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The 2013 Revised Jehovah's Witnesses' Bible
Is It Any Better Than the Old One?

By Tal Davis

In 1950 the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WBTS - the official corporation of Jehovah's Witnesses) published its own translation of the New Testament. They called it the New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures. In 1961, the society added the Old Testament and published them both as the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NWT). In the years before those books were released, Jehovah's Witnesses used a variety of translations, many of which were not widely circulated due to their bizarre renderings of key passages, particularly in the New Testament.

The earliest editions of the NWT were easily identified because they had a bright solid green hardcover. One critic of the book, the late William Cetnar, himself a former Jehovah's Witness, humorously referred to it as "the Green Phantom." The reason he called it that was because nowhere was it said who the committee members were that had done the translation work. They were "phantom" translators.

Many years later it became known who composed the committee. Raymond Franz (1922 - 2010), a disenchanting onetime member of the WBTS' highest ruling body (the Governing Body) provided the answer in his 1980 book, *Crisis of Conscience*. He stated that the translation committee consisted of then Governing Body members George Gangas (1897 - 1994), Albert Schroeder (1911 - 2006), Fredrick Franz (1893 - 1992), and then WBTS President, Nathan Knorr (1905 -

1977). "Fred Franz (Raymond Franz's uncle, who later became WBTS President), however, was the only one with sufficient knowledge of the Bible languages to attempt translation of this kind. He had studied Greek for two years at the University of Cincinnati, but was only self-taught in Hebrew" (*Crisis of Conscience*, 50).

In 1984, the WBTS made a few minor revisions to the 1961 edition. They replaced the ugly green cover with a more traditional black and used an easier to read text font. In any case, the newer edition had no real changes in the texts of the Old or New Testaments.

The NWT quickly became the Bible of choice (or requirement) for all Jehovah's Witnesses. The problem was that it was full of biased and, in many cases, outright distorted renderings of key biblical passages, especially those addressing the deity of Jesus Christ. Of course, the WBTS vehemently denies the full deity of Jesus Christ and the historic doctrine of the Holy Trinity. In their view, only the Father, that is Jehovah, is the one true God. Jesus was, in his preexistence, a created super angel named Michael. He was in no way equal in power or majesty to Jehovah. The WBTS also denies the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit. For them, the "holy spirit" is the non-personal active force of Jehovah (in the NWT "holy spirit" is never capitalized). We presented a detailed evaluation on the NWT on this website in 2011 (see it here: <http://www.marketfaith.org/the-jehovahs-witnesses-bible-is-it-reliable/>).

In 2013 the WBTS released a newer revised version of the NWT. I have not seen a print copy of the new

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edition. Apparently it has a white cover. Nonetheless, both the 1984 and 2013 NWT editions are available online for reading or downloading at the official Jehovah's Witnesses website: <http://www.jw.org/en/publications/bible>. The new online edition states in its foreword: "This revised edition has built on the fine foundation laid in previous editions of the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, a Bible that was first released more than 60 years ago. However, the English language has changed during the past half century. Such change prompted current members of the New World Bible Translation Committee to initiate this comprehensive revision. Our goal has been to produce a translation that is not only faithful to the original texts but also clear and easy to read."

As with the initial edition, the translation revision committee members are not named (at least nowhere that I have been able to find). We can only assume they are ranking members of the WBTS hierarchy. In any case, in this article we will examine some of the key passages in the New Testament that were in past NWT editions clearly mistranslated. We will analyze them and determine if the new revised version has corrected those biased renderings and ascertain what consequences they may have on WBTS theology.

JOHN 1:1 - We will first look at what is the most significant verse in the New Testament regarding the deity of Christ, John 1:1. The older 1984 NWT version had it this way: "In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god." The 2013 edition has it this way: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god." Notice that the 1984 edition put the definite article "[the]" in brackets in

the first phrase. The 2013 edition removes the brackets. The brackets were included to indicate that the word does not appear in any Greek text. In this case, however, the brackets were really unnecessary, as nearly every translator agrees "the" belongs there in this context.

