

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.

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commands in allowing *proskyneo* to be given to his disciples in Philadelphia. But how can God be the true object of our worship and at times permit some of his creatures to be similarly given “worship”? In this chapter I will consider this question first, and then present and defend the biblical teaching concerning God’s Firstborn, showing that he is indeed the first and most glorious creation of the Father, as Jehovah’s Witnesses teach.

The “Worship” of Jah’s Firstborn

The NWT’s use of “worship” in reference to Jesus. According to a number of translations of Hebrews 1:6, God commands all of the angels to “worship” his “Firstborn,” Jesus. The word here translated “worship” is the Greek word προσκυνέω (*proskyneo*). Rhodes writes the following in criticism of the NWT: “In Hebrews 1:6, we are told that Christ is worshipped (*proskuneo*) by the angels. But in the *New World Translation*, this superiority is obscured because of the way the Watchtower has butchered this verse.”³ Because the NWT as having translated *proskyneo* here as “obeisance” rather than as “worship,” Rhodes characterizes the NWT as having “butchered this verse.” What Rhodes fails to tell his readers is that the NWT rendering is both consistent with other Bible translations and with the definitions given for *proskyneo* in numerous New Testament (NT) Greek dictionaries.

For example, in the *New English Bible* Hebrews 1:6 reads, “Let all the angels of God pay him homage.” Consider also the readings found in the *Twentieth Century New Testament* (“Let all the angels of God bow before him”), Robert Young’s translation (“And let them bow before him—all messengers of God”), and Goodspeed’s translation (“And let all God’s angels bow before him”). Did these translations ‘butcher’ Hebrews 1:6? According to BAGD (page 716) *proskyneo* has the following meanings, “(fall down and) worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to, welcome respectfully.” Thus, Bible translators must carefully consider the context and the person to whom *proskyneo* is

³ Rhodes, *Reasoning*, page 171.

being giving before attempting to provide the right meaning of a particular word in a certain context.

In the case of Hebrews 1:6, as with Revelation 3:9, the one who is given *proskyneō* receives it *because of someone else*. In Hebrews 1:6 God's "Firstborn" is allowed to receive *proskyneō* from the "angels," and in Revelation 3:9 Jesus' followers are similarly permitted to receive "worship" or "obeisance" from those Jews who have not served Jesus. But while in some more recent editions of the NWT (for example, in the 1984 edition) *proskyneō* in Hebrews 1:6 is translated as "obeisance," earlier editions (for example, the 1950-1951, 1961 editions and the 1969 Kingdom Interlinear Translation [KIT]) translated *proskyneō* as "worship." So the NWT translators and the NWT's publisher (the Watchtower Society) clearly were not afraid of using "worship" for Jesus according to the biblical use and understanding of the word.

Indeed, the Watchtower Society's 1945 "Amendment to the Articles of Incorporation" says the Society's purposes include acting "as the servant of and the legal world-wide agency for that body of persons known as Jehovah's Witnesses ... and for public Christian worship of Almighty God and Christ Jesus."⁴ Thus, Jehovah's Witnesses are not opposed to 'worshipping' Jesus in the sense in which this can rightly be done without compromising the unique devotion due to the Father as the "one God." However, because the use of "worship" for anyone but God can be misleading without the proper context, the NWT eventually changed "worship" to "obeisance" in Hebrews 1:6 and the Society even withheld the part about "worship of ... Christ Jesus" from quotations of their 1945 "Articles of Amendment."⁵

⁴ Article 7.2 of the Society's "Articles of Amendment," January, 1945, filed in the court of Allegheny in the State of Pennsylvania.

⁵ In the 1969 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* published by the Watchtower Society, on page 50 the part quoted above from the 1945 "Articles of Amendment" is quoted again with modification, namely, "and for public Christian worship of Almighty God ..." The reference to "and Christ Jesus" is left out. It would have looked better for the Society to simply quote the 1945 "Amendment" in full on this point and then explain the sense in which Jesus can rightly be 'worshipped,' as they have done elsewhere. See, for example, "What Do the Scriptures Say About 'the Divinity of Christ'?" *The Watchtower*, January 15, 1992, page 23 (box), where it states in part that the worship God's Son receives "is relative and is directed through him to Jehovah."

The “worship” Jah permits others to receive. But to what extent can or should we give Jesus or any other creature whom God approves, “worship” in a biblical sense? Recall the wording of Hebrews 1:6, “*let all God’s angels do obeisance to/worship him*” (emphasis added). The fact that God ‘lets,’ ‘commands,’ or “told [his angels] to worship Jesus” is not lost on Bowman and Komoszewski.⁶ But they do not develop this point nor do they see its significance in relation to how the “worship” of Jesus in a relative sense is appropriate *if* God permits it.

