

IS THE *NEW WORLD TRANSLATION* A BETTER BIBLE?

The *New World Translation* was first published in 1950 by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah's Witnesses). This Bible has now been translated into more than 40 languages. Is this new translation truly a better Bible?

The Bible is God's written Word. It is the message God wants men and women to read so that they can know Him. However, the Bible was not written in the language we speak today, so it must be translated before we can read it.

God used approximately 36 men over a period of almost 2,000 years to write the 66 books of the Bible. Yet everything that each man wrote agrees just as if one author had written the whole Bible. In fact, that is what actually happened. The real author of the Bible is God.

The Bible was written in three languages and is divided into two parts. The Old Testament was written first. Almost all of these first 39 books were written in the Hebrew language. (Only eight of a total of 929 chapters were written in Aramaic.) The Old Testament contains some of the earliest written history of our world and it describes the beginning and history of God's special people. It contains poetry and books showing God's people how to live. The Old Testament also tells of the Savior who would come to rescue all humanity from their sin.

The second part of the Bible is about the Savior Jesus and His followers. This second part is called the New Testament. It records how Jesus lived a perfect life and yet was hated because He said He was from God. It recounts how His enemies killed Him, and then how He came back to life three days later to show that He really was God. The New Testament tells how Jesus' followers learned to be obedient to Him and spread the message that Jesus was the Savior of everyone who believes in Him.

The New Testament was written in Greek, and was completed about 40 years after Jesus lived. It was written by men who either knew Jesus personally or were His early followers.

But the Bible is more than just history. The Bible is God's Word for each of us today. It tells us about God. It tells us how Jesus came to save us from our sin. And it tells us how we should live in a way that pleases God. Therefore, we need to be able to read the Bible and understand exactly what God wants us to know. However, because the Bible was written in Hebrew and Greek, it must be translated into a language we understand before we are able to read it. We must have an accurate translation if we are to learn what God wants us to know.

Translations of the Bible have been made in many languages. In fact, the Bible has been translated into more languages than any other book in the history of the world. As a language changes, new translations must be made. But not all translations have been made simply because the language changed. Regrettably, sometimes translations were made because the translators wanted to publish a Bible that taught their doctrine.

Since the Bible is God's Word, we want the Bible translator to translate the exact thoughts of the Hebrew and Greek languages into the language we

speak today. Therefore, the best Bible translations will follow this simple rule:

The best Bible translation will tell us the exact thoughts of the original writers of the Hebrew and Greek portions of the Bible in a way that is easily understood in our language.

Of course, a Bible translation may be good in one area of translation but faulty in others. The best Bible translation for us today will be the one that most accurately tells us all of the thoughts of the original writers. However, a Bible translation should never be used to make the reader think that God is favoring a particular religious group's doctrine.

Some basic Bible facts

- The writers of each of the 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books used pen and ink and wrote on some form of animal skin or reed paper. The New Testament books are the most recent. Yet, even these were written almost 2,000 years ago. The original authors wrote a single copy on a reed paper called papyrus. We believe that the original account written by each author was inspired by God and was written without any errors. It was written exactly as God intended. Every word was perfect. However, the original copies have long since been lost.

Many copies of each book were made immediately after they were written. Then copies of the copies were made. Yet these were all hand-written documents and each contained some copying mistakes. Do we know today what the original authors wrote? Surprisingly, we do. Many very old copies of the Bible survived in countries with dry climates like

Egypt. The oldest known New Testament document is very small, but it was copied less than 60 or 70 years after the Apostle John wrote it. These hand-made copies are called Greek manuscripts. There are a number of ancient New Testament Greek manuscripts that were copied within 150 to 200 years after the original was written. In the last 200 years, over 5,000 copies of ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament have been discovered. After careful study of each of these manuscripts, the copying mistakes can be identified. It has been a slow and difficult process, but it has resulted in a reconstruction of the original Greek text of the New Testament that is almost exactly the same as it was written by the original writers.

- We know much about the history of the Bible manuscripts because of the writings of early Christians. Large numbers of ancient manuscripts written by Christian authors survived in the same way that the ancient Greek manuscripts of the Bible survived. These authors often quoted Scripture in their writings. This tells us the words used in the Bibles they were copying. There were also many debates between these authors in the first 400 years of the life of the Church. Because we can read their answers to each other, we often know exactly what was happening during the earliest history of the Church.
- The Old Testament uses the Hebrew name of God over 6,800 times. Because of the way ancient Hebrew was written, it is not easy for a translator today to decide exactly how that name should be pronounced. The name has often been written *Jehovah*. Many Bibles have simply written God's name as LORD using all capital letters. But it is important to remember that the Old Testament authors frequently used God's Hebrew name.

