Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel

Joseph Blenkinsopp, Professor Emeritus in the Theology Department at the University of Notre Dame, attempts to examine the intellectual leadership in Israel as exercised by three groups of people: sages, priests and prophets. Each group is given its own section, and the available information is looked at from various sources. If you are a casual, non-academic reader, interested in Ancient Israel, then I would highly recommend that you DO NOT waste your time on this turgid resource. Read more. 3 people found this helpful.


Others, however, wanted the new community to be under religious leadership; they chose as their leader Joshua, a descendant of the high priestly family. The latter party triumphed, Zerubbabel vanished as a political factor from Judaea, and Joshua became not only the high priest in the rebuilt Temple but the sole leader of the Jews. Political independence and the institution of an independent monarchy had now ceased to exist and the Temple . . . had again become the real centre of Israelite life. . . . This led to the priestly element in Israel acquiring an importance which it had not had hitherto.

This contribution to the growing socio-historical study of leadership roles in Israel investigates three social roles (sage, priest and prophet). Blenkinsopp's approach to this task recognizes that people can function in several roles, that later redactors may have reshaped some traditions, and that Weber's "ideal types" are useful for comparative purposes. He traces the earliest references of this tradition back to the "elders" who were custodians and transmitters of the ethos which gave Israel its identity in its early stages. When statehood was developed, scribes were needed to keep records and develop its literary and intellectual traditions, but little epic or commercial archaeological evidence exists to support these processes from the time of David and Solomon.