Note however that in the ending phrase, both the 1984 and 2013 NWT editions put the indefinite article "a" before "god." The word "a" also is not in the Greek text. The problem is that no other standard translation adds that word and all credible Greek scholars agree that it does not belong there. The WBTS places it in that context so that "the Word" (the preexistent Jesus) is not regarded as equal to Jehovah God. This is a clear distortion of the text to accommodate WBTS theology. The New American Standard Bible (NASB), like most other standard English versions, renders it thusly: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The context clearly equates the Word with God.

JOHN 8:58 - Another important passage in John's Gospel is in verse 8:58. The older NWT editions rendered this verse: "Jesus said to them, 'Most truly I say to you, before Abraham came into existence, I have been.'" In this case, the 2013 version renders it exactly the same way. The NASB and nearly every other translation renders it, "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.'" The term "I am" is a definite allusion to the Old Testament name of God (YHWH or Jehovah), which is a derivative of the Hebrew word for "I am." The Jehovah's Witnesses intentionally changed the tense to disguise the self-identification of Jesus with God. We know, however, that Jesus was making the claim to deity because the Jews immediately took up stones to execute Him for what they regarded as blasphemy. The WBTS, of course, cannot tolerate that interpretation.

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ACTS 10:36 - Here is another passage where the NWT mistranslated the passage to obfuscate Jesus' deity. The NASB renders that verse: "The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)." The writer, Luke, clearly calls Jesus "Lord of all" identifying Him as equal with God. The 1984 NWT had that verse like this: "He sent out the word to the sons of Israel to declare to them the good news of peace through Jesus Christ: this One is Lord of all [others]." Notice the translators added the word "[others]" in brackets to the end of the verse. Remember, when the NWT puts a word in brackets or parentheses, it means it is not actually in the Greek text. This addition was made obviously to diminish the implication that Jesus is "Lord of all (that is, everything - not just "all [others]")" and thus is God.

Oddly enough, the latest NWT version renders Acts 10:36 as, "He sent out the word to the sons of Israel to declare to them the good news of peace through Jesus Christ - this one is Lord of all." For some reason the translators did not repeat their earlier unwarranted addition of "[others]." This translation does appear to be an improvement and the translators of the revision must have anguished over this change because they surely realize the implications of calling Jesus "Lord of all." However, appearances are not always what they seem. Note that the 2013 revision editors, after removing "[others]," also altered the phrase "this One is Lord" by using the lower case in the word "one" in order to eliminate any implication that the phrase affirms Jesus' deity.

COLOSSIANS 1:15-20 - Perhaps one of the most significant passages in the New Testament regarding the full deity of Jesus is Colossians 1:15-20.

The NASB accurately translates this passage this way:

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

The WBTS in the 1984 NWT translates that passage like this:

"15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 because by means of him all [other] things were created in the heavens and upon the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, no matter whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All [other] things have been created through him and for him. 17 Also, he is before all [other] things and by means of him all [other] things were made to exist, 18 and he is the head of the body, the congregation. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that he might become the one who is first in all things; 19 because [God] saw good for all fullness to dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile again to himself all [other] things by making peace through the blood [he shed] on the torture stake, no matter whether they are the things upon the earth or the things in the heavens."

The 2013 online edition renders it like this:

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 because by means of him all other things were created in the heavens and on the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All other things have been created through him and for him. 17 Also, he is before all other things, and by means of him all other things were made to exist, 18 and he is the head of the body, the congregation. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might become the one who is first in all things; 19 because God was pleased to have all fullness to dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all other things by making peace through the blood he shed on the torture stake, whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens.

Can you detect the subtle changes the WBTS made in the newer edition? We will examine them, but first, one phrase they did not alter is in verse 15. The WBTS interprets the word "firstborn" in verse 15 to mean "first-created" to make it conform to its theology that Jesus is a created being and is less than God. However, the firstborn (*prototokos*) principle in Hebrew parlance refers to privilege and superiority, not to priority in time. The phrase means that Jesus, as God, is superior to all creation. The verses that follow (vss. 16-19) make this interpretation evident.

