

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



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Murrieta, California

Jehovah's Witnesses Defended:
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Copyright © 2009 by Elihu Books, LLC.

Published by Elihu Books, LLC.

www.elihubooks.com

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Murrieta, CA 92563

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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

As Yee points out, the use of *qanah* in Proverbs 8:22 is similar to Genesis 4:1. Here Eve clearly did not mean she “acquired” or “bought” Cain! Rather, she “produced,” “begat,” or even “created” him “with the aid of Jehovah.” In this connection, it should also be noted that “the meaning ‘begot’ here must be figurative and so equivalent to ‘created.’ ... The point of this verse, as of the succeeding verse, is merely that wisdom was created *first*.”¹⁰⁸ There is, in fact, an NT text that speaks about the heavenly Jesus in almost exactly same way.

Revelation 3:14. At this point, in several chapters of this book including this one, I believe I have presented good reasons for concluding the Bible teaches that Jesus of Nazareth preexisted his human life as a spirit “son” of God, as God’s “firstborn” and “only-begotten” Son. Another text which I believe clearly teaches that the pre-human Jesus was the first creation of God is Revelation 3:14. According to the RSV this verse calls Jesus the “beginning of God’s creation” (NWT = “the beginning of the creation by God” [Greek: ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ, *he arche tes ktiseos tou theou*]). But does this verse truly refer to Jesus as the “beginning” of God’s creation?

Regarding the use of this text by Jehovah’s Witnesses, Trinitarian author Ron Rhodes writes, “In responding to the Watchtower’s interpretation of Revelation 3:14, it is critical to note that there is a wide range of meanings for the Greek word ... translated ‘beginning’ in the *New World Translation*.”¹⁰⁹ While it is true that *arche* can have a meaning other than “beginning,” a check of all of the occurrences of *arche* in the NT where it is followed by a genitive expression (as in Revelation 3:14) shows that it always denotes a beginning or first part of something (examples below). Even when used without a genitive expression *arche* means “beginning” some 32 times.¹¹⁰ Of the remaining 13 occurrences of *arche* in the NT, 2 are used of the “four corners” (NWT: “extremities”) of the earth. The final 11 are used to denote

¹⁰⁸ Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs*, page 101.

¹⁰⁹ Rhodes, *Reasoning*, page 123.

¹¹⁰ See Matt 19:4, 8; 24:21; Mr 1:1; 10:6; Lu 1:2; Joh 1:1, 2; 6:64; 8:25, 44; 15:27; 16:4; Ac 11:15; 26:4; Col 1:18; 2Th 2:13; Heb 1:10; 2:3; 3:14; 1Jo 1:1; 2:7, 13, 14, 24; 3:8, 11; 2Jo 1:5, 6; Jude 6; Rev 21:6; 22:13.

“governments” or “rulers,” and where such meanings are intended *arche* in the NT is always used with other expressions that denote “power” (δύναμις, *dynamis*) or “authority” (ἐξουσία, *exousia*).¹¹¹

Based on the above information, the use of the singular *arche* in general and when used with a genitive expression specifically support “beginning” as the meaning of *arche* in Revelation 3:14. In spite of these good reasons based on the use of the word in question, Rhodes writes, “The authoritative *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* by William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich says the meaning of *arche* in Revelation 3:14 is ‘first cause.’”¹¹² True, this lexicon (hereafter simply “BAGD”) does list Revelation 3:14 under definition “2. the first cause” (page 112). However, no biblical passages are cited under this definition as parallels to the meaning provided. Further, BAGD went on to say this regarding the use of *arche* in Revelation 3:14, “the [meaning] beginning=first created is linguistically [possible].” To illustrate this “linguistically [possible]” meaning for *arche*, consider the following NT examples:

Matthew 24:8 (*arche odinon*), “*beginning of birth pangs*”:

“Beginning” (*arche*) here refers back to “all these things” (*panta ... tauta*) which in turn have reference to the signs listed in verses 4-7. These signs are a “beginning” of the signs which Jesus gives in response to the disciple’s questions in verse 3. The genitive here is therefore partitive in that the “birth pangs” are the whole of which the *arche* of the “signs” in verses 4-7 is the first part.

Mark 13:19 (*arches ktiseos*), “*beginning of creation*”:

Here “beginning” is likely a reference to the beginning of the creation of humankind. See pages 372-377 for a discussion of some of the relevant

¹¹¹ Lu 12:11; 20:20; Ro 8:38; 1Co 15:24; Eph 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:10; 2:15; Tit 3:1

¹¹² Rhodes, *Reasoning*, page 123. Rhodes (*Reasoning*, page 124) also argues that “beginning” as used of God in Rev 1:8, 21:6, and 22:13 “does not mean that [God] had a created beginning.” But Rev 1:8 does not use *arche* in reference to God, and the word “creation” is not used with *arche* in Rev 21:6 or in 22:13, while it is used in a genitive expression following *arche* in Rev 3:14. In Rev 21:6 and in 22:13 *arche* appears to be used of God as the “beginning” of all that he purposes to do or that he permits others to do, all of which also therefore ‘end’ with him. In this way, God can be the “beginning” and the “ending” according to his will, without himself being a created “beginning.”

types of 'beginnings' presented in the Bible, and the reasons supporting different understandings for the creative parts of the "beginning" of Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1.

