

In the Third Edition of *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, Greg Stafford takes up the familiar defense of subjects having to do with the use and pronunciation of the divine name, the identity of the biblical God Jah and of Jesus of Nazareth, as well as issues and questions having to do with salvation, God's sovereignty and mankind's "free will." This edition also contains discussions of several controversial issues, including questions related to abortion, a person's sexual orientation, and regarding uses of blood.

Most significantly, this book puts forth not only a defense of some the biblical teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, but it also further introduces the Christian Witnesses of Jah, Jehovah's Witnesses who reject human traditions when these can be shown to contradict what is based on the best available reasons. Thus, a call is made to all Jehovah's Witnesses, to all Christians, indeed, to "every breathing thing" to bear witness to and to praise the biblical God Jah, and to acknowledge what can be shown to be true for good reasons about Jesus of Nazareth.—Psalm 150:6; Isaiah 29:13; 43:10, 12; Acts 18:24-28; Galatians 1:10; Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, 6.

GREG STAFFORD is also the author of *Three Dissertations on the Teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses* and of various articles and debates on biblical Christianity and the history and the beliefs of the Watchtower Society and Jehovah's Witnesses. He is a Christian Witness of Jah, one of Jehovah's Witnesses who rejects traditions and beliefs that are not based on the best available evidence.



Cover design by George Foster

Religion

ISBN: 978-0-9659814-0-6



9 780965 981408

Jehovah's Witnesses Defended

AN ANSWER
TO SCHOLARS
AND CRITICS

THIRD
EDITION

GREG
STAFFORD



Jehovah's Witnesses Defended

AN ANSWER
TO SCHOLARS
AND CRITICS

— THIRD EDITION —

GREG STAFFORD

Jehovah's
Witnesses
Defended

— THIRD EDITION —

Jehovah's Witnesses Defended

— THIRD EDITION —

AN ANSWER
TO SCHOLARS
AND CRITICS

GREG STAFFORD



Murrieta, California

Jehovah's Witnesses Defended:
An Answer to Scholars and Critics, Third Edition
Copyright © 2009 by Elihu Books, LLC.

Published by Elihu Books, LLC.

www.elihubooks.com

Mailing address:

39252 Winchester Road, Suite #107-404
Murrieta, CA 92563

Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from the Old and New Testaments of the Bible are from the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures With References*, Revised, Copyright © 1984. At times, however, the author will present his own translation of these and of other related texts.

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations embodied in printed reviews or critical articles, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or computer of any kind, transmitted in any form or by any means (printed, written, photocopying, visual, electronic, audio, or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America by
Angel Printing, Inc., Oceanside, California

*This printed edition may differ in form and in content from pre-publication copies of some of the material released online by the author. Only the printed forms of this book contain the published edition.

Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication
(Provided by Quality Books, Inc.)

Stafford, Greg G.

Jehovah's Witnesses defended : an answer to scholars
and critics / by Greg Stafford. -- 3rd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

LCCN 2008905531

ISBN-13: 978-0-9659814-0-8

ISBN-10: 0-9659814-0-1

1. Jehovah's Witnesses--Doctrines. 2. Jehovah's
Witnesses--Apologetic works. I. Title.

BX8526.S69 2009

289.9'2

QBI08-600184

come/go/climb down,” often with an “indication of the place [from] which one comes or goes down.”⁵ In this case, as the text in John says, the “place” the “Son of man” came down from was “heaven.” How, though, should we understand the reference to “the Son of man”? Does this involve a real, conscious person who was alive prior to and during the ‘descent,’ and who continued existing as a person thereafter?

