

# "The Λογος was God," John 1:1

A few errors of the Jehovah's Witnesses

I've been studying and discussing religion with people for over sixty years. I never cease to be amazed at the eagerness of some to accept any meaning for the words in the Bible, constrained only by their personal desires. I write this as a reminder to me and all who read this that we, too, may fall victim to this subtle and seductive vice. It is such a temptation because it takes little or no effort and it eliminates two difficult, time consuming and sometimes painful aspects of the Christian life: 1) Bible study and 2) personal change.

Bible study requires effort, time and, oft times a personal change in actions or thinking. All these represent the pain before the gain. Remember any beneficial result is attained only by paying the price. Usually the benefit is in direct proportion to the price, the greater the benefit the greater the price required and, in most cases, vice versa.

I am writing this, not to convert any Jehovah's Witness but to strengthen your conviction on this subject and prepare you to assist your family and friends in rejecting this false religion *before* your family and friends become entangled in it.

The Jehovah's Witnesses deny that Jesus was God. This sounds so foreign to any who are even casually acquainted with the scriptures that our first thought is to throw up our hands in utter exasperation and walk away. But we simply cannot do this. There are souls at stake. Maybe the souls of some of your family or friends. We must try to understand why they have reached this conclusion and prepare ourselves to explain *why* they are wrong.

John 1:1 says "***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.***" That last clause should end all questions. We must, however, respond to their explanation of this clause.

The Greek says "**και θεος ην ο λογος.**" A word-for-word translation is "and God was the word." They correctly note that the definite article "the" (Greek ο) before the word God (θεος) is missing, and *incorrectly* deduce that the indefinite article "a" should be inserted. They therefore translate the passage as "and the word was a god" and *incorrectly* deduce from Col. 1:15 "...the firstborn of all creation" that the Logos was the first thing that God created. They then mistranslate Philippians 2:6 as "[he] ...gave no consideration to a seizure, namely, that he should be equal to God." Finally they ignore the plain and clear context and erroneously say that Proverbs 8:22 is referring to Jesus. Their errors here are many, varied and egregious.

*In the first place*, the absence of the Greek definite article does NOT imply that the indefinite article "a" should be used. Anyone with even a limited knowledge of Greek

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can read in English about the Greek definite article and learn that it's absence does not imply inserting "a" in the translation. A simple search on the Internet will produce enough information from those knowledgeable in Greek to explain this fact. Please see the appendix from two Greek scholars to clarify this point.

When the missing definite article is noticed we must think: "What must we conclude from that fact?" If in the Greek you must insert an "a" instead of the "the," then we must look at how the Jehovah's Witness Diaglott (a Greek interlinear, translated and published by the Jehovah's Witnesses in 1942) translates three other passages from John and the one from Romans which also do not have the definite article before the noun "God.". The translation in the Diaglott says:

John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God.*

John 1:6 *There was a man named John, send from God.*

John 1:12 *but as many as received him, he gave Authority to become children of God, to THOSE BELIEVING IN HIS*

*NAME,*

John 1:13 *who were begotten not of blood nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man but of God.*

Romans 9:5 *...;He who is over all, God blessed to the ages*

In all five verses the Greek word God does *not* have the definite article and four verses are translated correctly, even in their own translation (The New world Translation, 1950, revised May 1951), as "God" not "a god." This inconsistency, that θεος without the article requires a translation of "a god" in John 1:1 but not in 1:6, 1:12, 1:13, or Romans 9:5 is impossible for them to explain logically.

*In the second place* we should check various translations and see how many agree that this word "God" in John 1:1 should be translated as "a god." The following translations all use "God," not "a god" to translate θεος:

John Wycliffe bible of 1382, John Purvey bible of 1395, William Tyndale bibles of 1526 and 1534, The Geneva Bible of 1599, King James Bible of 1769, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, Weymouth, NIV, KJV, NKJV, American KJV, Phillips, NEB, McCord, Recovery version, RSV - Catholic Edition, Confraternity version, Numeric English New Testament, Living Gospels - paraphrased, The Living Oracles, Jerusalem Bible, The Easy to Read Version, The Amplified Bible, Young's Literal Translation, The Revised Berkeley Version, Goodspeed, \* The Diaglott. \* *A total of 31 translations.*

Please note that the Diaglott is an interlinear, translated and published by Jehovah's Witnesses (1942). Even it translates the clause as "and the logos was God."

