

# APOLOGIA

... always be ready to give a defense [Greek, *apologia*]  
to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you ... 1 PETER 3:15

## EZRA & NEHEMIAH

FOR  
JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES  
& OTHER DOUBTERS, RATIONALISTS,  
& SEEKERS AFTER CERTAINTY



No 1 in the series BIBLE STUDY for JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

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ACTS FOR JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES 2

### BIBLE STUDY FOR JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES: **EZRA**

**1:1-11** *Are the wills of men independent of God's SOVEREIGNTY?*  
(esp. v.5; See also 7:27; compare Exodus 31:1-11; 36:1-5; Haggai 1:14; Philippians 2:13)

**2:1-70** *What did the remnant returning from Babylon realize was the primary reason for their release?* (compare 1:5 with vv.59,62-63,68-70)

The priority and time of the Temple's rebuilding is central to the significance of the 70 years of Jer. 25:11; in turn, the beginning and termination of this period are crucial to the GENTILE TIMES (*appointed times of the nations*, NWT) dogma, which fixes 1914. See Daniel 9 for that prophet's view of the relation of the 70 years to Yahweh's worship.

**3:1-13** *For those returning, the restoration at Yahweh's worship in Jerusalem was a proof of what?* (v.11; compare Jer.31:1-6; Psalms 117,136)

**4:1-24** *What do vv.12-20 indicate was the local understanding as to the beginning of Gentile rule over Jerusalem?*

Connect the *rebellious city* (NAS) with the last days of the former Temple. -- 2 Chronicles 36:10-14. The *rebellious king* was actually Nebuchadnezzar's puppet appointee, vassal king Zedekiah. Independent Israelite rule of Jerusalem was therefore over long before the destruction of Solomon's Temple and the city, from which event The Watchtower dates the *appointed times of the nations* (Luke 21:24).

**5:1-17** *When asked for authorization by pagan officials, how did Jewish elders designate the Deity?*

Why would Jews of such obvious religious conviction avoid the use of the Tetragram? Compare Joseph before Egyptians, including Pharaoh (Genesis 39:9; 40:8; 41:16,25,28,32,51,52), Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar's court (Daniel 2:28,29,37,44,45; 4:24,25,26).

According to The Watchtower, Joseph & Daniel are good examples of/for Jehovah's Witnesses. What happened?

**6:1-12** What does even Persian King Darius seem to realize about the connection of the NAME and the temple?

**6:13-22** Only after which event do the sons of Israel **seek** (NAS), **search for** the God of Israel by His NAME? (esp. v.21; compare 3:10,11)

**7:1-28** Why wouldn't Artaxerxes, despite his evident fear of the **God of Jerusalem** (NAS, v.19), use the Tetragram?

It is widely acknowledged by O.T. scholars that *God of Heaven* (vv.12,21,23) is a circumlocution to avoid the use of the NAME -- out of **reverence**, not **reluctance** born of disrespect. Artaxerxes follows the pattern of Nebuchadnezzar, who likewise learned to fear the *God of Israel* (v.15) without becoming a "Jehovah's Witness". -- cf. Dan.12:47; 4:2,3,34-37. Notice too the contrast with Ezra (vv.27,28), who is returning to Jerusalem, the restored temple worship, and covenantal use of the NAME in the land.

**8:1-36** According to Ezra's faith (v.22), of what was the safe return of the exiles an evidence?

Again, note the context of the ONLY uses of the NAME (v.28,29,35). It may be a fruitful study to compare the lists of names of individual returnees in Ezra 1 and Ezra 8. The comparative scarcity of compounds containing the short form -- IAH (Jah) in chapter one is a likely indication that the generation of Jews born in Babylon did not feel free to use the covenant NAME. That sentiment may well have changed by the time of Ezra's return, a generation or more after the restoration of temple worship in Jerusalem. See also chapter 10 list.

**9:1-15** When praying regarding the guilt and unfaithfulness of His people, what form of address does Ezra use to his God? What contrast do we observe when Ezra **praises** God for His grace (v.8;

**favor, NWT) and righteousness (v.15)?** (Note also Shecaniah's admission, 10:2-4)

Compare Daniel, who only uses the NAME when beseeching Yahweh's covenant renewal and revival -- Daniel 9.

**10:1-44** When urging all the restored remnant to COVENANT separation from their foreign wives, what form of address does Ezra encourage them to adopt in confessing to God? (vv.3,11)

*God of your fathers* is no redundant appendage. It is a reminder of Yahweh's covenant faithfulness, in contrast to Israel's unfaithfulness (vv.10,13). Compare the contemporary exhortation of Malachi (1:2; 2:4-10; 3:6,7; 4:4-6).