I will discuss the concepts associated with the “Son of man” in non-biblical Jewish literature later in this chapter. But the Bible itself contains several explicit accounts related to Jesus’ preexistence and his ‘descent’ from “heaven.” One of the more explicit texts in the NT on this subject is in Philippians 2:5-8. Elsewhere I have written about this account as it pertains both to translation and meaning. After evaluating the issues and the arguments put forth by various writers,⁶ I believe the following translation of Philippians 2:5-9 is based on the best grammatical, contextual, semantic, and historical evidence:

Your attitude should be the same as Jesus Christ’s, who even though he was existing in the form of God/a god [or ‘a divine form’] he did not consider this equality with [or, ‘this likeness to’] God as something to exploit. Instead he gave himself up and took on the appearance of a slave and he came to be the same as men. When he found out that he was in the same form as men, he lowered himself even further by becoming obedient until death, indeed, death by torture.

If what I propose above is correct, then in giving up his equality/likeness with God, Jesus showed the highest level of humility and obedience (indeed, worship) that is possible for one

⁵ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., edited and revised by Frederick W. Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), page 514.

⁶ See my *Three Dissertations on the Teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Murrieta, CA: Elihu Books, 2002), note 5, pages 213-216, and especially my answer to the question, “What is your understanding of Philippians 2:5-9, and why does the NWT read so differently from versions like the NASB?” in “*Upon the Lampstand*,” December 15, 2007 (revised on February 10, 2008), pages 1-8, available through Elihu Books (www.elihubooks.com).

to demonstrate.⁷ It is, in fact, this very humility and obedience that gives Paul reason to bring up Jesus' prehuman activities in the first place (Philippians 2:5). While grammatically I do not believe the NWT's rendering has the best reasons supporting it, it is not without any good reasons.⁸ But the best available reasons

⁷ The syntactical question of Php 2:6 hinges on whether we have here an idiomatic use of *hegeomai* (a verb which in this instance means to "think" or to "consider"). By "idiomatic use" I mean a usage that conforms to what we find elsewhere regarding less disputed instances of *hegeomai* with a double accusative. More specifically, the question here has to do with the meaning of *hegeomai* where one articulated (= with the Greek article) accusative follows it and where one anarthrous (= without the Greek article) accusative precedes *hegeomai*. Where we have such a double accusative construction used with *hegeomai*, it appears that the accusative following the verb (*hegeomai*) always serves as the direct object of the verb and the accusative preceding *hegeomai* serves as the predicate accusative. Predicate accusatives describe direct objects. Roy W. Hoover, "The Harpagmos Enigma: A Philological Solution," *Harvard Theological Review* 64 (1971), pages 95-119, first proposed just such a view of this double-accusative construction, and there are several other texts with a grammatical structure that is similar to Php 2:6 that add support to his view. For example, in Isidore of Pelusium (fourth century CE) we read, *Ei hermaion hegesato to einai ison* ("If he considered being equal a treasure"). Here we have *hegeomai* used with a double accusative, that is, where the articulated accusative following the verb (*to einai ison*, "the being equal") is the direct object and the anarthrous accusative (*hermaion*, "a treasure") preceding *hegeomai* is the predicate accusative that further describes "being equal" as "a treasure." Another example of this construction is found in Diodorus Siculus (*Library* 15.4.3), "On arriving in Egypt he met the king and urged him to continue the war energetically and to consider the war against the Persians a common undertaking" (Greek: *koinon hegeisthai ton pros tous Persas polemon*). Here we have *hegeomai* followed by an articulated accusative *ton pros tous persas polemon* ("the war against the Persians") serving as the direct object, with the anarthrous *koinon* (meaning, "common undertaking") preceding *hegeomai* as the predicate accusative. Consider also the *Letter of Aristeas* 292.2, which R.J.H. Shutt translates, "you consider injustice the greatest evil" (in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, James H. Charlesworth, ed. [New York: Doubleday, 1985], page 32). Here again we have the same pattern of anarthrous predicate accusative ("greatest evil," *megiston kakon*), verb ("consider," *hegeomai*), and articulated accusative object ("injustice," *ten adikian*). Still another instance of this idiom can be found in Josephus' *War of the Jews*, 2.581, where he writes, "to consider the harm of your friends as your own." Here the anarthrous predicate accusative *oikeion* ("one's own") again precedes *hegeomai* ("to consider"), and *hegeomai* is once again followed by an articulated, accusative object (*ten blaben*, "the harm"). Therefore, to me it seems likely that the anarthrous, accusative-*hegeomai*-articular accusative construction always conforms to the previously described usage: predicate accusative-*hegeomai*-direct object accusative.