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The only two exceptions are: 1) Moffatt's translation: "the logos was divine." This is acceptable but misleading as divine means "of or pertaining to a god, especially the Supreme Being." (the American College Dictionary) and could possibly be misunderstood. 2) The New world Translation (1950) of the Jehovah's Witnesses is the only one which says "and the Word was a god."

I leave it to the reader to decide why every translation for 600 years (from John Wycliffe Bible of 1382) said "and the word was God" and only the Jehovah's Witness translation in 1950 says "... a god."

Although it is true that every translation is done by men and therefore may contain an error (or in some cases several) we must note that, in this case, there is unanimous agreement among hundreds of scholars over 600 years. To overturn all this scholarship we must have very strong and clear evidence. --- We certainly have no strong nor clear evidence (some would say we have no evidence at all) that "a god" is the correct translation.

We must also consider the implications if we side with *a god* as the correct translation. This implies that God allowed all the translations for over 600 years to convey the incorrect information that Jesus was God!! This also means that there was NO way for English speakers to obtain the correct information until 1952, which also implies that God did not care if we had the truth or not for over 600 years!! Can any reasonable person accept these necessary implications from this translation (a god) from "**και θεος ην ο λογος ?**"

*In the third place*, what does "a god" mean? How do you define "a god"? The indefinite article "a" is just that, *indefinite!!!* The indefinite article only has meaning if there are more than one of something. It means one of many, or one of several or at least one of a group larger than one! Do the Jehovah's Witnesses mean that they believe the Logos is just one member of a group of equal gods? Because if the members of the group are not equals then they are not in the same group. Do they believe in more than one being with the same power, knowledge, love, function (dying for our sins), and value (able to pay the price for our sins)? Is there more than one being who could have died for our sins? Is there more than one being who is interceding for us at God's right hand? Rom. 8:34 (Yes there is another one, the Holy Spirit, Romans 8:26. Do they claim the Holy Spirit is another example of "a god? If so, based on what evidence?) Is there more than one being whom the angels should worship? Hebrews 1:5-14 (especially v.6) Is there more than one being who is one with the father? John 10:30 "**I and the Father are one.**" Is there more than one being who has been given "**all authority in heaven and on earth**" Matt. 28:18 Is there more than one being who taught that he was equal to God? John 5:18 "**For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.**" Is there more than one being who is the "**only begotten son of God**"? Is there

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more than one being who had a virgin birth? Is there more than one being who is called ο θεος (the Greek letter "ο" is the definite article *the*), as in John 20:28 (and check out Jesus' answer in verse 29)?

If there was only one such being then these verses prove that Jesus was/is unique, and therefore he cannot be "a" god, but in reality he must be .....God, and the translation "and the word was God" in John 1:1 is correct.

In the fourth place verse 3 of John 1 says "**All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.**" In the Jehovah's Witnesses' New world Translation we have "**all things came into existence through him, and apart from him not even one thing came into existence.**" Yet they say that the logos was "a god" created, brought into existence, by God the father, apart from the logos. This is in direct contradiction to what John says in verse 3.

If everything that came into existence did so by or through him (the Logos) then the Logos cannot have *come into* existence at all! This implies that the "him" spoken of has eternal existence. This implies that "the Logos was God" must be the correct translation of John 1:1. To emphasize this fact the Holy Spirit had John write the additional clause "**apart from him not even one thing came into existence**" "Not even one thing," not even the Logos himself.

This means that the Logos did not come into existence at all, but always was! The only alternative is for our opponents to substantiate the proposition that from nonexistence the Logos created himself before he created everything else! Please ponder this last sentence, it is devastating to the position that the Logos was created

In the fifth place, they misunderstand *Col. 1:15*. Please read the context in the following three translations.