In the Bible, the worship of Jesus is nowhere said to have anything to do with his being a “person” of the Trinity. But the Bible does provide us with numerous instances where Jah permits the “worship” of certain humans, even in the same context, by the same people, and at the same time that he himself is being worshipped. For example, consider 1 Chronicles 29:20 according to the NIV: “Then David said to the whole assembly, ‘Praise the LORD your God.’ So they all praised the LORD, the God of their fathers; *they bowed low and fell prostrate before the LORD and the king*” (emphasis added).

In the LXX of this account both king David and Jah God are given *proskyneo* by the same people at the same time. David did not reject such “worship” here and instead direct it all to God, perhaps because he understood that it was due to his position as God’s royal representative, and because Jah allowed it. As great as this honor was for David, Jah permitted even greater glory and honor be given to David’s son Solomon:

And Solomon began to sit upon Jehovah’s throne as king in place of David his father and to make a success of it, and all the Israelites were obedient to him. As for all the princes and the mighty men and also all the sons of King David, they submitted themselves to Solomon the king. And Jehovah continued to make Solomon surpassingly great before the eyes of all Israel and to put upon him such royal dignity as had not come to be upon any king before him over Israel [1 Chronicles 29:23-25, NWT, underlining added].

⁶ Robert M. Bowman, Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007), page 40.

Jah gave Solomon greater "royal majesty" (NASB) than any king who preceded him, even more than he gave his father David, and yet David was "worshipped" in a sense permissible only by God (1Ch 29:20). Solomon enjoyed the obedience of his subjects because he sat on "Jehovah's throne." Similarly, "the Word" (John 1:14, 18; Revelation 19:13), is "worthy" to receive honor, glory, and even worship in a biblical sense as Jah's agent, more so than either Solomon or David, for as God's Son he "became obedient as far as death" and "was slaughtered" (Philippians 2:8-9; Revelation 5:9). Yet, Jesus himself reserved the highest form of worship for his God and Father, when he told Satan, "It is Jehovah your God you must worship, and it is to him alone you must render *sacred service* [Greek: λατρεύω, *latreuo*]."—Matthew 4:10.⁷

On the other hand, Bowman claims that "Jesus also receives ... sacred service (Rev. 22:3)."⁸ But does Revelation 22:3 teach that Jesus receives *latreuo*? The NIV translation of this text reads (with underlining and emphasis added): "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants *will serve* [form of *latreuo*] him." In this verse there are two individuals, "God" and the "Lamb," but in referring to the one who would receive *latreuo* John uses the third person *singular* pronoun ("his," "him"). If John had wanted his readers to believe that both God and the Lamb (Jesus) were to receive *latreuo*, then he could easily have used the third person *plural* pronoun (for

⁷ Karen H. Jones, "Distinguishing the Meaning of the Greek Verbs in the Semantic Domain for Worship," *FN* 4 (November 1991), page 185, observes: "In the New Testament λατρεύω [*latreuo*] is used to designate duties performed in a religious vocation. ... As used in the New Testament, the word λατρεύω denotes actions which are always evaluated positively when God is the grammatical object and negatively with reference to any other object (eg, Matt 4:10; Luke 4:7, 8)." It is, however, possible to use *latreuo* for someone other than God but only in furtherance of the worship of the "one God." For example, in "a Christian portion of the *Sibylline Oracle* (8.442-445)" we read that all things in the world "serve" (form of *latreuo*) Adam because he is made in the "form" (*morphe*) of God (D. Steenburg, "The Worship of Adam and Christ as the Image of God," *JSNT* 39 [1990], page 97). This use of *morphe* may have to do with an image Adam was given that permitted "worship" of him similar to how the Son of God is the "image" and "imprint" of God (Col 1:15; Heb 1:3), and how as such he can be worshipped in "fulfillment of God's victory over idolatry." It is also clear that this "worship" is in both cases "at God's bidding" (Steenburg, "The Worship of Adam and Christ as the Image of God," pages 100, 101), as with Heb 1:6.

⁸ Bowman, *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, page 109.

example, 'and *their* servants will serve *them*') instead of the singular form he chose to use.⁹

If Bowman or anyone would like to argue that *latreuo* here in Revelation 22:3 refers to "the Lamb," then we are justified in asking for the good reasons that restrict the reference here to the Lamb rather than to God, the one to whom *latreuo* is elsewhere restricted. The singular pronominal reference in Revelation 22:3 combined with Jesus' statement in Matthew 4:10, along with other uses of *latreuo* for God as distinct from Jesus in Revelation,¹⁰ support the view that in Revelation 22:3, *latreuo* is meant for God not the Lamb. Thus, Revelation 22:3 does not prove that "Jesus also receives ... sacred service," as Bowman claims.

