

In the Third Edition of *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, Greg Stafford takes up the familiar defense of subjects having to do with the use and pronunciation of the divine name, the identity of the biblical God Jah and of Jesus of Nazareth, as well as issues and questions having to do with salvation, God's sovereignty and mankind's "free will." This edition also contains discussions of several controversial issues, including questions related to abortion, a person's sexual orientation, and regarding uses of blood.

Most significantly, this book puts forth not only a defense of some the biblical teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, but it also further introduces the Christian Witnesses of Jah, Jehovah's Witnesses who reject human traditions when these can be shown to contradict what is based on the best available reasons. Thus, a call is made to all Jehovah's Witnesses, to all Christians, indeed, to "every breathing thing" to bear witness to and to praise the biblical God Jah, and to acknowledge what can be shown to be true for good reasons about Jesus of Nazareth.—Psalm 150:6; Isaiah 29:13; 43:10, 12; Acts 18:24-28; Galatians 1:10; Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, 6.

GREG STAFFORD is also the author of *Three Dissertations on the Teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses* and of various articles and debates on biblical Christianity and the history and the beliefs of the Watchtower Society and Jehovah's Witnesses. He is a Christian Witness of Jah, one of Jehovah's Witnesses who rejects traditions and beliefs that are not based on the best available evidence.



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Murrieta, California

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himself will be with them. And he will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away.”

The descending of this “holy city” appears clearly to signal that “the tent of God is with mankind” (Revelation 21:3). But if *all* “mankind” who are redeemed by God are with him and with his Son in heaven *before* New Jerusalem descends, and if all of “mankind” are also this “holy city,” then how does its descent cause God to be “with mankind” anymore than he already would be according to this belief? My point is, unless there are humans *on* the earth who are *not* the same ones who ‘conquer and who will by no means go out’ from New Jerusalem “which descends out of heaven” (Revelation 3:12), then there is no new sense in which God is “with mankind” as a result of New Jerusalem’s ‘descent.’ Jehovah’s Witnesses believe there *is* a new sense in which Jah God is going to be “with mankind,” namely, by means of New Jerusalem which is a part of the “new heavens” and “new earth” Jah is ‘making new.’—Revelation 21:5.

Finally on this point, Revelation 22:1-2 describes “a river of water of life, clear as crystal, flowing out from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of its [= New Jerusalem’s] broad way.” On each side of this river are “trees of life ... And the leaves of the trees [are] for the curing of the nations.” The Lamb’s “bride” which descends from God does not need any more ‘curing,’ for “no falsehood was found in their mouths; they are without blemish” (Revelation 14:5). But those to whom New Jerusalem descends (“mankind”) will need “curing” as is clear from the effects which result from New Jerusalem’s descent.—Revelation 21:4.

“Kings over the earth.” In the Bible book of Daniel, an interpretation of a dream by Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar tells of the transfer of power from one kingdom to another, until finally God himself sets up “a kingdom that will never be brought to ruin” (Daniel 2:36-44). The book of Daniel also describes “someone like a son of man” who receives a kingdom from one called “the Ancient of Days.” Consider Daniel 7:13-14:

I kept on beholding in the visions of the night, and, see there! with the clouds of the heavens someone like a son of man happened to be coming; and to the Ancient of Days he gained access, and they brought him up close even before that One. And to him there were given rulership and dignity and kingdom, that the peoples, national groups and languages should all serve even him. His rulership is an indefinitely lasting rulership that will not pass away, and his kingdom one that will not be brought to ruin.

