

WHY BELIEVE “NEHEMIAH?”

An important, time-sensitive message from Dan Smithwick, president and founder of Nehemiah Institute...

Dear Friend,

In 1986 I founded the Nehemiah Institute as a non-profit, private foundation. Leading me to establish the Nehemiah Institute was a conviction for the deep need of a ministry that provides Biblical worldview training and assessment programs for Christian educators -- this was the genesis of the Nehemiah Institute, which has grown considerably over the past two decades to also serve families, churches, and Christian media outlets.

When I founded the Nehemiah Institute, the first proprietary program I developed was the worldview assessment tool called the PEERS Test. I personally developed and wrote the PEERS Test and later received theological and editorial assistance from others. After rigorous development and field testing, PEERS was honed to 70 foundational statements that deal with an individual's worldviews on Politics, Economics, Education, Religion and Social issues (PEERS).

How were the 70 worldview statements developed?

The PEERS Test worldview statements were developed by using writings of several biblical and humanist scholars who wrote articles or books on one or more of the five PEERS topics. For example, I used the authors of the *Humanist Manifesto*, published in 1933, as a basis for many humanist worldview statements. The Bible, of course, was also used to draft statements reflecting basic biblical principles for each of the five areas.

The PEERS Test was initially created for high school students, but was expanded to include materials for college students, adults, junior high and elementary grade students. There are currently five versions of the PEERS test for use among these different age groups.

The development of two unique worldview training programs

Two distinct worldview training programs were developed to provide instruction on the five topics addressed in the PEERS Test. The first program is the Position Papers. The Position Papers correlate with specific PEERS Test statements and provide biblical support as to agreement or disagreement with the PEERS statement in question. Position Papers have been developed for questions most frequently missed, which is approximately 40% of all test items.

Position Papers were developed “in house” and are available for all PEERS Test versions. Position Papers for college students were developed by Dr. Marc Clausen, now professor at Cedarville University, Cedarville, OH. As deemed necessary, the collegiate version of Position Papers is expanded each year to provide biblical teaching on additional test statements.

The second training product is a special study course: *Developing a Biblical Worldview* (DBW). I wrote the course with input from two individuals with professional training (one with Masters Degree and one with PhD) in theology and history. DBW is a ten-chapter, quick study course providing one chapter for each of the five PEERS categories, plus five additional chapters on the meaning of biblical worldview and its application in modern culture. The DBW study course is primarily used by Christian high schools as a 10th grade curriculum. It is, however, also used for youth and adult study groups in churches.

The common question... "Why should I believe the Nehemiah Institute?"

This question is raised regarding the position taken on PEERS Test statements. The question is important because the test is "scored" and subsequently ranks the individual taking the test into one of four worldview classifications: **Biblical Theism**, **Moderate Christianity**, **Secular Humanism** or **Socialism**. So, what makes Nehemiah Institute the authority on deciding the correct response to test statements? How can we accurately reveal who is a biblical theist, a Socialist, or something in between?

This is valid question, especially for schools using the PEERS Test to aid in establishing a formal letter grade for their students. The following is a description of three methods used to confirm a satisfactory degree of validity and reliability of the Peers Test. In addition, you will read testimonies from others who have used or studied the PEERS Test.

The most important assessment of the PEERS Test is the "Berean exercise." Acts 17: 10, 11 says, *The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.* When it comes to biblical teaching, I think we all need personal conviction(s) of the truthfulness of the matter, based on diligent biblical study, and not just accepting as fact what others say is correct, nor just offering an opposing view simply based on the premise... *"This is what I choose to believe."*

Methods used to determine the accuracy of validity of the PEERS Test

Method #1: Item Discrimination Test

This is a statistical method of determining if a test statement is "bad" simply by the way it is constructed. The procedure consists of using results from a broad sample of tests (we used several hundred randomly selected tests during a set three-year period) and dividing the list into two groups -- one group was those made up of the top 20% of test results and the other made up of the lowest 20% of test results. Then for each group, a calculation was made for each test question to see if the bottom group obtained a higher percentage of correct answers than the top group. If the bottom 20% of any test gets a test question correct more often than the top 20%, it is almost a certainty that there is something wrong with how the test statement is constructed.

How did the PEERS Test fair under the Item Discrimination Test?

The results of the Item Discrimination Test conducted on the PEERS Test resulted in just one of the 100 test statements "failing." This test statement was immediately discarded

and replaced with a new test statement. With 99 of 100 test items passing the Item Discrimination Test, this gave one measurement of evidence for strong validity of the PEERS Test.

