

**THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE CONCEPT  
OF 'YAHWEH'S PEOPLE' IN EZRA AND NEHEMIAH  
DURING THE EARLY POST- EXILIC PERIOD  
(539-350 BC)**

**BY**

**EMMANUEL ORDUE USUE**

**SUBMITTED AS PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS**

**FOR THE DEGREE**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**TO THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGY**

**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA,**

**PRETORIA.**

**SEPTEMBER 2005**

**PROMOTER: PROF. D J HUMAN**

**APPROVED BY**



PROF. D J HUMAN

(PROMOTER)

## DEDICATION

*This work is dedicated to the memory of my late parents Dinah Vembera Usue and Daniel Usue Atonko who have gone to be with the Lord on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2004 and June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2005 respectively and to my wife Joyce Member Ordue who has stayed by my side during the course of my studies at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. May this work be used for the building of the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The God of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ deserves my thanks and praise. I have received theological training abroad by his mercy and grace. God has shown me his love, care and kindness during the course of my academic journey. The journey has been coloured with mixed experiences, namely, joy and gladness but also, pain, tears, loss of friends, family members and colleagues. In all of these, I am deeply grateful to God because my spiritual life has grown and matured. Today, through his grace this work, I hope, will contribute to the building of the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I thank my wife Joyce Member Ordue for her patient endurance during the long years of my studies abroad. True love between two persons can be measured and discerned when both of them consciously stay and walk together in love and peace during a turbulent period. Our marriage has been tested by winds and storms of life during this academic journey but both of us have remained committed to each other and have endured all the shocks and thunders of marriage as well as Christian life. Thank you Joyce for staying by my side as you had promised to do. Your support has indeed given me a sense of worth and direction. The result of it is this work.

My promoter, Professor Dirk J Human has done an extra-ordinary supervisory work on the content of this dissertation. His constructive criticism and

compassionate supervision has enabled me to work hard without getting bored. Thank you very much professor for all the support I have received from you. The external examiners also deserve my thanks for all the constructive comments they have made on my work. Their comments have been very helpful to me and to the final shape of this dissertation.

This research would not have been achieved without the financial assistance from friends, Churches and institutions. In view of this, I thank Oreland Presbyterian Church USA, the University of Pretoria, NKST Church, Mr. John and Mrs JoAnn Swart, Rev. Jeff and Mrs. Tracee Denlinger, the Old Testament Society of South Africa, Ms. Grace Mullen, Mr. Paul and Mrs. Nancy Tsou and their daughter Amy Tsou, Prof. N. Meki, Prof. Dick and Mrs. Jackie Miller, Atese Lilian Nguumbur and Ms. Ann Terlumun Kotze, Dr. Gordon and Mrs. Lessly Russell, Mr. du Toit and Mrs. Dolin Van der Merwe and family, Dr. Fanie and Mrs. Angela Cronje; Mr. Hawtrey and Mrs. JoAn Judd and Rev. Jack Kraus for all the financial, material and prayer support to me.

I thank Rev. Clifford and Mrs. Beverly Vick for their painstaking editorial work on the grammatical aspect of this dissertation. I thank also Ms. Elsa Gouws for her Library assistance. Other friends that have supported me in one way or the other include Rev. and Atese Gbiligh, Rev. and Atese Mbachirin, Mr. and Mrs. Nder Kuha, Mrs. Ngunan Orbunde, Mrs. Miriam P. Akpede (my mother in-law), Rev. J. N. and Atese Hinga.

Finally, I would like to thank those who have raised me up from childhood to adulthood and through whom I came to know and walk with my Lord Jesus Christ. My late mother Dinah Vembera Usue and father Daniel Usue Atonko deserve my thanks for their spiritual upbringing. My late mother Vembera encouraged me persistently to study hard and achieve God's purpose for my life. Today, she has gone to be with the Lord but her prayers and dreams for me, I hope, have been realized. Mother, you have passed away but the memories of your motherly care lives with me. Late Evangelist Idyer Tor and Mr. Unyo Tov who have also departed to be with the Lord supported me during my teenage years. My public profession of faith was possible through the work of Rev. Samuel Gbor, the former Pastor of the NKST Church Buruku. I thank all of you for contributing to my spiritual and educational upbringing.

There are many other people who have supported me during the period of my studies but due to the brevity of this space, their names have not been mentioned here. However, I am very thankful to all of them for their support. God knows how much you mean to me. My prayer is that God should bless each one of you for the role you have played in my life and for all the kindness you have shown to me during the course of my academic journey. May this work be used for the glory of God.