## NIV

**13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.**

## ASV

**13 who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love; 14 in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins: 15 who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 for in him were all things**

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*created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him; 17 and he is before all things, and in him all things consist.*

## **KJV**

*13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: 14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: 15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: 16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: 17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.*

(Please forgive this rather long parenthetical statement, but verse 13 must be noted. Paul says to the Colossians that Christ “*brought us into,*” “*translated us into,*” “*hath translated us into*” the kingdom of His dear son. These verbs are in the past tense, meaning it happened in the past relative to when Paul wrote this letter. Therefore the kingdom existed in the first century and the Colossian Christians were in it. The idea that the kingdom did not exist and does not exist and will not exist until Christ’s return (followed by the 1000 year reign) is contrary to scripture, logic and common sense!)

Now look at verse 15 “*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation [or of all creation, or of every creature] .*” What does “firstborn” mean? When understood literally it means the first child born of a woman or an animal. In several places the word is used to mean the oldest son, or oldest child; the one born first. If taken literally here in verse 15 the following prepositional phrase tells us the group from which the “firstborn” comes. In this verse it would mean the first one to come from “all creation” or the first one to come from “every creature.” All this implies that Christ was the first creature or the first one produced from “all creation.” Thus implying that Christ came from, or after, the other things created. But this clearly contradicts John 1:1-3. Therefore *firstborn* cannot be taken literally here.

Remember John 1:3b says “...and without him was not anything made that hath been made.” If John 1:3 is true then Christ was not made, because anything that was made was made through Christ. If Christ was not “made” or “created” then he was/is eternal.

*In the sixth place,* this idea of taking the word *firstborn* literally also contradicts the following two verses, 16 and 17, which say the same things as John 1:3. Notice that the first word of verse 16 is “for.” This means that verse 16 is going to tell us why he is said to be the *firstborn*. “For [or because] in him all things were created.” This says that he was called the *firstborn* because everything that was created was created through him (Christ). This means that if Christ was a created being then he was created through

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himself, in other words, he created himself (from nothing) because everything that was created, was created by or through him. Only the totally unreasonable could see reason in this thought?

These "all things" of v.16 even includes: "... *all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him; 17 and he is before all things, and in him all things consist.* This constant repetition of who created "all" things, and what the "all things" consist of, is so that "men are without excuse," Romans 1:18-20. It is plain to all who love the truth. Therefore this word "firstborn" must be taken figuratively, the meaning of this figurative word is given in verse 16. He is the firstborn of all creation in the sense of being the creator of all things. He is before all things, ... *all things not some things or most things but in reality, ...ALL things.* Including all things in heaven and on earth, both visible and invisible. Again emphasizing the totality of all that was created, was done by or through Christ, or the Logos as in John 1:1-3.

*In the seventh place,* another reason to understand *firstborn* figuratively is that it is also used in verse 18 in the phrase "firstborn from among the dead." This too is figurative because Christ was not the first one to be "born" from the dead, because Lazarus, the widow of Nain's son, Luke 7:11-16 and, of course the many saints who, at the crucifixion, came from the tombs, Matthew 27:22-24. Therefore this instance of the word *firstborn* must also be taken figuratively, meaning not literally "first" but first in the sense that he was the first to be born from the dead, *never to die* again. Or *firstborn* in sense of being the most important, the best, which this word can also mean, as in Romans 8:29 and Hebrews 1:6. This verse simply adds weight to all previous evidence that *firstborn* in v. 15 must also be understood figuratively.

*In the eighth place* they grossly mistranslate Philippians 2:5-11, which says "***Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***" - NIV

KJV - v. 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:  
NKJV - v. 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to

be grasped,

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AKJV - v. 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

ASV - v. 6 who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a

thing to be grasped,

NASB - v. 6 who , although he existed in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God a

thing to be grasped.

RSV - v. 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

WEY - v. 6 Although from the beginning He had the nature of God He did not reckon His

equality with God a treasure to be tightly grasped.

YLT - v. 6 who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal to God,

Jerusalem Bible - v. 6 "His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God.

Now compare all these translations to the New World translation of the Jehovah's Witnesses: "*who, although he was existing in God's form, gave no consideration to a seizure, namely, that he should be equal to God.*"

All of our decisions must be made based on the most or best evidence else we are saying that God supported the truth with less evidence than a false alternative. You have the evidence from many translations versus one translation by a special group with a vested interest in a particular, yea even a unique meaning. The conclusion should be obvious; but there is even more evidence to follow.