Method #2: Construct Validity

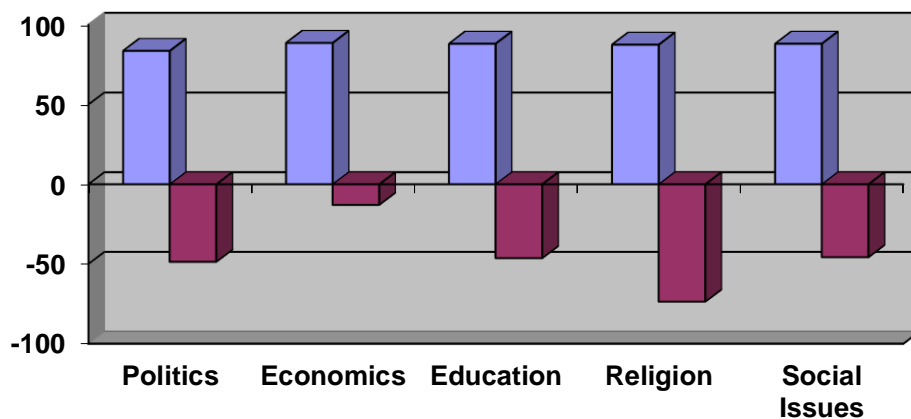
This method consists of identifying two groups of people that are well-known to have strong opposing views on a subject, or a combination of subjects, and having both groups take the PEER Test. If the test (the PEERS Test in this case) reflects the difference in views that are known to exist beforehand, then it provides another means of evidence for the test being a valid instrument.

Biblical worldview scholars vs. Humanist and New Age adherents

For this method, the two groups selected were: Biblical worldview scholars and Humanist/New Age adherents. The Biblical scholars consisted of individuals who write or teach on the subject of Biblical worldview. Some of the well-known names among this group are Dr. Ronald Nash, Dr. George Grant, Douglas Wilson, Rev. Steve Schlissel, Dr. Jay Grimstead, Dr. Calvin Biesner, Bishop William Mikler, Dr. Jeff Myers, Dr. Carole Adams, Dr. David Ayers and Dr. Henry Krabbendam. The full group was comprised of individuals from most major denominations, male, female, charismatic, and evangelical.

The Humanist/ New Age group consisted of individuals who were either staff members of Humanist or New Age organizations or subscribers to the monthly publications of either of these organizations. It was understood that staff members and subscribers of these organizations are individuals who hold strong views of the Humanist position, as published in the Humanist Manifesto.

The following chart shows the PEERS Test results from these two groups. The blue bars are the Biblical Scholars and the red bars are the Humanist/New Age adherents. The PEERS Test is constructed to rate results on a scale of -100 to +100, meaning devout Socialist to devout Biblical Theist.



It is noteworthy to mention that none of the Biblical scholar group scored below 70 (minimum score to be ranked in the Biblical Theism category) on Composite Score and only three of the Humanist group scored above zero. It was clear from this exercise that the PEERS Test accurately reflected strong differences in views from these two groups on

numerous issues in politics, economics, education, religion and social issues. Based on these findings, the study provides a second means of evidence for the validity of the PEERS Test.

Method #3: Professional Validity and Reliability Study

This is the most comprehensive and trustworthy measurement for examining the validity, accuracy and fairness of the PEERS Test. There are two parts to this study: validity and reliability. The first part requires that an “examination of tests” expert be retained to collect a panel of scholars who are considered experts in their fields, and who have experience in participating in this exercise.

For this study, in 1995, Nehemiah Institute contracted, for a fee, with Dr. Brian Ray, Professor at Oregon State University in Salem, OR. Dr. Ray conducted a professional Validity and Reliability Assessment of the PEERS Test. Dr. Ray gathered a panel of 10 experts, five who were well-known to represent a conservative Biblical view of life and five who were well-known to refute Christianity as a valid belief system. Nehemiah Institute was not allowed to know the identity of this panel.

The panel members were not required to take the PEERS test, rather their job was to respond to a questionnaire developed by Dr. Ray, which required a response to each statement on the PEERS Test. In essence, this study determines if the PEERS Test measures what it claims to measure.

The second part, reliability, required over two hundred individuals to take the PEERS Test, and without revealing their results, they had to take the test a second time after a period of several months. The intent of this was to determine if the test is constructed such that people make thoughtful responses to the test statements, or if the test is constructed so poorly that people randomly pick answers without thought or conviction about why they agree or disagree with the test statements.

In order for the PEERS Test to be used as a testing instrument in a professional education institution, the test must be deemed valid (measures what it purports to measure) and reliable (consistently produces the same or near same results for the person taking the test).

Dr. Ray’s astonishing findings were finally revealed

In 1996, Dr. Ray released the findings of his study to Nehemiah Institute via a 30-page report. The full report is available upon request. The concluding statement of the report reads:

“The PEERS Test is designed to measure the degree to which a person has or holds a biblical Christian worldview with respect to major aspects of life (i.e., political, economical, educational, religious, and social). The evidence examined during this evaluation indicates that the validity of the instrument is more than satisfactory for most purposes, and its reliability (i.e., structural consistency) is very strong. The findings of this study suggest that the PEERS Test may be successfully used for individual assessment, group assessment and research purposes.” Brian Ray, PhD

In addition to the formal procedures used to determine the validity of the PEERS Test, the following statement was given regarding the training materials developed by Nehemiah Institute to support the position taken on the PEERS Test statements.