Daniel goes on to write about how this “son of man” would not be the only one who rules in this kingdom. Indeed, according to Daniel 7:27 the “one like a son of man” will have others rule with him (with underlining added):

And the kingdom and the rulership and the grandeur of the kingdoms under all the heavens were given to the people who are the holy ones of the Supreme One. Their kingdom is an indefinitely lasting kingdom, and all the rulerships will serve and obey even them.³⁶

When Jesus was on the earth, he spoke directly to those whom he considered “holy ones,” like those whom Daniel mentions. In John 14:2-3 Jesus said, “In the house of my Father there are many abodes.” He also said he would “prepare a place” for his followers, so that where Jesus is ‘they may be also.’ This “place,” according to Jesus, is ‘at his table in his kingdom.’ This includes ‘sitting on

³⁶ Some translations read, “His kingdom [will be] an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him” (NASB [underlining added]). The NIV reads similarly. But the RSV and the NEB (and others) agree with the NWT. The use of the third-person singular pronoun (“His,” “Him”) rather than the plural reference (“their,” “them”) is due to the ambiguity of the antecedent for *malkhuteh* (“his/its kingdom”). It can refer to the “people” or to the “Supreme One.” The NWT and other translations view *‘am* (“people”) as the antecedent, which is singular and masculine and the central constituent of the construct chain “the people of holy (ones) of the most high.” Because reference to a “people” includes individuals, a corresponding reference in English may either use “they” or “it” (compare the 1984 NWT Reference Bible’s footnote to Dan 7:27). It appears there is a parallel between Dan 7:14 and 7:27, for in 7:14 the one to whom the kingdom is given is also the one whom the people serve. In the first part of 7:27 the “people” (= “holy ones”) are given the kingdom, and then the “rulerships” serve *them*. See, T.J. Meadowcroft, *Aramaic Daniel and Greek Daniel: A Literary Comparison* (JSOTSup 198; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pages 212-213 for more on the parallels between 7:14 and 7:27, and pages 232-233 for more on the ambiguity of the antecedent in verse 27. Meadowcroft believes it is “more likely that the third person singular in vs. 27 refers to the people of the saints.”

thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel' (Luke 22:28-30). Paul had this hope in mind when he wrote to Timothy, "If we go on enduring, we shall also rule together as kings" (2 Timothy 2:12, see also 1 Corinthians 4:8). Further, in Revelation 2:26-29 the glorified Jesus says to his followers in Thyatira (with underlining added):

And to him that conquers and observes my deeds down to the end I will give authority over the nations, and he shall shepherd the people with an iron rod so that they will be broken to pieces like clay vessels, the same as I have received from my Father, and I will give him the morning star. Let the one who has an ear hear what the spirit says to the congregations.

For those who are faithful to Jesus "down to the end," he will give "authority over the nations." Because this is possible only as a result of Jesus' great sacrifice, the inhabitants of heaven sing this song of praise and thanksgiving to the "Lamb," "You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, because you were slaughtered and with your blood you bought persons for God out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and you have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God, and they are to rule as kings over the earth" (Revelation 5:9-10; underlining added). However, Bowman objects to the translation "over the earth" in the NWT in this text:

The NWT rendering "over the earth" has almost no scholarly support and is certainly wrong. The word *epi* on occasion can mean "over" (e.g., Rev. 9:11; 11:6), but it never means "over" when used with a place-noun such as "the earth." The phrase *epi tēs gēs*, "on the earth," appears 63 times in the New Testament, yet Revelation 5:10 is the *only* place anyone has ever suggested that it be translated "over the earth." In the immediate context, the phrase *epi tēs gēs* appears two other times (vv. 3, 13), where it must be translated "on the earth."³⁷

Bowman makes several mistakes in the above paragraph, and his analysis leaves out significant information that contradicts his claims about the NWT's translation of Revelation 5:10. First, Bowman claims the expression *epi tes ges* "appears 63 times in the

³⁷ Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, page 56, section D.1.a.(2).