The difference in translations is apparent. It all hinges on the translation of the word ἀρπαγμα (a thing to be grasped). Our standard Greek lexicons are needed to understand this word. They are:

**Thayer's**, p. 74 "2. a thing seized or to be seized, booty: ἀρπαγμα ηγειθαι τι to deem anything a prize, -- a thing to be seized upon or held fast, retained, Phil. 2:6

**BDAG**, 3rd ed., p.133. After several options the writer ends the explanation under (2) with this translation of Phil. 2:6: "did not consider equality with God a prize to be tenaciously grasped."

**TDNT**, V1, p. 474 After discarding two other possibilities for the meaning he then says "This leaves only c. which gives the rendering: "He did not regard equality with God as a gain, either in the sense of something not to be let slip, or in the sense of something not to be left unutilized." after further comments he ends with this summary: "Jesus did not regard equality with God as a gain to be utilized."

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These Lexicons are unanimous in declaring the equality of Jesus with God and his (Jesus') desire not to keep this equality grasped tenaciously but "let it slip" or to be "unutilized" as he emptied himself to become a man ... our savior!

Once again our opponents offer no evidence to support their *unique* translation.

In the ninth place Proverbs 8:22-36 is misapplied to Jesus. The passage says:

*22 ¶ Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, Before his works of old.  
23 I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, Before the earth was.  
24 When there were no depths, I was brought forth, When there were no fountains abounding with water.  
25 Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills was I brought forth;  
26 While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, Nor the beginning of the dust of the world.  
27 When he established the heavens, I was there: When he set a circle upon the face of the deep,  
28 When he made firm the skies above, When the fountains of the deep became strong,  
29 When he gave to the sea its bound, That the waters should not transgress his commandment, When he marked out the foundations of the earth;  
30 Then I was by him, as a master workman; And I was daily his delight, Rejoicing always before him,  
31 Rejoicing in his habitable earth; And my delight was with the sons of men.  
32 ¶ Now therefore, my sons, hearken unto me; For blessed are they that keep my ways.  
33 Hear instruction, and be wise, And refuse it not.  
34 Blessed is the man that heareth me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at the posts of my doors.  
35 For whoso findeth me findeth life, And shall obtain favor of Jehovah.  
36 But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: All they that hate me love death.*

No other response is needed but to read the context!! Start at v. 12

*12 ¶ I wisdom have made prudence my dwelling, And find out knowledge and discretion.  
13 The fear of Jehovah is to hate evil: Pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, And the perverse mouth, do I hate.  
14 Counsel is mine, and sound knowledge: I am understanding; I have might.  
15 By me kings reign, And princes decree justice. 16 By me princes rule, And nobles, even all the judges of the earth. 17 I love them that love me; And those that*

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*seek me diligently shall find me. 18 Riches and honor are with me; Yea, durable wealth and righteousness. 19 My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; And my revenue than choice silver. 20 I walk in the way of righteousness, In the midst of the paths of justice; 21 That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance, And that I may fill their treasuries. 22 ¶ Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, Before his works of old.*

Please note that all the first person singular pronouns refer to wisdom. This is just a figure of speech, a personification of wisdom. Nothing more, nothing less. Just read it from v. 12 and at each first person singular pronoun ask yourself who or what noun is represented by the pronoun.

To strengthen this conclusion read into the next chapter at verse 1 where the subject continues: *1 ¶ Wisdom hath builded her house; She hath hewn out her seven pillars:*

## Summary

The consensus of all translations give "...and the word was God" as the correct rendering of John 1:1. The reason for this is the clear rules of Greek grammar which explain why the definite article "the" is not in the Greek of John 1:1. This Greek and contextual evidence is overwhelming and consistent. See the appendix for additional support.

In Colossians 1:15 the figurative meaning of "most important" or "the one in charge" for *firstborn* is clear from the context (v. 16 & 18). This meaning is also required by the teachings of John 1:3.

The consensus of translations for Philippians 2:6 again show the New World Translation of the Jehovah's Witnesses to be in error. A study of the Greek word ἀρπαγμασ supports the common translation as "...did not regard equality with God something to be held onto..."

A simple reading of the context of Proverbs 8, starting from verse 12, clearly establishes the noun to which all the first person singular pronouns refer is wisdom personified, not Jesus. This is so obvious you would need help to misunderstand it.

