



# A Closer Look

## at the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures

### The Jehovah's Witnesses Bible

“All scripture is inspired of God.” These words of 2 Timothy 3:16 identify God, whose name is Jehovah, as the Author and Inspirer of the Holy Scriptures. How satisfyingly delightful the inspired Scriptures are! What an amazing fund of true knowledge they provide! They are indeed “the very knowledge of God” that has been sought after and treasured by lovers of righteousness in all ages—Proverbs 2:5.

*(All Scripture is Inspired of God and Beneficial, 7).*

The above statement comes from a textbook written by anonymous authors of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WBTS), the official corporation of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Most evangelical Christians would read it and find little or nothing to dispute about it. Indeed, Christians historically have affirmed the full inspiration and authority of the 66 books comprising the Protestant Bible.

The WBTS concurs:

“The sacred Scriptures, as a collection from Genesis to Revelation, form one complete Book, one complete library, all inspired by the one supreme Author...The sixty-six Bible books, *all together*, form the one library of the Holy Scriptures” (*All Scripture*, 11).

Evangelical Christians furthermore affirm the Bible as the authority for believers in all matters of faith and practice. Once again, the WBTS assumes the same authority for the Bible, in principle: “The Scriptures are God's incomparable gift to mankind, a storehouse of spiritual treasures whose depth of wisdom is unfathomable, and whose power for enlightening and stimulating to righteousness exceeds that of all other books ever written” (*All Scripture*, 8).

The discerning Christian, however, must ask, “Is the Jehovah's Witnesses' claim of biblical authority accurate?” The reality is that the Jehovah's Witnesses' assertion to be totally biblically based should be questioned at two major points. One is regarding the WBTS's *interpretation* of the Bible, and the other is regarding the WBTS's *translation* of the Bible.

#### Interpretation of the Bible

The WBTS claims that its Governing Body, its highest administrative authority, is the “faithful and discreet slave” mentioned in Matthew 24:45 (*New World Translation*). It considers itself and its publications the only legitimate channel of directly inspired leadership and the only totally correct interpreters of Scripture in the world today. Thus, the Governing Body says that only WBTS literature is reliable and can be trusted to interpret the Bible correctly.

All Christian churches, their teachers, writers, and preachers are regarded as part of the evil world system, under the control of Satan. Their interpretations are thus dismissed as flawed, corrupted, and distorted, and are never consulted except to confirm WBTS teachings. Evangelical Christians would argue that no one church or organization can claim exclusive authority to interpret the Bible. All Christians are capable, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and with proper training, to understand the Bible.

#### Translating the Bible

Christians affirm the inspiration and authority of the Bible. However, the original texts of the biblical books were not written in English. Biblical authors wrote in Hebrew, *koine* Greek, and, in a few instances, Aramaic. Thus, we do not affirm the same level of inspiration for any translation as we do for the original autographs in their original languages. Translators are obliged to carefully review the biblical texts in their original languages when doing their work. Translation is a difficult task and there is rarely universal satisfaction with the final outcome. Revisions and corrections of translations are expected. Only the original Greek and Hebrew texts are invariable.

The WBTS would probably agree, in principle, to the above statement. However, it is at this very point that we find one of the most significant differences between the WBTS and nearly every other Bible-believing movement in the world.

In 1950, the WBTS published its own English version of the New Testament, which was called *The New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures*. Translations of various Old Testament books were subsequently released as the *New World Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures*. Finally, in 1961, the entire set of WBTS translations was published as *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (NWT). Some revisions have been made since that initial edition, but the NWT essentially remains as it was originally published.

Jehovah's Witnesses regard the NWT as the best, if not the only, reliable Bible translation. It is this critical issue that concerns us here: is the NWT a truly reliable rendering of God's Word? Our contention, in agreement with some of the world's foremost biblical scholars, is that it is not. We will now examine several specific reasons why we hold this position.

#### The NWT Translation Committee

In an article on the NWT, one WBTS book states that it is “a translation of the Holy Scriptures made directly from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek into modern-day English by a committee of anointed witnesses of Jehovah” (*Reasoning From the Scriptures*, 276).

