

WERE THE PROPHETS OPPOSED TO THE PRIESTS OR DID THEY STAND WITH THE PRIESTS?

Among the most noteworthy changes in the study of Israelite prophecy in recent decades is the sharp reversal of point of view regarding the relationship of the prophet to the cult. It was formerly believed that the prophets and the priests were ranged against each other in sharp antagonism. The prophet opposed the cult and all its works, so it was supposed, and sought thus to purge Israelite faith of all that interfered with the immediacy of relationship between man and God. Along with this emphasis went a serious neglect of the priestly literature of the OT and a low estimate of its value. . . . A strong impetus was given to a fresh evaluation of the biblical records by the publication in 1914 of Gustav Holscher's book, Die Profeten. He discerned the historical origins of Hebrew prophecy . . . and maintained that Israel also took over the cultus of Canaan. As in the worship of Baal, the early prophetic enthusiasts in Israel attached themselves to the ancient sanctuaries together with the priests. ((The frequent association of priests and prophets is further cited together with reference to A.R. Johnson's contention that there is abundance evidence to show that there were prophets who 'belonged to the cultic personnel of the different sanctuaries in as real a sense as did the priests.')) Johnson supports his contentions with an impressive array of evidence and has given the death-blow to the old view of the prophets as opponents of the cultus as an institution. Alfred Haldar . . . defines a more radical position than Johnson's . . . hold(ing) that the king was at the head of associations of cult prophets, that the canonical prophets belonged to such groups, and that their prophecies are to be understood in general against the background of the ideology of the sacral kingship. H. H. Rowley has issued a warning against exalting the prophet at the expense of the priest. . . . (Muilenourg, in Peake's, 479)

Summary of conclusions: (1) the early prophets were cultic . . . (2) the distinction between priest and prophet must not be exaggerated since they shared a common work . . . there were different kinds of prophets (3) the prophets were deeply concerned over the cult and its practices . . . The severe indictment of the cult must not be interpreted as a rejection of the cult per se . . . (4) Whether the canonical prophets belonged to the personnel of the cultus is less certain. (Muilenourg, 479-80)

Amos once more is the first of the prophets to speak in this forthright way about the sacrificial system. Some scholars have seen in this denunciation, and in the following verse ((Amos 5.25)), a clear repudiation of the importance of ritual acts of any sort. More probably, Amos wishes to lay before the community the worthlessness of all such acts when they are a substitute for true obedience to the covenant requirements. (Harrelson, 349)

Jeremiah goes farther than his predecessors Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah in attacking the sacrificial system as such . . . Jeremiah places obedience to the divine word over against the offering of sacrifices. We have noted that much of Israel's sacrificial system was introduced after the entrance into the land of Canaan. The sacrificial system in the days of Moses was in all probability quite simple. The prophets attack sacrifices for the same reason that Jeremiah here has threatened the destruction of the temple. Sacrifices and offerings easily become a means of bargaining with God for His favor, or worse, as means for coercing the deity to bless His worshipers. The prophets must condemn such sacrificial practices and understandings. They were not necessarily opposed, however, to the making of all sacrifices, in favor of a religion without this cultic element. Ancient religion is unthinkable without sacrificial acts. . . . The Israelites in later times were to learn that the sacrifices fundamentally desired by Yahweh were those of confession, repentance, and thanksgiving. But the material sacrifices could vividly represent such self-sacrifice, such as (Harrelson, 263)