New Testament.” But it actually occurs 57 times in the NT, not 63 times.³⁸ Second, Bowman claims *epi* “never means ‘over’ when used with a place-noun such as ‘the earth.’” This appears to be an instance where Bowman speaks ahead of a complete and proper analysis, for there is nothing unusual with understanding *epi tes ges* in Acts 10:11 as “over the earth,” a translation which can be found in at least one modern translation of the NT.³⁹

Also, Bowman does not seem accept that it is the particular verb associated with *epi tes ges* in Revelation 5:10 which in large part supports the translation “over” for *epi*. In fact, Revelation 5:10 is the *only* place in the NT where *epi tes ges* is used with the verb *basileuo* (“to rule”). Indeed, the four other times in the NT where *basileuo* is used with *epi* (Luke 1:33; 19:14, 27; Romans 5:14) the translation “over” is appropriate, while “on” does not fit the overall sense of these passages. Even from a strictly lexical perspective, that is, without regard for the verb with which *epi* is associated, more than one Greek lexicon recognizes “over” as a proper sense for the Greek preposition *epi*.⁴⁰

Though *epi* can be used for that which rests “on” something, in Revelation 5:10 it appears to be used metaphorically with *tes ges* (“the earth”) and with *basileuo* to show control or authority “over” the place or people referenced. It is used in a similar sense elsewhere in the NT with other, similar verbs. Consider Luke 12:42, where we read that Jesus will “appoint” faithful servants “over his body of attendants” (Greek: ἐπὶ τῆς θεραπέιας αὐτοῦ, *epi tes therapeias autou*). Surely, no one will argue that the “faithful slave” is here appointed to stand “on” the master’s “attendants”! Rather, the Master will give his faithful slaves authority *over* his belongings. Consider also Revelation 9:11, to

³⁸ This determination was made by using the search feature for the exact phrase *epi tes ges* using BibleWorks™ (Norfolk, VA), version 6.0.005y (2003). The Westcott and Hort Greek text, used by the Watchtower Society’s NT translation, contains the phrase 57 times.

³⁹ *The Unvarnished New Testament*, translated by Andy Gaus (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1991).

⁴⁰ For examples see *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., page 286, “over of power, authority, control of or over someone or someth[ing] ... Rv 5:10”; Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), page, 231, “used of things, affairs, persons, which one is set over, over which he exercises power ... Rev. v. 10” (underlining added).

which Bowman himself refers, which speaks of a “king” that is “over” the “locusts” who are released from the abyss (Greek: ἔχουσιν ἐπὶ αὐτῶν βασιλέα, *ekhousin epi auton basilea*). This does not appear to be a literal instance of the “king” actually standing “on” the “locusts”! It seems to me that the better sense, based on the reasons provided, is this “king” has authority *over* the “locusts.”

Finally, there is the use of *epe* in Acts 8:27 which again has to do with authority “over” something, in this case the Ethiopian eunuch’s authority “over” the “treasure” of “Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.” It is similar with Revelation 5:10. Here Jesus and those who are ruling with him do so *over* the earth in that they, as “kings,” have authority “over” the earth and its inhabitants. Thus, C.B. Williams translates this part of Revelation 5:10 as, “and they will rule over the earth.”⁴¹ Jesus tells these ones, and all those who will live “with” him and with his Father in the “new heavens” and “new earth,” that they must first ‘conquer’ (see Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). But ‘conquer’ who or what, and how?

Exercising Faith. Jehovah’s Witnesses believe for a person to be saved from death he or she must endure in “work that is good,” until the “end” of the person’s life or until the end of the final “age” of this world (Matthew 24:13; Romans 2:6; James 1:2-3). Paul taught (with underlining) that God “made known to us the sacred secret of his will,” and that the Ephesians put their hope in Jesus “after [they] heard the word of truth, the good news about [their] salvation” (Ephesians 1:9, 13). Paul also wrote, “By means of him also, after you believed, you were sealed with the promised holy spirit, which is a token in advance of our inheritance, for the purpose of releasing by a ransom [God’s] own possession, to his glorious praise.”—Ephesians 1:13-14.

It is clear, then, that while it is God who ‘makes known to us the sacred secret of his will,’ *we* must individually ‘hear the word of truth.’ *After* we believe we are then “sealed” with the holy spirit, as a “token in advance of our inheritance.” But there is

⁴¹ See also “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower*, June 15, 1960, pages 383-384; “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower*, December 1, 1974, pages 735-736.