One might naturally ask, “If that is so, just who were the translators on the committee who were so qualified to make such an audacious claim to be ‘anointed?’” Surprisingly, in the same book, in direct answer to that question, the following statement is made: “When presenting as a gift the publishing rights to their translation, the New World Bible Translation Committee requested that its members remain anonymous. The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania has honored their request” (*Reasoning*, 277).

The truth is that nowhere in the NWT or any WBTS literature are the names of the translators revealed; and while it is true that some other Bible translations such as the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB) do not list their translators in their editions, only the NWT and the WBTS will not send the names to curious inquirers upon written request.

So, do we know who the NWT translators were? The answer is yes, we do know, despite the WBTS' refusal to release the names. Raymond Franz is a former member of the WBTS Governing Body. In his book, *Crisis of Conscience*, he states that the translation committee consisted of Governing Body members George Gangas, Albert Schroeder, Fredrick Franz, and then WBTS President, Nathan Knorr.

“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 in the University of Cincinnati but was only self-taught in Hebrew” (*Crisis of Conscience*, 50).

The fact is, none of the members of the NWT committee, including Fredrick Franz, were really qualified to make a scholarly translation from the original languages. No one on the committee had more than a rudimentary familiarity with Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic. This lack of expertise is clearly revealed in the poor, biased quality of the NWT's renderings of many key biblical passages.

#### The Name of God

The WBTS teaches that God is a unitary being who created the universe. It states correctly that God revealed His personal name to Moses in the Old Testament. That name in Hebrew consists of four Hebrew consonants called by biblical scholars (Jewish and Christian) as the Tetragrammaton. In Hebrew it is written thusly: יהוה (HWHY—note: Hebrew is read from right to left).

Many attempts have been made to transliterate the Tetragrammaton in English and other languages. None are adequate since it is not known exactly how it was originally pronounced. Most biblical scholars believe that “Yahweh” is closest to the original pronunciation.

The WBTS, however, traditionally has maintained that the best English transliteration is rendered “Jehovah.” Thus, in the NWT, 6,974 times where the Tetragrammaton appears in the Hebrew text (Old Testament), it renders the name of God as Jehovah.

Most Hebrew scholars find no serious fault with this NWT usage in the Old Testament. Indeed, some older English translations did likewise, including *the American Standard Version* (1901). The King James Version translators used “Jehovah” in only four instances (see Ex. 6:3; Ps. 83:18; Isa. 12:2; 26:4). They, like most modern translators, preferred to render the Tetragrammaton by the capitalized designation LORD in keeping with ancient Jewish tradition to avoid pronouncing (or mispronouncing) the sacred name of God.

Consider this statement from the “Principles of Translation” of the NASB:

In the Scriptures, the name of God is most significant and understandably so. It is inconceivable to think of spiritual matters without a proper designation for the Supreme Deity. Thus the most common name for the Deity is God, a translation of the original *Elohim*. One of the titles for God is Lord, a translation of *Adonai*. There is yet another name which is particularly assigned to God as His special or proper name, that is, the four letters YHWH (Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 42:8). This name has not been pronounced by the Jews because of reverence for the great sacredness of the divine name. Therefore, it has been consistently translated **Lord**. The only exception to this translation of YHWH is when it occurs in immediate proximity to the word Lord, that is, *Adonai*. In that case it is regularly translated **God** in order to avoid confusion.

It is known that for many years YHWH has been transliterated as Yahweh, however, no complete certainty attaches to this pronunciation (NASB, iv).

The WBTS has criticized this practice as indicative of Jewish and Christian attempts to obscure the sacred name of Jehovah God from its people. It argues that it demonstrates the satanic nature of modern religious practice.

Granted, some Christian scholars acknowledge that the use of LORD instead of the sacred name is unwarranted and that perhaps Yahweh or Jehovah should be the standard English transliteration. That being said, the WBTS contention that the Tetragrammaton is somehow the exclusive sacred name of God is also unwarranted. In fact, in the Old Testament, several other common names for God are used in Hebrew including *Elohim* (a generic word for God); *El* (a shorter form of Elohim); and other combinations of terms such as *El-Elyon* (God Most High) and *El-Shaddai* (God Almighty).