### BIBLE STUDY FOR JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES: **NEHEMIAH**

**1:1-11** Despite Israel's sins, with what does Nehemiah connect the COVENANT and the NAME of Yahweh? (vv.5,9)

**2:1-3:32** Was **the God of heaven** only concerned with the restoration of **worship** in Jerusalem? (2:3-5) What else had God put in Nehemiah's heart? (2:12,20)

We would be remiss if we neglected to point out that Yahweh's covenants with Israel were (and are) not merely contractual arrangements. From the beginning LOVE has been the binding force of the covenants (Deut.7:6-11; Hosea 3:1-5; Jer.31:1-3,35-37). It is touching to contemplate the Lord's consideration for the *human* needs of his servants -- especially the desire of Jerusalem's sons for community continuity. Nehemiah pleads the compassion of Artaxerxes for his hometown as a favour, a gesture of appreciation for service rendered. Are we not convinced that the Lord will not do less than a pagan ruler in granting His servant the desires of his heart? (Psalm 37:4; 21:2)

**4:1-23** What might we say about **non-religious** interests of the God of Israel? (esp. vv.4,5,8-9,14-15,20)

**5:1-19** *Is it humanitarianism that spurs Nehemiah's care for his fellow Jews? (esp. vv.15,19)*

Draw attention to the common appellation for the Deity in public discourse, even prayer, as against public worship (4:4,9,20; 5:9,13a,15,19; contrast 5:13b)

**6:1-19** *To what is the slanderous spirit closely related? (esp. vv.2,6-8,13)*

We may mark the inevitable progress of opposition to the divine will and work: from derision and ridicule (2:19; 4:1-3) to violent intent (4:8-11) and diabolical, murderous conniving (chapter 6). He who searches the heart knows no clear demarcation between the assassination of a man's character and the taking of his life (John 2:24,25; John 7:19,20; 8:44-58 -- note that the one denoted "a murderer from the beginning" is yet named *diabolos*, slanderer, and *accuser of our brethren* -- Rev.12:10).

**7:1-8:18** *Nehemiah's building projects are only preparatory to what? (esp. 8:1-8) To what were the restored services given over? (esp. 8:3,6,18, also 9:3)*

**9:1-38** *In the Levites' lengthy rehearsing of Israel's history -- actually a prayer -- how often is the NAME used? (contrast use in praise, worship and covenant recounting, vv.3-8, with the final summation of Israel's rebellion, vv.31-32)*

The Levites reluctance to use the NAME may well be a sign of their true contrition at Israel's failure to keep covenant. Contrast TRUE reverence for the name of the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 43:14 and passim) with the Watchtower's advocacy of its indiscriminate use.

*What do Jehovah's Witnesses (and many Christians) tend to see in Israel's history? (vv.16,18,26, etc) But what does thoughtful inquiry see? (vv.8,15,17,19,27,28,31,32)*

**10:1-12:47** *What seems to be the chief motivation for the thousands*

*of Israelites covenanting with Nehemiah, even to determining the location of their homes?*

Again, no one seems to recall Nehemiah's generation while wagging heads and fingers at Israel's history. One could wish that this generation of Christians would make God's worship as high a priority. *If thou, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.* (Psalm 130:3,4).

**13:1-31** *Why would it be that such a man of God as Nehemiah would hesitate to use the NAME in prayer (vv.14,22b,29,31), or in conversation with fellow Jews? (vv.11,18,25-27)*

The NAME does not occur once in this lengthy chapter. Even the NWT can't find a place to insert it. Why? Wasn't the entire point of their punishment, according to Isaiah (ch.43), that they failed to be His witnesses?

A suggested talking point with JW's: Nehemiah may have a consciousness of community guilt in the sorry state of spirituality he finds upon returning to Jerusalem after a lengthy absence (v.6). The covenant NAME would not fall easily from the lips of a man shamed, even implicated (as governor), in the backslidings recounted here: a profaned temple (vv.4-9); neglected priesthood (vv.10-14); violated sabbath (vv.15-22); intermarriage with the heathen (vv.23-31). Nehemiah's plea, *Remember me, O My God, for good* (v.31) vividly drives home the man's despair over -- and sense of responsibility for -- Israel's spiritual declension. Nehemiah would not want to be included among those *swearing by the name of Jehovah and who make mention even of the God of Israel, not in truth and not in righteousness* (Isaiah 48:1, NWT) Would that Jehovah's Witnesses knew the full implications of their careless NAME dropping. (Deut.5:11)