John 2:11 (*archen ton semeion*), "beginning of the/his signs":

Here "beginning" indicates the first of Jesus' signs.

Philippians 4:15 (*arche tou evangeliou*), "beginning of the good news":

Here "beginning" refers to the "start" (NWT) of Paul's "declaring the good news" when he "departed from Macedonia."

Hebrews 3:14 (*ten archen tes hypostseos*), "the confidence^[113] we had at the beginning":

The translation of this part of Hebrews 3:14 is not so clear. That which is here referred to as "beginning" is characterized by the meaning of *hypastaseos* (NWT's "confidence"), so that it involves *the start* of a person's trust or confidence in the good news.

Hebrews 5:12 (*tes arches ton logion tou theou*), "the beginning of the words of God":

Note the similarity between this verse and Revelation 3:14: There is a partitive genitive (namely, "of the words") with "the beginning" (*tes arches*) that is considered part of "the words" used with *arche* and followed by a genitive of origin. This means the "words" are "of/by God" (*tou theou*). The "elementary things" (*ta stoicheia*) are a part of the "beginning" [*arche*] or "first" things that are taught to a new believer, the "milk" of verse 13.

Hebrews 6:1 (*ton tes arches tou christou logon*), "the teaching of the first things [NWT: 'primary doctrine'] concerning Christ":

¹¹³ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (WBC 47A; Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1991), page 82, note q, objects to "confidence" as a proper meaning for *hypastaseos* "since examples of the word with this nuance cannot be found in early sources." But this nuance fits quite well in Heb 3:14, since "confidence" or "trust" (both meanings are accepted by J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida [*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), page 376, entry 31.84]) can move a person to take the first step in rejecting "fear" and "sin.—Heb 3:12-13.

Here the reference is to those things that are foundational or 'first' where it concerns faith in Jesus. Upon such things a Christian's faith is then 'built up' as it matures through life.

Hebrews 7:3 (*archen hemeron*), "*a beginning of days*":

Here "beginning" refers to a traceable "start" for Melchizedek, who is "without genealogy."

2 Peter 3:4 (*ap' arches ktiseos*), "*from the beginning of creation*":

See my comments above under **Mark 13:19**.

There are also plenty of examples from the Greek OT (LXX) which show how *arche* regularly meant "beginning" or "first."¹¹⁴ Indeed, after acknowledging that "beginning=first created" is a possible alternative to the definition "first cause" (as noted above), BAGD refers to the article by C.F. Burney which I cited earlier in this chapter in connection with Jesus' identity as the Wisdom of Proverbs 8:22. Burney believes Revelation 3:14 is an allusion to Proverbs 8:22, and with reference to the meaning of Revelation 3:14 Burney writes, "[interpreters] have not a shadow of authority for limiting in meaning to 'the source of God's creation.'"¹¹⁵ Whether *arche* means "source," "ruler," or "beginning" in Revelation 3:14, the translation "beginning" is not only credible but the likely meaning based on the best available reasons.

By contrast, Rhodes believes that Revelation 3:14 means that Christ is "the 'beginner' of God's creation," believing that his interpretation "harmonizes with other New Testament passages about Christ as Creator," among which Rhodes believes are Colossians 1:16, 17, Hebrews 1:2, and John 1:3.¹¹⁶ But in this publication, and in prior editions of this book, I have presented a much different understanding of these texts, namely, one which understands Jesus as the mediator of the Father's creative acts, not as the one who created 'through himself'! In the above three texts and in 1 Corinthians 8:6 Jesus is also presented as the agent

¹¹⁴ See Gen 10:10; 49:3; Ex 12:2; Nu 24:20; De 21:17; Job 40:19; Hosea 1:2.

¹¹⁵ Burney, "Christ as the APXH of Creation," page 177.

¹¹⁶ Rhodes, *Reasoning*, pages 125-126.

“through whom” the Father created, just as is Wisdom in Proverbs Chapter 8 (see my discussion of this text in the previous section). Being the one “through whom” another (the Father) creates is *not* the same as being the one who does the actual creating or the one “from whom” creation comes first.

Returning to the discussion of OT LXX grammatical parallels to Revelation 3:14, consider Job 40:19. Here reference is made to “the beginning of the Lord’s creation” (Greek: ἀρχὴ πλάσματος κυρίου, *arche plasmatos kyriou*). Here a form of the Greek word *plasma* is used which can involve something or someone “formed,” such as when Adam was “formed” from the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7, 8). In Genesis 2:7, 8 the LXX does in fact use a form of the Greek verb *plasso* (πλάσσω), which means “to form.” In Genesis 2:7, 8 the Hebrew text uses a word which more closely corresponds to *plasso* in terms of “forming” something. But in Job 40:19 the Hebrew text uses a term which refers to the beginning of God’s “ways.” It is, in fact, the same word used to describe the creation of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22.