The WBTS makes a reasonable case for using the sacred name in the Old Testament and criticizing those who do not. However, in the WBTS's translation of the New Testament, which is called The Christian Greek Scriptures, there is an even more grievous and presumptuous error. The NWT inexplicably translates the common Greek words for Lord (κύριος, *kurios*) and God (Θεός, *Theos*) as "Jehovah" 237 times in the New Testament. This unwarranted substitutionary use of the Old Testament name of God is made, however, only when *kurios* is used in the context of a clear reference to God in a generic sense, or when used in a passage that is a quote from the Old Testament. However, not once do they translate *kurios* 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 legitimate textual or linguistic basis for making that distinction. The word *kurios* should always be accurately translated, according to context, as "Lord" or "Master", and the word *Theos* as God, but neither ever translated as "Jehovah".

The reason for the NWT committee's placement of this name of God in the New Testament is obvious to anyone who understands Jehovah's Witnesses theology. The WBTS, since its inception over a century ago, has totally rejected the key doctrines of the Holy Trinity and the full deity of Jesus Christ. As a result, in its literature, and especially in its translation of the Bible, the WBTS has sought to obscure the clear New Testament teachings of those truths. This deliberate concealment is obvious when one makes a simple comparison of the NWT to the word-for-word translation of the Westcott and Hort Greek Text in the WBTS' own book *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures*.

The 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 clearly done to reinforce the distinction between God and Jesus in the minds of uninformed Jehovah's Witnesses. The truth is that the New Testament writers, following Jewish tradition in the Greek Septuagint's translation of the Old Testament, understood the term *kurios* (Lord), in most cases, to be a reference to deity in the fullest sense. Thus, when New Testament writers call Jesus "Lord," they are identifying Him with the God of the Old Testament (Yahweh or Jehovah).

The WBTS' denial of Jesus' deity is evidenced in numerous biased and inaccurate renderings of key passages by the NWT translators. Consider the following examples:

- John 1:1  
The NWT renders this verse: "In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god."

Nearly every other standard English translation agrees with that of the NASB: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

- John 8:58  
The NWT renders this verse: "Jesus said to them, 'Most truly I say to you, before Abraham came into existence, I have been.'"  
The NASB renders it, "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.'"  
The term "I am" (Greek: ἐγώ εἰμι, *ego eimi*) is a definite allusion to the Old Testament name of God (YHWH), which is a derivative of the word for "I am."
- Acts 10:36  
The NWT translates this verse: "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]."  
The NASB renders it: "The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)."
- Titus 2:13  
Rendered in the NWT: "While we wait for the happy hope and glorious manifestation of the great God and of [the] Savior of us, Christ Jesus."  
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."

Each of the above biblical examples, as well as many others, demonstrate the conscious effort by the NWT translators to deny the full deity of Jesus Christ in accordance with WBTS doctrine. For other examples, see the Interfaith Evangelism brochures "Belief Bulletin—Jehovah's Witnesses (0840089554) and "A Closer Look at the Jehovah's Witnesses' View of Christ" (0840089155).

### Conclusion

The WBTS maintains that its English translation of the Bible, *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, is the best version ever produced. The evidence does not bear that conclusion. Actually, the facts show that the NWT ranks as one of the most unscholarly and biased Bible versions ever produced.

Unfortunately, millions of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide are required to consult the NWT exclusively. Thus, only the doctrinal biases and distortions of the WBTS are absorbed by faithful Jehovah's Witnesses.

Christians must help them understand the reasons why the NWT cannot be trusted. Christians need to demonstrate the problems of the NWT and point to clear biblical teachings from accurate Bible versions. This is especially critical when addressing key doctrines such as the nature of God, the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the way of salvation. Salvation comes only by repentance of sin and receiving the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ (see Eph. 2:8-9).

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