

6. Periods of canonization

We continue to work with critical assumptions and the idea is that there were particular periods when a canonizing event was witnessed and these become guides to the entire process. We consider the following:

Ezra 10, coupled with **Nehemiah 8-9** is alleged to show a period of popular canonization. But when the passage is set in historical context, it becomes apparent that what is happening is the recognition of an existing code of laws that are now being given fresh application to the nation. It does not seem that anything is being created but that what is already in force is being given an impulse. It seems clear that the people were not hearing these laws for the first time and that the picture is much more of a renewal of covenant than that of a covenant reception. It is not reminiscent of Exodus 19 in that regard.

Similarly in **2 Chronicles 34** when the book of the law is found, the suggestion is not that a canon book was being made but that a standard known but ignored as being implemented. The book found in the temple was known to those who found it and certified it to be the historic text of the nation. As to how it had fallen into disuse, that is part of the human fallacy in sacred matters, but the king and the prophetess knew what it was and were in dismay as to how to put it into action. I think the text must really be stretched to suggest that something new was brought out at this time and the people rallied to it in the hope of a quickened national consciousness.

We may make the same observations for the Jamnia council. There is little that is historically known to indicate that it was a canonizing council. It dealt with questions (apparently) in literature that already had an authoritative role in the nation. It becomes a canonizing council only if we reject the idea of inspiration and recognition as the works came forth.

Admittedly there are many things we do not know and we do not learn much about them from the New Testament age when the whole canonical question was much different...with a different community, etc. But in our conservative opinion, the canon grew book by book as the forthcoming literature was tested under the concepts of the prophetic test and the claims of divine origination. The divisions arose to facilitate the synagogue system of teaching and while not given originally, came to have a significant use.