⁸ See Rolf Furuli, *The Role of Theology and Bias in Bible Translation: With a special look at the New World Translation of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Huntington Beach, CA: Elihu Books, 1999), pages 262-275. However, Furuli's comparison of the syntax of Php 2:6 with 3 Maccabees 3:15 (pages 270-271) and Job 35:2 and Baruch 5:9 (page

(including the syntactical idiom described in notes 7 and 8) support the view that Paul refers here to Jesus in his prehuman state “in the form of God/a god” (Greek: *morphe theou*). It is this “form” that Jesus chose to give up (= “emptied himself” [Greek: *keno'oi*]), and so he set aside this ‘equality’ or ‘likeness’ (Greek: *isa*)⁹ with God by taking on “a slave’s form,” that is, by coming

270, note 152) suffers from the fact that none of these texts have an articulated accusative following *hegeomai*. Indeed, in 3 Maccabees 3:15 the accusative *ta katoikounta* (“the inhabitants”) is the object of the infinitive verb *tithenesasthai* (“to nurse”), which makes this text very different from Php 2:6. The sense of *hegeomai* in Baruch 5:9 may also be “lead,” “guide” (“For God will lead Israel with joy ...”), and in Job 35:2 there is, again, no articulated accusative following *hegeomai*. Therefore, I do not accept Furuli’s arguments in favor of the NWT rendering of this text. The double accusative view articulated by Hoover has better reasons supporting it. Jason David BeDuhn, *Truth In Translation: Accuracy and Bias in English Translations of the New Testament* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2003), page 55, refers to different words related to the verb *harpazo*, one of which is *harpagmon*. BeDuhn then concludes, “You can see that every one of these related words has to do with the seizure of something not yet one’s own.” The difference here is that *harpagmon* is used in a syntactical relationship with *hegeomai* which suggests that *harpagmon* describes something the prehuman Jesus *already possessed*, namely, an “equality/likeness with God.” This “is precisely another way of saying ‘in the form of God’” (Gerald F. Hawthorne, “In the Form of God and Equal with God,” in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philipians 2*, Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds. [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998], page 104). BeDuhn also claims that in J.C. O’Neil’s “Hoover on *Harpagmos* Reviewed, with a Modest Proposal Concerning Philipians 2:6,” *HTR* 81 (1988), pages 445-449, “Hoover’s entire argument was demolished in just four pages.” But this simply is not true where it concerns the syntactical idiom described in note 7 above. Beyond the fact that O’Neil’s arguments have “not generally persuaded critics” (Stephen E. Fowl, *Philipians* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005], page 94, note 15), O’Neil actually argues that the text in Philipians really read something that is not in or even suggested by any known NT manuscript reading. O’Neil (“Hoover on *Harpagmos* Reviewed,” page 449) argues that Paul actually used a second negative (*me*) and that later scribes replaced it with the Greek article *to* (“the”) so that what Paul really wrote (according to O’Neil) is, “who being in the form of God thought it not robbery not to be equal [*me einai*] with God”! O’Neil has done nothing to ‘demolish’ the double accusative view of Hoover where *hegeomai* is concerned. Ironically, O’Neil’s article was written in “honor of Professor C.F.D. Moule on his eightieth birthday” (see “Hoover on *Harpagmos* Reviewed,” page 445). Yet, according to Hawthorne, Moule (who has written extensively about Php 2:5-9) “graciously bowed to Hoover and admitted that Hoover’s philological study had won the day and in his (Moule’s) judgment was the final answer to the enigmatic [*harpagmos*]” (Hawthorne, “In the Form of God and Equal With God,” page 102).