## ABSTRACT

This investigation is about the theological perspectives in Ezra and Nehemiah on the concept of 'Yahweh's people' during the early post-exilic period (539-350 BC). The study has utilized literary and historical methods with a theological perspective since the text of the Bible is a literary, historical and theological document (cf Gorman 2001:8; McKenzie & Haynes 1999:20-21). The books of Ezra and Nehemiah formed the primary sources of the research. The Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants, as well as the Ancient Near Eastern Treaty pattern have also been investigated as a background picture to the discussion in Ezra and Nehemiah.

The study reveals that there is both an exclusive and an inclusive perspective in Ezra and Nehemiah. Similar perspectives are found in the Abrahamic/Mosaic covenants. These perspectives concern the conception of 'Yahweh's people' and other nations, foreigners and aliens.

On the one hand, the exclusive' theological perspective in Ezra and Nehemiah looks at those who did not go into exile and essentially, the rest of the other people as 'foreigners' or aliens; but primarily as those who are not 'Yahweh's people'<sup>1</sup>. Non-exiles were perceived as a threat to the religious, political, economic, social life, and progress of the early returned exiles.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf Ezr 2:59-62; 4:1-3; 9:1-2; Neh 2:19-20; 7:61-65; 9:1-2; 13:1-9, 23-28; Van Wyk & Breytenbach (2001:1256).

On the other hand, the inclusive theological perspective in Ezra and Nehemiah viewed non-exiles or other nations/foreigners with sympathy and appreciation (cf Ezr 1:1-3; 3:7; 4:2; 6:13-14; 10:15; Neh 2:8-9). This group considered the so-called foreigners as partners, friends and human beings who could embrace Yahweh as their God.

In view of the dual perspectives, I have argued that the author(s)/editor(s) of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah re-interpreted certain passages from the Pentateuch and from the deuteronomic-deuteronomistic history in a peculiar way to support the exclusive religious and social reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah. Thus, this investigation has shown that Israel and essentially all other nations, races and people could become 'Yahweh's people' through appropriate covenant means. These covenant processes included:

- Yahweh's promise to become the God of the Patriarchs as well as the God of Israel (cf Gn 17:7-8);
- The notion of Abraham as the father of a multitude of nations (cf Gn 17:5);
- Circumcision (cf Gn 17:10-14);
- The blessing of other nations via Abraham and his descendants (cf Gn 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14);
- Food provision (cf Ex 23:10-11; Lv 19:9-10; 23:22; 25:1-7; Dt 14:28-29; 24:19-21; 26:12-15);
- Sabbath keeping (cf Ex 20:8-11; 23:12; Dt 5:12-15);
- Celebration of Passover, feasts of Weeks and Tabernacles (cf Ex 12:17-20, 48-49; Nm 9:14; Dt 16:10-14);
- Equality of both the Israelites and the aliens before the law of Yahweh (cf Ex 12:49; Lv 24:22; Nm 9:14; 15:13-16, 29-30);
- Intermarriage (cf Tamar-Gn 38:6-30; Moses-Nm 12:1-2; Ruth-Rt 1:16-17; 4:13-22; Rahab-Jos 6:22-23 and Bathsheba-2 Sm 11:3, 26-27; 12:24-25);
- Sacrificial offering (cf Lv 22:17-20, 25; Nm 15:13-16) and
- Cities of refuge (cf Nm 35:14-15).



The reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah ignored this inclusive perspective of the two covenants. Ezra and Nehemiah adopted the exclusive perspective of both covenants as the basis for their reforms. This is a one-sided understanding of the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenant perspective on 'Yahweh's people'. A close reading of the two covenants reveals the openness of Yahweh, the God of Israel, to all nations, races, peoples and ethnic groups. Yahweh accepted all people who embraced him as their God through appropriate covenant means. Yahweh cannot be confined to a single group of people as presupposed in Ezra and Nehemiah. He cannot be localized!

