

The Jehovah's Witnesses' New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures – Part 6

by Dr. John Ankerberg and Dr. John Weldon

Examples of Mistranslation—continued

In the following material we have utilized the Watchtower Society's *New World Translation* [NWT] and *Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures* (1969). It gives the Greek text, a word for word English translation below the Greek text, and, has a column containing the *New World Translation* to the right.

In the following examples we have provided the *New World Translation* and the *New American Standard* translation so the reader may make a quick comparison prior to a brief discussion. The NWT mistranslation is supplied in capital letters for emphasis.

12. **Philippians 1:23** [The word “depart” is translated as “releasing” to support a belief in soul sleep.]

I am under pressure from these two things; but what I do desire is the
RELEASING and the being with Christ.... NWT

But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and
be with Christ, for that is very much better. NAS

Walter Martin states:

The rendering, “but what I do desire is the releasing,” particularly the last word, is a gross imposition upon the principles of Greek exegesis because the untutored Russellites have rendered the first aorist active infinitive of the verb *analuoo* (*analusaí*) as a substantive (the releasing), which in this context is unscholarly and atrocious Greek. In order to translate it “the releasing” the form would have to be the participle construction (*analusas*).¹

(Martin also shows that in 2 Timothy 4:6 the Witnesses *accept* the similar form of the same word as meaning death, but they cannot do so in Philippians 1:23 for reasons of theological bias.)

13. **Matthew 24:3** [The word “coming” as “presence” to justify the “invisible presence” of Jesus theory.]

...Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your PRESENCE and of the conclusion of the system of these things? NWT

...Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age? NAS

The Greek word *parousia* according to its context should be translated *coming*. (It can be translated “presence” but context must determine which is correct.) Martin states:

Jehovah’s Witnesses claim scholarship for this blanket translation of *parousia*, yet not one great scholar in the history of Greek exegesis and translation has ever held this view. Since 1871, when Pastor Russell produced this concept, upon examination, it has been denounced by every competent scholar. The reason this Russellite rendering is so dangerous is that it attempts to prove that *parousia*, in regard to Christ’s second advent, really means that His return or “presence” was to be invisible and unknown to all but “the faithful” (Russellites, of course)... To conclude that presence necessarily implies invisibility is also another flaw in the Watchtower’s argument, for in numerous places where they render *parousia* “presence,” the persons spoken of were hardly invisible. (See 1 Co. 16:17, 2 Co. 7:6; and 10:10.)²

Thus, in the *New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon* under the word *parousia* we find these comments: “In the N.T., esp. of the advent, i.e., the future, visible, return from heaven of Jesus, the Messiah, to raise the dead, hold the last judgment, and set up formally and gloriously the kingdom of God: Mt. 24:3.”³

14. [The Translation of the YHWH as Jehovah.]

We can see biased translations in other areas as well, even in the Witnesses’ own term *Jehovah* which is so important to them as allegedly signifying the “true” name of God. The NWT adds Jehovah to the New Testament text over 200 times, in spite of the fact that “Jehovah” is not found anywhere in the Bible, New or Old Testament. Yet they claim the New Testament originals were “tampered with” and that the tetragrammaton (YHWH) was surreptitiously removed, substituting *kurios* (Lord) and *theos* (God). The fact is that YHWH never occurs in any New Testament Greek manuscripts and in only *one* Septuagint copy.⁴ There is simply no evidence of tampering.⁵

The truth is that YHWH can be translated different ways since the insertion of vowels is arbitrary. YHWH could have been Jehovah or JiHiViH or JaHiVeH, etc. In other words, the translation of *kurios* and *theos* as JEHOVAH in the *New World Translation* (237 times) is a completely unjustified translation. We simply do not know the “true” name of God. Metzger observes: “The introduction of the word ‘Jehovah’ into the New Testament text, in spite of much ingenuity in an argument filled with a considerable amount of irrelevant material (p. 10-25), is a plain piece of special pleading.”⁶

There is another obvious reason for using “Jehovah” in place of “Lord”; it thereby denies the deity of Christ where the term “Lord” (applied to Jesus) connotes the meaning of Jehovah in the Old Testament. Often, when the New Testament refers to

Christ as “Lord,” it is associating Him with Jehovah in the Old Testament. The Watchtower Society has even had to be inconsistent in its translation, translating *kurios* variously as “Jehovah” or “Lord” to suit their own theology. For example, if we look at *The Kingdom Interlinear* (p. 723) for Romans 10:11, *kurios* is translated Lord, but in verse 13 the same word, *kurios* (which here clearly refers to Jesus), is now translated “Jehovah” rather than “Lord” or “Jesus.” In both places the term Lord refers to Jesus and connotes His deity but the *New World Translation* hides this by the translation of “Lord” in verse 11 and “Jehovah” in verse 13 implying the entire section refers to Jehovah—but not to Jesus. Likewise, Philippians 2:10-11 clearly refers to Jesus and is based on Isaiah 45:22-25, referring to Jehovah (see Rom. 14:9-11). Yet if *kurios* were translated Jehovah in Philippians 2 it would mean Jesus is identified with Jehovah, and the Watchtower Society could not permit such a translation. Hence, *kurios* is here translated “Lord.” Thus, it is only where *kurios* can be translated Jesus and not simultaneously imply His deity, that it is so translated.