As for Behemoth itself, the one called “the beginning of the Lord’s creation,” no one can say exactly what type of creature it was. However, suggestions such as the hippopotamus do not fit well with some of the descriptions given, even in hyperbole. For example, in Job 40:17 Behemoth’s tail is said to ‘bend down like a cedar.’ This does not describe the hippopotamus! Consider, however, the creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2. Starting with the fifth day of creation, Genesis 1:24 reads: “Let the earth put forth living souls according to their kinds, domestic animal [Hebrew: *Behemah*, singular form of *Behemoth* used in Job 40:19] and moving animal and wild beast of the earth according to its kind” (NWT). The LXX here uses three terms to describe these land animals, one of which is *theria*. I believe this is the LXX’s corresponding word for the Hebrew *Behemah*, as it also is in Job 40:15.

It would appear to be the case, then, that Behemoth was “the beginning of the Lord’s [land] formations/creations.” Indeed, both in the LXX of Job 40:19 and in Genesis 2:19 a form of the Greek verb *plasma* (“to form”) is used where in both cases it seems as if the creatures described are land creatures. This

includes flying creatures which must return to the land. Also, the LXX adds more to the distinction of Behemoth by including the following, "He [Behemoth] was made for the purpose of amusing the angels of [God]." James Strahan notes that while it may be that Behemoth "was the first land animal to be created," Job 40:19 likely regards Behemoth as "God's masterpiece."¹¹⁷ Either meaning, however, includes Behemoth in the "creation" or "formations" of God, whether as its first, as its best, or perhaps as both.

With this in mind, Job 40:19 could certainly be understood relative to the land creations of God that began on the fifth day of creation according to Genesis chapter 1. These land creations are again highlighted in Genesis chapter 2, where the text first speaks of God "forming" animals from the ground to bring to Adam for naming. Perhaps Behemoth was the first animal God brought to Adam because it was the first one God formed from "the ground."—Genesis 2:19.

Both Job 40:19 and Proverbs 8:22 are parallel to Revelation 3:14 in their use of *arche*. So is the LXX of Numbers 24:20 by its use of *arche* for Amalek as "the first [Greek: *arche*] of the nations." Though Amalek is not the first of all the nations chronologically speaking, Amalek was the first nation to fight against Israel after the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 17:8). Indeed, the Targums of Onqelos, Neofiti, and Pseudo-Jonathan make this meaning explicit in their translations, namely, "The first of the nations who waged (war) with Israel were the Amalekites."¹¹⁸ I know of no example in the Bible or in literature contemporary with it where *arche* means "origin" or "active cause." To suggest that we have just such a use in Revelation 3:14 is special pleading, and the burden of proof is on those who contend that

¹¹⁷ James Strahan, *The Book of Job*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1914), page 339.

¹¹⁸ See the readings in Martin McNamara and Ernest G. Clarke, *The Aramaic Bible*, vol. 4, *Targum Neofiti 1: Numbers and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Numbers* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995) and Bernard Grossfield, *The Aramaic Bible*, vol. 8, *The Targum Onqelos to Leviticus and The Targum Onqelos to Numbers* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1988).

the meaning is different from the above examples of *arche* in the NT and in the LXX.

Finally, in Revelation 3:14 it is said that Jesus is the *arche* of “God’s creation.” Therefore, whatever meaning we give to *arche* in this verse does not negate the fact that Jesus is distinct from “God.” The “creation” referred to in Revelation 3:14 “belongs” to or is “of” or “by” (Greek: *tes* [genitive of origin]) “God,” not “of” or “by” the *arche* itself! Those who advocate the meanings of “origin,” “first cause,” or “ruler” for *arche* in Revelation 3:14 must provide examples supporting their position and also explain the relationship between “God” and the *arche* of *his* creation before I can accept it as more likely than “beginning” for Jesus where it concerns the creation “by God.”

Chapter Summary

The Bible presents Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God, as his God’s “firstborn” and “only-begotten” who came to the earth in response to God’s will. Jesus had a human life (John 1:14), and a prehuman life (Philippians 2:6-8). He taught his followers that he lived “because of the Father” (John 6:57) and several NT and other biblical texts strongly support his teaching, including Colossians 1:15-17, Proverbs 8:22-31, and Revelation 3:14. The belief of Jehovah’s Witnesses and now by the Christian Witnesses of Jah that God’s Son was created or given life before he became a man is well-founded on the best available reasons, and it is consistent with the overall teaching of the Bible concerning Jesus’ life in heaven and on the earth.

The Bible also tells us that Jesus is “the Word of God,” and that he existed “with” Jah before all things were created (John 1:1; Revelation 19:13). He is the beloved “firstborn” of God whom all will honor and worship as God permits, even as he commands (Hebrews 1:6). Through this one God made all other things, that is, all things other than the one he himself made directly, without a mediator. But once the Son was given life, “all things” were made through him and “for him,” as he is the “heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2). This one was “glad before [Jah] all the time, being