- The New Testament does not use God's Hebrew name. None of the more than 5,000 ancient Greek manuscripts that we have today use the Hebrew name of God written in either Hebrew or Greek letters. It is abbreviated as *Jah* in the word hallelujah four times (Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, and 6). But in these four instances, it is written in Greek and not Hebrew letters. All 5,000 surviving Greek manuscripts use a single word that is most frequently applied to Jesus. That word is *Lord*. This single word is also used in quotations of the Old Testament where God's Hebrew name is written. The use of this single word for *Lord* is one of the most important issues concerning the accuracy of the *New World Translation*.
- The New Testament frequently quotes the Old Testament. In many of these quotations, either the Hebrew name of God—which is often written *Jehovah*—is in the actual Old Testament quotation, or the quotation is saying something that is true of only Jehovah. As we will see, it is very important to know if the New Testament writer actually applied these quotations containing the Hebrew name of God to Jesus, or if the writer intended them to apply only to Jehovah.

Some examples

Before we go further, we need to look at two examples that show us why the debate regarding the Hebrew name of God in the New Testament is important.

1. ***Certain verses talk about God.*** There are verses in the New Testament that specifically identify the one referred to as God. Revelation 11:17 is one example. It says, "We give Thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty." *The New World Translation* translates this same verse as, "We thank you, Jehovah God, the Almighty." It makes a great deal of difference if the one

who is "God, the Almighty" is the *Lord* (Jesus) or *Jehovah*. Revelation 4:11 says "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God." The *New World Translation* reads, "'You are worthy, Jehovah,' even our God." There are a number of similar examples in Revelation in which the *New World Translation* uses *Jehovah* rather than *Lord*. (Revelation 1:8, 4:8, 15:3, 16:7, 18:8, 19:6, 21:22, and 22:5-6.) Yet, in each of these examples, the Greek text from which the *New World Translation* was translated (the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* published by the Watch Tower Society) always uses the Greek word for *Lord*. It does not use the Hebrew name of God because there is no ancient manuscript evidence that the New Testament writers used it.

2. *The Old Testament is quoted in the New Testament.* The New Testament frequently quotes the Old Testament. The New Testament quotation sometimes includes a verse that uses the Hebrew name of God. Matthew 3:3 is an example. It says, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." Matthew quoted Isaiah 40:3 and applied it to John the Baptist who made the way ready for Jesus. Isaiah 40:3 used the Hebrew name of God. However, when Matthew quoted the verse he applied it to Jesus by using the Greek word for *Lord*. However, the *New World Translation* says, "Someone is crying out in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of Jehovah, you people! Make his roads straight.'" Again, the Greek text from which the *New World Translation* was translated uses the Greek word for *Lord* and not the Hebrew name of God.

Sometimes, however, the Hebrew name of God is not included in the verse that is quoted from the Old Testament. In Romans 14:11, the Apostle Paul said, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." Paul quoted Isaiah 45:23 which says, "I have sworn by Myself...that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance." The Hebrew name of God is not in

the actual Old Testament verse that Paul quoted, though Isaiah said that these were the words of God Himself. So Paul knew that it was God who said, "to Me every knee will bow." That worship belongs only to God. Yet in Romans 14:11, Paul says that it was the *Lord* speaking. However, the *New World Translation* says, ""As I live.' says Jehovah, 'to me every knee will bend down, and every tongue will make open acknowledgment to God.'" (Notice that the *New World Translation* uses extra quotation marks to show that God is speaking.)

However, the Apostle Paul repeats this quotation in Philippians 2:10-11. He says, "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Paul said that the worship that belonged only to God in the Old Testament was also to be given to Jesus. The translators did not want to use the word *Jehovah* because this verse referred to Jesus. So the *New World Translation* says, "So that in the name of Jesus every knee should bend...and every tongue should openly acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." In the verse in Philippians they omit quotation marks as though it is not a verse from the Old Testament. (In their reference Bible they list Isaiah 45:23 as the source for Romans 14:11, yet there is no reference to Isaiah in Philippians 2:10-11.) They ignore that this worship with "every knee bowing" belongs only to God.

The translators' assumptions

The translators of the *New World Translation* believe that in the original New Testament Greek manuscripts the Hebrew name of God was written in Hebrew letters. They say that the original authors would have read their Hebrew Bibles that used the Hebrew name of God and would have copied that name in Hebrew as they were writing the Greek New Testament.