#### **KEY TERMS**

Yahweh, God, Israel, Jews, exiles, foreigners, nations, aliens, covenant, treaty, people and land.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
Title page.....	i
Approval page.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abstract.....	vii
Table of Contents.....	x
<b>CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2 MOTIVATION.....	5
1.3 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY.....	13
1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	14
1.5 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.....	21
1.6 HYPOTHESIS.....	22
1.7 METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN.....	23
1.8 CHAPTER DIVISION, ORTHOGRAPHY AND TERMINOLOGY.....	26
1.8.1 Chapter division.....	27
1.8.2 Orthography.....	28
1.8.3 Terminology.....	29
<b>CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE BOOKS OF EZRA AND NEHEMIAH.....</b>	<b>32</b>
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	32
2.2 DATE AND AUTHORSHIP.....	32
2.3 UNITY WITH 1 AND 2 CHRONICLES.....	36
2.4 COMPOSITION, CHRONOLOGY AND UNITY.....	40
2.5 SHESHBAZZAR AND ZERUBBABEL.....	51
2.6 BOOK OF THE LAW.....	55
2.7 OWNERSHIP OF THE LAND OF JUDAH.....	57
2.8 ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS OF THE STATE OF JUDAH.....	57
2.9 THEOLOGY OF EZRA AND NEHEMIAH.....	59
2.9.1 Movement theology.....	60
2.9.2 Rebuilding of two walls.....	63
2.9.3 Theology of continuity.....	63
2.9.4 Theologies of crying, intermarriage, covenant, retribution and Torah.....	66
2.10 FACTORS BEHIND THE TENSION IN EZRA-NEHEMIAH.....	67
2.10.1 Prohibition of intermarriage.....	68
2.10.2 Women in Ezra 9-10 .....	71
2.10.3 Identity and attitude of the Samaritans.....	73
2.10.4 Concept of 'Yahweh's people'.....	75
2.11 SYNTHESIS.....	76

<b>CHAPTER 3 ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TREATY AND ABRAHAMIC COVENANT.....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>3.1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>3.2 ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TREATY/COVENANT.....</b>	<b>83</b>
3.2.1 Definition of the term <i>tyrIB</i> .....	83
3.2.2 Origin and meaning of the term .....	84
3.2.3 Ancient Near Eastern treaty form.....	86
3.2.3.1 Identification of the covenant giver.....	90
3.2.3.2 Historical prologue.....	90
3.2.3.3 Stipulations.....	91
3.2.3.4 Preservation and periodic public reading.....	92
3.2.3.5 Witnesses to the treaty.....	93
3.2.3.6 Blessing and curses.....	93
3.2.3.7 Ratification ceremony.....	94
3.2.3.8 Imposition of the curses.....	95
<b>3.3 ABRAHAMIC COVENANT.....</b>	<b>96</b>
3.3.1 Literary context of the Abrahamic covenant.....	96
3.3.2 Structure of Genesis.....	97
3.3.3 Movement of the narrative.....	100
3.3.4 Characteristic elements of the Abrahamic covenant.....	104
3.3.4.1 Identification of the covenant giver.....	110
3.3.4.2 Historical prologue.....	113
3.3.4.3 Stipulations/obligations.....	115
3.3.4.4 Preservation and/or periodic public reading.....	118
3.3.4.5 Witnesses to the treaty.....	119
3.3.4.6 Blessing and curses.....	120
3.3.4.7 Ratification ceremony.....	125
<b>3.4 IMPLICATIONS OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT.....</b>	<b>126</b>
3.4.1 Exclusive and inclusive character.....	126
3.4.2 Yahweh unilaterally administered the covenant.....	127
3.4.3 Goal(s) or value(s) of the Abrahamic covenant.....	128
3.4.3.1 Yahweh will be Abraham's God .....	128
3.4.3.2 Leadership, obedience, righteousness and justice.....	129
3.4.3.3 Abraham will be blessed and be a channel of blessing.....	130
3.4.3.4 Covenant as a means of Yahweh's self-revelation.....	130
3.4.3.5 Redemption of Abraham's descendants.....	131
3.4.4 Significance of name change.....	132
<b>3.5 EZRA, NEHEMIAH AND THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT.....</b>	<b>133</b>
3.5.1 Introduction.....	133
3.5.2 Ezra, Nehemiah and the Abrahamic covenant.....	134
<b>3.6 CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>3.7 EXCURSUS: Blessing of other nations.....</b>	<b>138</b>
3.7.1 Introduction.....	138
3.7.2 Passive interpretation of <i>barak</i> .....	139
3.7.3 Reflexive interpretation of <i>barak</i> .....	139
3.7.4 Examining the passive interpretation of the verb forms.....	140