⁹ The Greek word *isa*, as used in Php 2:6, can mean either “equality” or “likeness” (as in the LXX of Job 10:10; 11:12; 13:12, 28; 15:16; 24:20; 27:16; 28:2; 29:14; 30:19; 40:4; see also Wisdom 7:3). Compare the use of *isa* in Lu 20:36, where it also

to be “in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7). As Hawthorne states:

This means then that “the being equal with God” is precisely another way of saying “in the form of God.” Or better still, whatever meaning one might put forth as a possible meaning for the expression [“in the form of God”] can only be properly understood in terms of [“equal to/like God”], and vice versa— [“the being equal to God”] can only be properly understood in terms of [“in the form of God/divine form”].¹⁰

Here in Philippians 2:5-11 Paul teaches us that the prehuman Jesus showed humility and obedience by giving up the “form” or “equality” he had with God (or as “a god”). This same ‘equality with God’ is taught elsewhere in the NT, in texts like Hebrews 1:3, where Jesus is said to be “the reflection of [God’s] glory and the exact representation of his [God’s] very being” (underlining added). Also, elsewhere in the NT we get additional descriptions for what Jesus gave up when he came to the earth.

In 2 Corinthians 8:9 we are told that “though [Jesus] was rich he became poor.” This can only refer to that which Jesus *had* but gave up, and so later he truly could be described as having ‘become poor.’ If he really did not give up the ‘riches of God’s glory’ (compare Ephesians 3:16; Philippians 4:19), but in fact still retained them while on earth, then he was merely pretending to be “poor.” Jehovah’s Witnesses believe Jesus really did give up what he had before coming to the earth, and by giving up “God’s form” and coming to the earth in “a slave’s form” (Greek: *morphēn doulou*), the Word “emptied himself” of his “riches” and became “the same as men” (Greek: *en homoimati anthropon*). Jesus exchanged one “form” (that of “God” of “a

means “like” in that those who die and who are resurrected are “like” the angels because they “neither marry nor are given in marriage” and because “neither can they die anymore”).

¹⁰ Hawthorne, “In the Form of God and Equal with God,” page 104.

god”) for another “form” (that of “man”) and he “became poor” for our sakes.¹¹

Buzzard and Hunting conclude that in Philippians 2:5-9 Paul is talking about Jesus existing “in the form of God” because “as the Messiah [Jesus] was invested with a functional equality with God,” and he “did not take advantage of his royal position as God’s legal representative but adopted the character of a slave.”¹² This view simply does not match what the text teaches. It is *prior to* ‘emptying himself’ that Jesus existed in the “form of God/a god.” Thus, Paul uses the present verb for “existing” (Greek: *hyparkon*) when he writes about the “form” Jesus had before he “emptied himself.” Paul explains that *after* Jesus “emptied himself” of the “form of God/a god” he then took on an entirely different “form,” that of a “man.”

If while in the “form of God/a god” Jesus was already in the form or appearance of a “man,” then there would be no need for Paul to say that he ‘took on’ this other form! If, as Buzzard and Hunting believe, the “form of God” is simply the “exalted status of the man Jesus”¹³ (even though Jesus is not said to be “exalted” until *after* his death [Philippians 2:10-11]), Paul could simply have said that ‘Jesus was in the form of God/a god and in this form he was faithful until death.’ But Paul breaks things up to show that while existing in one form (“of God/a god”) Jesus did

¹¹ *Morphe* (“form”) can mean simply “appearance” without implying that the “appearance” reflects the actual nature of a person or thing. Compare, for example, Mk 16:12 (longer ending) where *morphe* does not reflect a person’s underlying nature since here Jesus had already been raised to life as a “spirit” being (1Co 15:45). In this account Jesus is presented as merely ‘appearing’ to his disciples in a human “form.” This is similar to how angels ‘appeared’ in human forms but did not “become” men. Neither the angels nor Jesus in his post-resurrection appearances were humans by their nature; they simply took on the temporary appearance of men to such an extent that they could ‘eat’ (Gen 19:1-3; Lu 24:43). But in the case of the Word it is said that he “became flesh” (Joh 1:14). Unlike the angels in the OT, the Word was actually ‘conceived’ in a human womb (Lu 1:31), born as a child (Lu 2:7), and he grew up and “found himself” as a man (Php 2:7). This was a permanent change from one form to another, from an ‘emptying’ of an ‘equality/likeness to God’ to the ‘taking on’ of a ‘likeness with men,’ that is, until his death and resurrection when Jesus once again “became a life-giving spirit.”—1Co 15:45.