However, then they must explain why none of the 5,000 ancient Greek manuscripts that exist today contain the Hebrew name of God. They explain this by saying that there was false teaching between 70 and 170 years after Jesus lived. They say that this false teaching opposed the use of God's Hebrew name and caused it to be changed to *Lord* in all of the existing Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. They say that careless and deceitful scribes changed the Bible. There are two great problems with this explanation.

1. There is no manuscript evidence of any kind that indicates that the Hebrew name of God was used in the New Testament. In over 5,000 ancient manuscripts, there is not one indication that the Hebrew letters of God's name were used. There is not even indication that the Hebrew letters were changed to Greek letters. The only word that appears is *Lord*. By 170 years after Jesus had lived, the Church had spread from Judea to Asia, Europe and Africa. If this change had been made, it would have meant that *all* of the thousands of manuscripts on three continents had been altered. That is difficult to imagine since we have Greek manuscripts of the New Testament that were written sometime between 70 and 170 years after Jesus lived which do not contain the Hebrew name of God.
2. In all the writings of the early Christians, there is not a single reference to a false teaching that would have caused this change in the New Testament. This change would have caused great debate among early Christians. After all, many had already suffered much for the Gospel. Why would they say nothing when mere scribes decided to change the Bible after they had suffered for it. Both secular history and the writings of the early Christians would have mentioned the conflict that would have come from such a change.

Hebrew versions

If there are no ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament that contain the Hebrew name of God, how did the translators of the *New World Translation* justify using the name *Jehovah* in the New Testament? The translators gathered a large number of Hebrew versions that used the Hebrew name of God as their evidence. In most cases, in verses where these Hebrew versions used the Hebrew name of God, the *New World Translation* used *Jehovah*.

A Hebrew version is a New Testament translated for Hebrew-speaking Christians. It is not a New Testament originally written in Hebrew. *Hebrew versions were translated from the same Greek texts used for all other New Testament translations. None of these Greek texts contain the Hebrew name of God.* Hebrew versions cannot give more information about the original Greek manuscripts than the Greek texts from which they were translated. Nor are Hebrew versions ancient texts. The Hebrew versions cited by the translators of the *New World Translation* were themselves translated between the years 1385 and 1979. Hebrew versions are not ancient manuscripts that came from the time of the first Church. They are certainly not older than the ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.

The translators of the *New World Translation* used the Hebrew versions as though they separated the identity of *Lord* and *Jehovah*. However, that is not true. When one reads certain of these Hebrew versions, it is apparent that the Hebrew translators did just the opposite and used the Hebrew name of God to show that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. For example, seven of these Hebrew versions used the Hebrew name of God in 1 Peter 3:15. Had the *New World Translation* used *Jehovah* in this verse it would have read,

"But sanctify the Christ as Jehovah in your hearts." In another interesting example from a Hebrew version, when the grammatical rules used by the translators are applied, Acts 26:15 reads, "*And Jehovah God said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.*" These Hebrew versions really show that Jesus is Messiah and fully identified with God rather than showing that Jesus and Jehovah are distinctly different.

There is another question that would need to be answered if the original writers of the New Testament had used the Hebrew name of God. We would need to ask how many times (and in what verses) the Hebrew name of God was used. The translators of the *New World Translation* say that the Hebrew name of God was used 237 times in the New Testament. But when we read the *New World Translation*, it is obvious that the selection of these 237 verses has more to do with what the verses were saying than with what was written in ancient manuscripts. The verses that were most frequently changed from *Lord* to *Jehovah* were those verses that identify a quality that could only be true of God.

Why do Jehovah's Witnesses want *Jehovah* in the New Testament?

There is a simple reason why Jehovah's Witnesses want a Bible that uses *Jehovah* rather than *Lord* in many New Testament verses. Because they believe that Jesus is merely God's first created son, they do not want their Bible to identify Jesus as being equal to the God of the Old Testament. They want a Bible with a New Testament that makes a distinction between *Lord* and *Jehovah*. If the New Testament identifies the One on the throne as the "*Lord God Almighty*" (Revelation 11:17), this would tell us that the *Lord* Jesus is "God Almighty." Similarly, the Old Testament often makes statements that can only be said of God. If the New Testament quotes an Old Testament verse that uses the Hebrew name of God but applies it to

Jesus as *Lord*, this would tell us that the New Testament writer was identifying Jesus with the God of the Old Testament. This is what Paul did when he quoted Isaiah 45:23, yet applied it to Jesus. Therefore, Jehovah's Witnesses want to change these verses so that Jesus is not identified with God. They want their Bible to read "*Jehovah God Almighty*" in Revelation 11:17 and many similar verses. They also do not want to apply an Old Testament quotation that uses the Hebrew name of God to Jesus in the New Testament.