15. [Additional Examples]

In addition to the above examples, we may note that Professor Gruss observes a number of other errors in translation.⁷ In Matthew 24:6, 14; 1 Peter 4:7; 2 Corinthians 11:15; Revelation 19:20 and elsewhere words are added that are not in the Greek. And despite the claim to not engage in paraphrasing, the *New World Translation* repeatedly paraphrases when Scripture refers to believers being “in Christ.” All believers everywhere can be in Christ only if Jesus is God. But in the NWT the term “in Christ” (Greek *en*) is often mistranslated, e.g., as “in union with” (Christ) or something similar. The Witnesses then interpret this to mean a union of purpose rather than an “organic” spiritual union.

Gruss comments:

With the same Greek word being translated properly in every case except when it refers to the believer’s personal relationship with Christ, it must be concluded that the translator’s paraphrasing is nothing less than interpretation. One loses confidence in a translation which professes to be literal when it is replete with biased paraphrases.⁸

In Philippians 3:11 the Greek *exanastasis* (resurrection) is erroneously translated “earlier resurrection.” And, in John 13:18, 17:12, 19:24 and 19:36 the exact same Greek words are translated four different ways. Robert H. Countess refers to additional mistranslations.⁹

Our only conclusion is that the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society can hardly be concerned with accurately translating the New Testament in light of such examples.

So far we have referred to the New Testament portion of the *New World Translation*. What of the Old Testament? Although space does not permit illustrations, according to reviewers it is not much improved. In his discussion, British scholar H. H. Rowley asserts, “From beginning to end this volume is a shining example of how the Bible should not be translated. . . .” and he calls it “an insult to the Word of God.”¹⁰ Gruss points out that their translation of the Old Testament has the same basic purpose as that of the New, to justify preconceived Watchtower theology.¹¹

We should emphasize again that our analysis of the *New World Translation* here is not a result of “biased trinitarian theology” as Witnesses are fond of claiming. If those quoted above are biased it is toward a respect for rules of grammar and divine revelation. A Christian should feel free to challenge a Witness by appealing to non-Christian authorities at this point. Any university Greek professor could be consulted for his view of the *New World Translation* at John 1:1, Matthew 25:46, etc.

In conclusion, the above examples represent only a small percentage of the mistranslations and biases of the *New World Translation*. We must now ask, “Has the Watchtower Society passed or failed the test of accurately translating the Bible?” If it has failed, as it has, it cannot claim either adherence to or a respect for divine revelation. And if it has no respect for God’s Word, can it possibly be the sole channel through which God has chosen to operate on earth?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Brown, Colin (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973).
2. *Caris* Newsletter, May 1978, Vol. 2, no. 2 & 3 (Santa Ana, CA: CARIS, 1978).
3. Countess, Robert, *The Jehovah’s Witnesses New Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1983).
4. Dana, H. E. and Mantey, Julius, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto, Canada: MacMillan, 1957).
5. Gruss Edmond, *Apostles of Denial* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976).
6. Hoekema, Anthony, *The Four Major Cults* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960).
7. Mantey, Julius, *Depth Exploration in the New Testament* (NY: Vantage Press, 1980).
8. Martin, Walter, *Jehovah of the Watchtower* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1974).
9. Robertson, Archibald T., *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1930).
10. Turner, Nigel, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (Edinburg: T and T. Clark, 1965).
11. Thayer, J. H., *New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon* (Wilmington, DE: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1977).
12. Trench, R. C., *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978).
13. Van Buskirk, Michael, *The Scholastic Dishonesty of the Watchtower* (Santa Ana, CA: CARIS, 1976).
14. Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1969).
15. _____, *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1961).
16. _____, *All Scripture is Inspired by God and Beneficial* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1963).

17. _____, *Make Sure of All Things Hold Fast to That Which is Fine* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1965).
18. Wilson, Benjamin, *The Emphatic Diaglott New Testament*, Interlinear Edition (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1942).
19. Wuest, Kenneth, *Word Studies in Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971).

Notes

- ¹ Walter Martin, *Jehovah of the Watchtower* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1974), p. 136.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 141.
- ³ J. H. Thayer, *New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* (Wilmington, DE: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1977), p. 490.
- ⁴ Robert Countess, *The Jehovah's Witnesses New Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1983), p. 23; Edmund Gruss, *Apostles of Denial* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976), pp. 198-99.
- ⁵ Gruss, pp. 198-200; Martin, pp. 129-31.
- ⁶ Bruce Metzger, *The Bible Translator*, July 1964, p. 152, cited in Gruss, p. 200.
- ⁷ Gruss, pp. 200-205.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 201.
- ⁹ Countess, ch. 6.
- ¹⁰ Rowley, "How Not to Translate the Bible," *The Expository Times*, Nov. 1953, pp. 41-42, cf., Jan. 1956, p. 107; cited by Gruss, *Apostles of Denial*, pp. 212-13.
- ¹¹ Gruss, p. 213.