5.2.3	Conclusion.....	218
<b>5.3</b>	<b>NEHEMIAH NARRATIVE.....</b>	<b>219</b>
5.3.1	Structural projects.....	220
5.3.1.1	King Artaxerxes' orders.....	220
5.3.1.2	Work on the city wall.....	223
5.3.2	Religious and social reforms.....	226
5.3.2.1	Confession of sins.....	227
5.3.2.2	Signing an agreement.....	229
5.3.2.3	Law of Moses.....	230
5.3.2.4	Sabbath reforms.....	234
5.3.2.5	Marriage reforms.....	236
5.3.3	Conclusion.....	243
<b>5.4</b>	<b>EXCURSUS: Terms associated with the <i>golah</i> community as 'Yahweh's people' .....</b>	<b>246</b>
<b>CHAPTER 6 SYNTHESIS .....</b>		<b>247</b>
6.1	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>247</b>
6.2	<b>MOTIVATION.....</b>	<b>247</b>
6.3	<b>RELEVANCE.....</b>	<b>249</b>
6.4	<b>METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN.....</b>	<b>249</b>
6.5	<b>AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.....</b>	<b>250</b>
6.6	<b>HYPOTHESES.....</b>	<b>253</b>
6.7	<b>SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS.....</b>	<b>254</b>
6.8	<b>FINAL SYNTHESIS.....</b>	<b>255</b>
6.9	<b>POSTSCRIPT.....</b>	<b>257</b>
<b>TABLE OF HEBREW TRANSLITERATION.....</b>		<b>259</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>		<b>261</b>

The degree PhD

**Emmanuel Ordue Usue**

Emmanuel Usue was born in Nigeria in 1964. He obtained his High School certificate in 1984. He received a Diploma in Theology at RTCN (now RTS) Mkar in Nigeria in 1989. He was ordained as a pastor in 1990. He obtained his Masters and Doctor of Ministry degrees in Counseling at LPTS USA in 1998 and 2001 respectively. He did an MTh degree in the Old Testament with distinction at the University of Pretoria in 2004.

His thesis, entitled **Theological perspectives on the concept of 'Yahweh's people' in Ezra and Nehemiah during the early post-exilic period (539-350 BC)**, deals with the conflict between the *golah* community and the *am ha'arets* regarding the religious, political and social reforms of Ezra and

Nehemiah. The study argues that the conception of 'Yahweh's people' lay behind the tension between the two above named groups. Consequently, two theological perspectives emerged in Ezra and Nehemiah on the concept of 'Yahweh's people'. One is exclusive, the other is inclusive. The study demonstrates that the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants provide a framework through which every other person could embrace Yahweh, the God of Israel as their God. Therefore, Yahweh cannot be confined to a single group of people, race or nation as presupposed by the leaders of the early post-exilic Jewish community in Ezra and Nehemiah.

Promoter : Prof Dirk J Human (University of Pretoria)

External examiners :

The degree PhD

**Dr Emmanuel Ordue Usue**

Emmanuel Usue was born on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1964 in Nigeria. He attended elementary and high schools in Buruku from 1973 to 1984. He professed Jesus Christ and was baptized in 1982. He obtained his Diploma in Theology at the Reformed Theological College of Nigeria Mkar (now Reformed Theological Seminary) in 1989. He was ordained as a pastor in 1990 at NKST Church Yaaya. He married Mrs. Joyce Usue in 1990. He did a BTh degree programme on a part-time basis for three years at RTCN.

But, he did not complete his BTh because he received a scholarship from abroad and moved and studied at LPTS, USA in a ThM degree from 1997 to 1998. His wife Joyce stayed in Nigeria. He obtained a DMin degree in 2001. Dr Usue received another scholarship to do a Master of Divinity degree in the Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary. He moved to WTS in 2000. He returned briefly to LPTS and received his DMin. degree certificate in 2001. At WTS, it became clear that his wife will not join him in the USA since she was denied the Visa. As a result, Dr. Usue transferred from USA to the University of Pretoria in December 2002. Here, he obtained his MTh degree in the Old Testament with distinction in 2004. He continued into the PhD programme until today. His promoter is Prof. D J Human.

Working experience: Pastor-NKST Church Yaaya; Member of several governing boards, including the State Primary Education board, NKST Hospital Mbaakon and as the Gen. Sec. to the NKST Classis Mbaakon. He taught at Simons Bible College in the USA in 1999 and 2000. Dr Usue plans to return to Nigeria to teach at the Reformed Theological Seminary Mkar and at the University of Mkar.

Promoter : Prof Dirk J Human (University of Pretoria)

External examiner :