¹² Buzzard and Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, page 102.

¹³ Buzzard and Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, page 102.

not “exploit” his “equality” with God. Rather, the prehuman Jesus “took” (Greek: *labon*) a slave’s form and “came to be” (Greek: *genomenos*) just like men. Further, when he “found out [Greek: *heuretheis*] that he was in the same form as men” he was obedient until death.

I cannot think of any clearer division between two forms than those of “God/a god” and “man.” In fact, what we read here in Philippians 2 is nothing less than what John tells us in the Prologue to his Gospel, namely, that the Word existed “with” God as “a god” and *then proceeded to* ‘reside among us’ in the “flesh,” as a man (John 1:1, 14; see Chapter 4 for more on John 1:1). Philippians 2:5-9 does not anywhere or in any way limit the ‘emptying’ of Jesus to the ‘laying aside of his privileges.’¹⁴ The only items mentioned in this account are Jesus’ “form of God/a god” and his “equality with God” which, as noted earlier, are the same in this context.

It should almost go without saying that if Jesus gave up the “form of” or “equality with God,” then any “privileges” associated with having the “form”/“equality” were given up, too. Philippians 2:5-9 does *not* start with or limit that which Jesus “emptied himself” of to the “privileges” that come with his having the “form of” or “equality with God.” Indeed, it is the “form”/“equality” itself that Jesus gave up and that he exchanged for another, more lowly “form.” Again, he “became poor” though he previously “was rich.” However, since Trinitarian theology requires that Jesus *never* relinquish this “form of”/“equality with God,” even as he takes on another completely different form or nature (namely, that of a “man”), Trinitarians are forced to assume that what Jesus gave up is restricted to something that is not anywhere mentioned in the text itself, namely, “privileges.” Yet, as Braumann rightly observes:

It is said of this divine mode of existence that Christ existed in it in the past (*hyparchōn*, being, v. 6). It refers to his pre-existence prior to the incarnation. *en morphē theou* characterizes, therefore, his existence before his earthly life, but not his

¹⁴ White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, page 127.

existence in that earthly life. For he emptied himself (*heauton ekenōsen*, v. 7) taking the “form of a servant” (*morphēn doulou*). This form replaces the “form of God.” It is not to be thought of like clothing put over the previous form or as an addition to the pre-existing form. Christ’s mode of being was essentially changed.¹⁵

There are other NT texts that clearly teach the real, personal preexistence of Jesus of Nazareth. For example, in John 17:5 Jesus is recorded as speaking directly to his Father, who is in the heavens (John 17:1). During this conversation Jesus says (with emphasis added), “So now you, Father, glorify me alongside yourself with the glory that I had alongside you *before the world was.*” Buzzard and Hunting take the following view of this text (with underlining added):

When Jesus says that he “had” the glory for which he now prays (John 17:5), he is merely asking for the glory which he knew was prepared for him by God from the beginning. That glory existed in God’s plan, and in that sense Jesus already “had” it. We note that Jesus did not say, “Give me back” or “restore to me the glory which I had when I was alive with you before my birth.” This notion would have been completely foreign to Judaism.¹⁶

I will discuss what would have been considered “completely foreign to Judaism” in Jesus’ day later in this chapter. But I am here interested in what is “completely foreign” to the Bible, and to its revelation of who Jesus is according to what we read therein. What Jesus’ religious enemies may have believed about preexistence in general or about the Messiah in particular is really quite secondary to what Jesus and his followers actually taught. Contrary to Buzzard and Hunting, Jesus says nothing whatsoever about “the glory which he knew was prepared for him by God

¹⁵ G. Braumann, “μορφή,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, Colin Brown, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), page 706 (underlining added).

¹⁶ Buzzard and Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, page 165.