Evaluating the *New World Translation*

1. We said that a good translation tells us the exact thoughts of the original Bible writers. The Old Testament writers used God's name over 6,800 times. A good translation of the Bible should use God's name in the Old Testament. Regrettably, many Bible translations today do not. However, the *New World Translation* uses the name *Jehovah* over 6,800 times in the Old Testament. In this area, the *New World Translation* has correctly told us the meaning intended by the original writers.
2. The translators of the *New World Translation* have used the name *Jehovah* 237 times in the New Testament. There is no New Testament Greek manuscript evidence that shows that the Hebrew name of God was ever used. However, if the Hebrew name of God had been used, then there would need to have been an explanation for its removal. There is no historic record of any debate among the early Christians regarding the removal of the Hebrew name of God from their Scriptures. The translators of the *New World Translation* mislead their readers. With no Greek manuscript or historical evidence, they changed the word *Lord* that was written by the inspired New Testament writers to *Jehovah* in 237 verses.

3. We also find serious inconsistency in the translators' use of *Jehovah* in the New Testament. They say that they will insert *Jehovah* when an Old Testament verse using the Hebrew name of God is quoted. In almost all cases they follow their rule. However, when 1 Peter 3:15 quotes an Old Testament verse using the Hebrew name of God, it is omitted in the *New World Translation* because it would identify Jesus as God. When Philippians 2:10-11 gives qualities to Jesus that can only be true of God, they do not acknowledge that the verse is an Old Testament quotation.

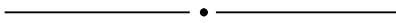
4. The translators are also inconsistent in their use of Hebrew versions. In most instances, when a Hebrew version uses the Hebrew name of God, they insert *Jehovah* into the New Testament verse. On the other hand, even though seven Hebrew versions use the Hebrew name of God in 1 Peter 3:15, they still do not insert *Jehovah* as noted above. If the translators had inserted *Jehovah* in this verse, it would have identified Jesus with Jehovah. Many Hebrew versions have used the Hebrew name of God to identify Jesus with Jehovah. However, the translators of the *New World Translation* have avoided making that identification in their own translation.

5. In certain passages, words have actually been inserted to change the meaning of the Bible. When talking about Jesus, Colossians 1:16 says, "For in Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth." However, the *New World Translation* says, "By means of him all [other] things were created in the heavens and upon the earth." Because Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus was created as the first son of the Father, they have added the word "other" to this verse. The word "other" has been inserted four times in this chapter so that they can teach that Jesus was created. In verses 16 and 17 the *New World Translation* says, "All [other] things have been created through him and for him. Also, he

is before all [other] things and by means of him all [other] things were made to exist."

6. Sometimes the translators of the *New World Translation* give the same word from the original Greek language two different meanings so that they do not identify Jesus with Jehovah. Their own Greek New Testament uses a single word to mean "obeisance." When the *New World Translation* uses this word about the Lord Jesus, they translate it as "obeisance." However, when they translate the same word about *Jehovah*, they translate it as "worship."
7. When reading the Jehovah's Witnesses' *New World Translation* it is obvious that they have published a Bible for the purpose of teaching their own doctrine. They have done this by changing the meaning of the most authentic ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.

The *New World Translation* has failed the test that says that the best Bible translation will tell us the exact thoughts of the original writers of the Hebrew and Greek portions of the Bible in a way that is easily understood in our language. The *New World Translation* does not accurately translate what the New Testament writers said about Jesus.



The Good News

Jesus died for our sins so that we can be completely forgiven. He came back from the dead to give us new life. If you do not know God, Jesus will

become your Savior if you believe that His death and resurrection is all that you need to satisfy God. (Read Romans 5:1-21 in your Bible.)

Does it matter who Jesus is? It certainly does. If Jesus is God, then He has the power to give us His perfection and we will someday live with God. Of course, we must learn to be obedient to Him in the lessons He wants to teach us. But we do not need to work to earn Salvation. Salvation is God's free gift to us when we have faith in Jesus' death and resurrection. The Bible says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Because their Bible has been changed, Jehovah's Witnesses do not know that Salvation is God's free gift. Since they do not believe that Jesus can give them His perfection as God, they think that they must do good works in order to earn Salvation. They hope that if they do enough, they will live forever in God's Kingdom.

Yes, it does matter whether Jesus was just a perfect man, or if He is really God. Read your Bible to learn what it says about Jesus and why your Salvation depends only on Him.