So, now let's examine some changes in the 2013 NWT from 1984 and how they both contrast with the actual translation. To start with, in the 1984 and previous editions, the WBTS presumptuously added to its translation of verses 16-20 by inserting the word "[other]" five times in several verses (vss. 15, 16, 17, and 20). The word "[other]" is conspicuous because they used brackets (or parentheses) where no word appears in the Greek text. This unwarranted addition to the text was made so the passage would conform to the Jehovah's Witnesses' theological position about the preexistent Jesus. The WBTS contends that Jesus was Michael, Jehovah's first created being, and was not the ultimate creator of "all things" (*panta* or *pantas* - literally everything that exists) in the universe. According to WBTS theology Michael (Jesus) only assisted Jehovah to make all "other" things.

Many times I have shown this passage to Jehovah's Witnesses and asked them why the translators added the "[other]" words in the passage when it is not in the Greek text. Sometimes I even showed them the passage in the WBTS' own book, The Kingdom

Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures to prove the bracketed words were added without explanation in the NWT. Most of them were unaware that it was even done that way until I told them. Nonetheless, most argued that if the translators put them there they must have had good reason. Yes, from their viewpoint they did have good reason: to negate the impact of the passage asserting the deity of Jesus Christ.

Now, it is interesting to note that in the newer NWT 2013 revision the translators left the unwarranted words "other" in those five places in the text where they should not be, but quietly removed the brackets! In other words, the revision editors (whoever they were) decided that leaving the brackets on the words was an inadvertent admission that the words do not appear in the Greek text and should not be there. So, rather than having to explain why the brackets were there, they just removed them. Maybe they hoped no one would notice.

Anyway, the clear teaching of the passage, when translated as it is in Greek, is that everything that exists was created by and for Jesus, was reconciled by Jesus, and is sustained by Jesus Christ, who is the fullness of God (vs. 19; also see Colossians 2:9)!

TITUS 2:13 - Another key verse the NWT translators had to disassemble to fit their theology is Titus 2:13. The NASB, in agreement with nearly all other versions, says: "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." The verse, as properly translated, calls Christ Jesus "our great God and Savior."

In the 1984 NWT it was awkwardly rendered: "While we wait for the happy hope and glorious manifestation of the great God and of [the] Savior of us, Christ Jesus." The WBTS actually added two words to the text not found in the Greek: "of [the]." They did put [the] in brackets to acknowledge its absence in the Greek but did not do so for the word "of." They also eliminated the word "our" from before "great God" and put "of us" at the end of the sentence. Their purpose evidently was to distinguish "the great God" from "[the] Savior of us" since in WBTS theology Jesus cannot be God.

The 2013 version of the NWT has the verse like this: "while we wait for the happy hope and glorious manifestation of the great God and of our Savior, Jesus Christ." Notice that they removed entirely "[the]" in the last clause and removed "us" at the end of the sen-

tence. Nonetheless, they kept and moved the word "of" from before "us" to before "our Savior" even though "of" is not even in the Greek text at this place. They also moved the word "our," not before "great God and Savior," as in the NASB and all other standard translations, but before "Savior, Jesus Christ." The effect of this change is significant theologically. By surreptitiously locating the word "our" before "Savior, Jesus Christ" instead of where it belongs, before "great God," the WBTS is still clearly trying to distinguish "God" from, "Savior, Jesus Christ."

The phrase should correctly read as the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) has it: "while we wait for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." In other words, Jesus Christ Himself is "our great God and Savior!"

REVELATION 3:14b - One other key verse we need to examine in the NWT is Revelation 3:14b. The NASB translates that phrase like this: "The Amen (i.e.: the risen Jesus), the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God." Both the 1984 and 2013 NWT editions render the phrase as, "the Amen says, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation by God." The WBTS maintains that the verse's reference to Jesus as "the beginning of the creation" is proof that Jesus (Michael) was the first created being by Jehovah in the preexistent era.