If you think this evidence is not enough to prove that Jesus was equal to God then you need more and better evidence to prove otherwise, else you have God supporting the truth with less evidence than a false alternative. I beg you to study this evidence with care and an open mind.

## Appendix

# "The Λογος was God," John 1:1

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The following article on the use of the definite article in Greek from the web sites:

- 1) [ibiblio.org/koine/greek/lessons/eimi.html](http://ibiblio.org/koine/greek/lessons/eimi.html),
- 2) [carm.org/jw/john1\\_1.htm](http://carm.org/jw/john1_1.htm)

## Articles and predicates:

At the start of this course, we read John 1:1, which contains the following phrase:

John 1:1c **και θεος ην ο λογος** (...and God is the word)

The subject normally has the article; the predicate does not. In Greek, as in English, both the subject and the predicate are nominative, so the cases do not distinguish subject from predicate. Instead, the article is used to identify the subject: the noun with the article is the subject, the noun without the article is the predicate. In English, the subject comes before the predicate, so when we translate this we must change the word order: ...And the Word was God.

Note that "the Word was God" does not mean the same thing as "God was the Word", so it is important to correctly identify the subject before translating.

## A GROSSLY MISLEADING TRANSLATION

An article by Julius Robert Mantey, A.B., Th.D., Ph.D., D.D.

John 1:1 which reads "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God," is shockingly mistranslated, "Originally the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god," in a New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures, published under the auspices of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Since my name is used and our Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament is quoted on page 744 [or in the Appendix, p. 775 of New world Translation - ccb] to seek to justify their translation, I am making this statement.

The translation suggested in our Grammar for the disputed passage is, "the Word was deity." Moffatt's rendering is "the Word was divine." Williams' translation is, "the Word was God himself." Each translation reflects the dominant idea in the Greek, For, whenever an article does not precede a noun in Greek, that noun can either be considered as emphasizing the character, nature, essence or quality of a person or thing, as *theos* (God) does in John 1:1, or it can be translated in certain contexts as indefinite, as they have done.

If the Greek article occurred with both Word and God in John 1:1 the implication would be that they are one and the same person, absolutely identical. But John affirmed that "the Word was with (the) God" (the definite article preceding each noun), and in so

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writing he indicated his belief that they were distinct and separate personalities. Then John next stated that the Word was God, i.e., of the same family or essence that characterizes the Creator. Or, in other words, that both are of the same nature, and that nature is the highest in existence, namely, divine.

Examples where the noun in the predicate does not have an article, as in the above verse, are: John 4:24, "God is spirit" (not a spirit; 1 John 4:16, "God is love" (not a love); and Matthew 13:39, "the reapers are angels," i.e., they are the type of beings known as angels. In each instance the noun in the predicate was used to describe some quality or characteristic of the subject, whether as to nature or type.

The apostle John in the context of the introduction to his gospel is pulling all the stops out of language to portray not only the deity of Christ but also His equality with the Father. He states that the Word was in the beginning, that He was with God, that He was God and that all creation came into existence through Him and that not even one thing exists which was not created by Christ. What else could be said that John did not say? In John 1:18 he explained that Christ has been so intimate with the Father that He was in His bosom and that He came to earth to exhibit or portray God. But if we had no other statement from John except that which is found in John 14:9, "He that has seen me has seen the Father," that would be enough to satisfy the seeking soul that Christ and God are the same in essence and that both are divine and equal in nature.

Besides, the whole tenor of New Testament revelation points in this direction. Compare Paul's declaration in Colossians 1:19 for instance: "That all the divine fullness should dwell in Him," or the statement in Hebrews 1:3, "He is the reflection of God's glory and the perfect representation of His being, and continues to uphold the universe by His mighty word" (Williams' translation). And note the sweeping, cosmic claim recorded in Matthew 28:19, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth."

And, if we contrast with that the belittling implication that Christ was only *a* god, do we not at once detect the discord? Does not such a conception conflict with the New Testament message both in whole and in part? Why, if John, in the midst of the idolatry of his day, had made such a statement would not the first century hearers and readers have gotten a totally inadequate picture of Christ who we believe is the Creator of the universe and the only Redeemer of humanity?

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