Statement of Theological Review

To Whom It May Concern:

I have reviewed the Mission Statement and various materials published by the Nehemiah Institute, Lexington, KY, particularly their worldview tests. I do not find any statement of belief or theological position in their materials that would appear to be in conflict with or opposed to orthodox Christian views as historically expressed by the Christian church. In particular, the views expressed by the Nehemiah Institute support such matters as supernatural creation, Trinitarian theology, inerrancy of scripture, virgin birth and deity of Jesus Christ, salvation of sinful man only in Jesus Christ and the eventual second return of Jesus Christ. I believe the work of Nehemiah Institute is trustworthy and useful for the advancement of the work of the Christian church.

Consented-

Dr. David Ayers
Professor
Grove City College

Dr. Theodore Baehr
President
Christian Film & TV

Rev. Andrew Sandlin
Editor
Chalcedon

Rev. Douglas Wilson
Author/pastor
Credenda Agenda

Dr. George Grant
Author/educator
Bannockburn College

Dr. Jay Grimstead
Executive Director
Coalition on Revival

Over 100,000 PEERS Tests taken

In the past two decades, over 100,000 individuals from all 50 states and over 20 nations have taken PEERS Tests and worldview training from Nehemiah Institute.

What are people saying about PEER Testing and the Nehemiah Institute?

The following are real, unsolicited testimonials that have been submitted to Nehemiah Institute:

"We recognize the quality of your work and appreciate the time and effort you have so obviously invested in the development of this material. We are sincerely encouraged by your input and regard your inquiry as a valued compliment."

Sharon Kopf, Assistant to Dr. James Dobson, Focus on the Family

"We appreciate your work with the Nehemiah Institute and the PEERS Testing Group. Please continue to keep us up to date; we find your information extremely interesting. Your service is a valuable tool and we believe the Lord will continue to bless your endeavors."

Ken Ham, Answers in Genesis

"I want you to know that you are on the right track and I appreciate you greatly."

Dr. Ted Baehr, Christian Film & Television Commission

"Congratulations Dan, for the excellent use of the important work you have done. We are more convinced than ever that the Lord has raised you up as a

'prophet-scientist' to bring reality-awareness to the church for such a time as this."

Dr. Carol Adams, Foundation for American Christian Education

"Thank you SO much for your ministry! Your program has been a life changing course for ME and the homeschool students who took the course (including my son). I'll be offering it again this fall to additional homeschool students in our co-op. As far as I'm concerned, it should be a REQUIRED course!"

Cindy, homeschool mom, Colorado

"I just want to tell you how much of a help your products have been to me. I am a senior at a Christian high school, which I have attended all my life, and my father is a Baptist pastor. I took the PEERS Test and scored in the secular humanism category on some parts of the test. Needless to say, this disturbed me. I took the test independently and am now working through the DWB workbook. It has been a tremendous blessing to help me evaluate everything I hear or see in the light of God's Word. I tell everyone I can about you guys. Thank you!"

Anna, student, Portland, Oregon

Based on the small sampling of comments above, I feel confident stating that the PEERS Test and Nehemiah Institute's worldview training materials are highly effective tools to aid the Christian community in discipleship work. I also say with equal conviction that the PEERS Test is not a perfect instrument, will never be a perfect instrument, and should NOT be used as a sole means of assessing one's views or positions on the Christian faith. The following statement appears as a disclaimer on each PEERS Scorecard generated:

Note: These results only portray the person's general worldview philosophy based on responses to PEERS Test items. The results do not take into consideration other important qualities (integrity, faithfulness, mental aptitude, etc.) necessary for making a thorough appraisal of an individual. The PEERS Test does not, and cannot, make a judgment on an individual's personal relationship to God.
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What thinking Christian could deny the seriousness of "worldview"?

The fact that the Biblical scholar group and the Humanist/New Age group have worldviews that are diametrically opposed, as illustrated by the PEERS Test, should be of vital concern to Christian parents, pastors, and Christian educators. The PEER Test has proven that for at least 20 years our youth are increasingly moving away from Christian views and toward Humanist views. I believe a thoughtful person, upon careful study of the PEERS Test and its results could only come to the following conclusion:

The PEERS Test is accurate, relevant, timely, and the clear downward trend of youth requires immediate action.

It is my hope you find yourself in the place of action. I would be pleased to take your call regarding this report, or questions you have about the PEERS Test, or additional resources from the Nehemiah Institute. You can reach me directly at (407) 462-2725. Please take a moment to visit our website at www.nehemiahinstitute.com.

Dan Smithwick
Founder and president, Nehemiah Institute