that Ezekiel represents the non-Aaronite Levites as guilty in a body of idolatry, and the Aaronite priests as without a stain—which is quasi-absurd. (2) Although I do not believe that the 'sons of Zadok' represent in an exact fashion, in Ezekiel, the clergy of the temple of Jerusalem, it is very probable that, in proclaiming the degradation of the idolatrous priests, Ezekiel may have thought of the priests of the *bāmôth* who were dispossessed by Josiah (*Sac. lév. p. 194*)—a story which was not calculated to suggest to him the idea of a collective accusation against the non-Aaronite Levites. (3) Nor, as it seems to me, can it be held that this accusation was merely a *pretext* put forward during the Exile, in order to deprive the Levites of their privileges and to place them in their proper position; for not only would it have been going too far to oppose the idolatry of the Levites to the fidelity of the Aaronites, but the pretext was quite superfluous, the reform in question being naturally brought about by circumstances, and one that was capable of being imposed upon the Levites in the name of the Law and of strict justice (*ib. p. 208 f.*).

It is plain that the 'reform' of Ezekiel, if it is to be rightly understood, must be studied in connexion with all the data which the O.T. supplies regarding the Levitical priesthood. For this reason the chapter in my book which deals with this 'reform,' cannot, I think, fail to gain in clearness by the reading of the whole of which it forms a part.

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF HEBREWS.

HEBREWS XI. I.

'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen' (R.V.).

EXPOSITION.

'Faith.'—The order shows that the object of the writer is not to give a formal definition of Faith, but to bring out characteristics of Faith which bear upon his argument. It seems to suggest the affirmation of the reality of faith as well

as the nature of faith, as if it were 'Now faith is, and it is this. . . .'—WESTCOTT.

FAITH is not regarded in this Epistle from the same aspect as by St. Paul. He contemplated it as the spiritual act by which the believer originally finds acceptance before God in Christ; this Epistle views it as the spirit which animates the lives of faithful men, the trust in God by which they overcome the world. Its practical efficacy, again, distinguishes it from the barren faith which St. James condemns.—RENDALL.