This WBTS interpretation of this phrase, however, misses the main point the author was trying to get across to his readers (the church at Laodicea and indirectly to us). The word rendered "beginning" in the NWT (and traditionally in many other standard English translations: egs: KJV; NKJV; NASB; RSV; NSRV) is the Greek word *arche*. That term can also be translated accurately as: "source" (New English Bible); "ruler" (New International Version); Originator (HCSB); or "origin" (Good News Bible). These renderings thus fully confirm the orthodox view of Christ's divinity. The great Greek scholar A.T. Robertson commented on this phrase saying, "Not the first of creatures as the Arians held and Unitarians (and Jehovah's Witnesses) do now, but the *originating source* of creation through whom God works" (Archibald Thomas Robinson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1933, p. 321 - emphasis added).

The point of the verse is that Jesus was creation's "beginning," not as the first created thing in time, but

as its very source or origin of being (i.e. God). As I like to put it, "Jesus was the BANG in the Big Bang!"

The other problem with the WBTS' interpretation of this verse concerns their translation of the last clause *tou Theou* as "by God." No other standard translation has that phrase like that. The genitive grammatical usage requires "of God." This further suggests that Christ is the prime source or origin of God's creation, not that He Himself was created "by God."

LORD OR JEHOVAH? - Finally we come to the most grievous and presumptuous distortion found in both the 1984 and 2013 editions of the NWT New Testament. The WBTS translators inexplicably translate the common Greek words for Lord (*kurios*) and God (*Theos*) as "Jehovah" 237 times in their NWT "Christian Greek Scriptures." This unwarranted use of the Old Testament name of God (as transliterated by the WBTS) is made, however, only when *kurios* is used in the context of a reference to God in a generic sense, or when used in a passage that quotes from the Old Testament. Never is *kurios* translated as "Jehovah" in the nearly 400 times in the New Testament when it is applied as a title to Jesus Christ. There is simply no justifiable textual or linguistic bases for using "Jehovah" or for making that distinction. The word *kurios* should always be accurately translated, according to context, as "Lord" or "Master," and the word *Theos* always translated as "God." Neither Greek word can ever be translated legitimately as "Jehovah."

The New Testament writers, following Jewish tradition and the 3rd Century BC Greek Septuagint's translation of the Old Testament, understood the term *kurios* (Lord), in most cases, to be a reference to deity (Yahweh) in the fullest sense. Thus, when New Testament writers called Jesus *kurios* (Lord or Master), they were directly identifying Him with the God of the Old Testament (Yahweh or Jehovah).

It is obvious that the NWT's illegitimate use of "Jehovah" to translate *kurios* (Lord) or *Theos* (God) 237 times in generic reference to God, but never as a title of Jesus, is to reinforce the distinction between God and Jesus in the minds of uninformed Jehovah's Witnesses.

CONCLUSION

In 2013 the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, also known as Jehovah's Witnesses, released a revised edition of its English Bible called The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures. This was the first

revision of that Bible version since 1984. The WBTS stated in the foreword to the new edition that they had made the revisions in order to make the Bible more readable for a new generation. As language and word meanings have changed over the years, the WBTS indicated that some of the words and phrases used in earlier NWT editions needed updating. That rationale is true for any Bible translation version and is a common practice by all Bible publishers. Even the revered King James Version has undergone several updates over the years.

The newest version of NWT does make many minor changes in the use of some words and phrases. That being said, however, it is clearly apparent that it does not correct the many blatantly biased and erroneous translations of a number of key scriptural passages that were in the 1984 and preceding NWT editions. As we have shown, the NWT is seriously biased in its renderings of specific verses and passages to reflect the unitarian and Arianist doctrinal positions of the WBTS, especially in regards to the preexistent nature of Jesus Christ. The new edition not only fails to correct those erroneous renderings but in some instances makes those mistranslations even more obscure to the unwary reader. Thus our bottom-line conclusion is that the 2013 New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, as was also seen in previous editions, is still one of the most biased, distorted, and deceptive Bible versions ever published. The NWT is an unreliable and un scholarly corruption of God's Word. It should be avoided, condemned, and exposed by all Bible loving and believing Christians. So, is the 2013 revised Jehovah's Witnesses' Bible any better than the old one? The short answer: NO!

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