In addition to 1 Chronicles 29:20 and Revelation 3:9, there are numerous other texts in the Bible that reveal how Jah permits worship (*proskyneo*) of some of his appointed servants. Consider the following examples of *proskyneo* used for God's servants in the Greek version of the OT (the LXX), with the English from the RSV (with underlining added):

1 Samuel (1 Kings in LXX) 24:8 (24:9)

Afterward David also arose, and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth, and did obeisance [ἐπὶ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ, *epi prosopon autou epi ten gen kai prosekynesen auto; prosekynesen is a form of proskyneo*].

1 Samuel 25:23

When Ab'igail saw David, she made haste, and alighted from the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed to the ground [προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, *prosekynesen auto epi ten gen*].

⁹ Compare Rev 6:16, 17 where the third person plural pronoun is used in reference to God and to the Lamb.

¹⁰ Rev 7:15 speaks of the great crowd that comes out of the tribulation rendering *latreuo* to the "One seated on the throne," referring to God. However, Jesus is clearly distinguished from the One seated on the throne, as he is said to be "in the midst of the throne," according to verse 17.

1 Samuel 25:41

And she rose and bowed with her face to the ground [προσεκύνησεν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον, *prosekynesen epi ten gen epi prosopon*], and said, "Behold, your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord."

2 Samuel 1:2 (2 Kings in the LXX)

And on the third day, behold, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes rent and earth upon his head. And when he came to David, he fell to the ground and did obeisance [ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ, *epesen epi ten gen kai prosekynesen auto*].

2 Samuel 9:6

And Me·phib'ō·sheth the son of Jonathan, son of Saul, came to David, and fell on his face and did obeisance [ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ, *epesen epi prosopon autou kai prosekynesen auto*].

In these and in other biblical texts,¹¹ human servants of God are not simply given *proskyneo* (though that in and of itself is significant). Rather, people 'bow with their face to the earth' and 'fall down' and give them *proskyneo*! But where is the Trinitarian appreciation for such uses of *proskyneo*, that is, relative to how they can be used to understand the kind of "worship" God *permits* or 'commands' be given to his very own Son? Where are the Trinitarians when it comes to explaining the above texts which teach that servants of "one God" can be given *proskyneo* by others, even after 'falling to the ground with their face to the earth'? So far as I can tell, their explanations and any attempts to use such texts as a background for the worship of the Son in the NT are nowhere to be found.

In this light, it is interesting to note that most of the above information about the use of *proskyneo* in the OT LXX and in the NT was presented in the Second Edition of this book.¹² Yet,

¹¹ See also 2Sa 14:4, 22, 33; 16:4; 18:28; 24:20; 1Ki 1:16, 23; 2Ki 2:15; 4:17; 1Ch 21:21; Isa 60:14; Ru 2:10.

¹² See *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, Second Edition (Huntington Beach, CA: Elihu Books, 2000), pages 205-210.

though they refer to my Second Edition on several occasions in their recent work on the subject of the deity of Jesus Christ, Bowman and Komoszewski ignore each and every single one of the texts captioned above in their discussion of the worship of Jesus in the Bible. They thus leave their readers without a complete perspective on the biblical understanding of what it means to 'fall down,' 'bow before,' and *then* give *proskyneo* to someone who is not God himself or even a "person" of the "one God."¹³ Also, though Bowman and Komoszewski ignore my discussion of this subject as presented in my Second Edition, they find occasion for criticizing Jason Beduhn for "taking no notice of Hebrews 1:6!"¹⁴

The Logos and "Time"

"In the beginning." Now that I have given some perspective on "time" and on the biblical teaching about how Christians can properly "worship" God's "Firstborn," it is time to return to the question of whether the Bible does in fact teach that Jesus is the first and most glorious of all of God's creations. First I will show how the Bible presents the Word (*ho logos*) in relation to indicators of time before he "became flesh" (John 1:14). This will provide a basis for further discussion of the role of the Word in creation, and also where it concerns the creation of the Word as God's "Firstborn."

Consider the meaning of the first two clauses of John 1:1, which according to nearly every English translation read, "In the beginning was the Word [clause A], and the Word was with God [clause B]." To one familiar with the opening words of Genesis 1:1, the question of whether the "beginning" here referred to is the same "beginning" mentioned in Genesis 1:1 comes naturally to mind. At one time (as recent as 1993), Jehovah's Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society believed that the "beginning" of John 1:1 referred to the "beginning" of Proverbs 8:22 and Revelation 3:14 (two texts that are discussed later in this chapter), but not to the "beginning" of Genesis 1:1.

¹³ Bowman and Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place*, pages 37-45.

¹⁴ Bowman and Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place*, page 10.