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Answering a Letter from Jehovah's Witnesses

By Tal Davis

Recently I received a hand-addressed letter at my home in Flowery Branch, Georgia. It was from a married couple who live in the city. Here is what the letter said (their names have been omitted for privacy; italics mine):

Dear Neighbor,

We are writing to invite you to a special event that will be attended by millions of people. It is the Anniversary (sic) of Jesus' Death.

"Keep doing this in remembrance of me"- Luke 22:19

Your own special invitation is enclosed.

The event will be held in person and on Zoom. If you would like to attend, please email your Zoom ID request to (their personal email address) Or visit the official website of Jehovah's Witnesses www.jw.org

Sincerely

(his signature)

Enclosed in the envelope was a leaflet listing the time and place for the event. I knew immediately what the invitation was for. Every year, Jehovah's Witnesses and their families (many of whom are not active Jehovah's Witnesses) gather in local Kingdom Halls (congregational buildings) to commemorate what we usually call the Last Supper of Jesus and His disciples. It is always held after sunset on Nisan 14 according to the lunar Hebrew calendar, which is also the date of the Jewish Passover. This year that date was Thursday, April 15.

In 2020, 17,844,773 attended the event worldwide; about twice the number of active Jehovah's Witnesses members. The people listen to lectures, and then the Lord's Memorial meal is celebrated. Bread and wine is passed among the people present, but very few actually partake of the elements. In fact, in 2020, only 21,182 took the bread and wine. That is less than 0.2 % of those present that night and only about 0.25% of the active membership. So why the small number of partakers?

The answer is that the Jehovah's Witnesses believe that only 144,000 of their very best people are part of what they call "the Anointed Class." These are the only Jehovah's Witnesses, according their theology, who will go to heaven after Armageddon and the last judgment. All the others will live forever on earth. So, in their practice, only those in the Anointed Class now living are eligible to take the elements in the Memorial meal. Needless to say, all those concepts are totally contrary to sound biblical teaching and the intentions of Jesus Himself.

Anyway, I responded to the letter I received with a personal letter of my own, addressed to the writers. I did not go into the question of the Memorial meal, but I did use as an opportunity to ask questions that I hope the readers will investigate. My response is below. I think it models a way to witness to Jehovah's Witnesses.

Dear Mr. and Mrs. (name withheld),

Thank you for your kind invitation to attend the Memorial of Jesus' Death event on April 15, 2022. I doubt I will be able to attend but I do have two questions that

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I have asked Jehovah's Witnesses in the past and have never received satisfactory answers. The questions are regarding the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NWT), the Bible published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

My first question concerns the NWT translation of Colossians 1:15-17. The 2013 online version of the NWT renders that passage this way:

15 He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 because by means of him all other things were created in the heavens and on the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All other things have been created through him and for him. 17 Also, he is before all other things, and by means of him all other things were made to exist, (NWT)

Many times I have shown this passage to Jehovah's Witnesses and asked them if they knew why the NWT translators added the words "other" in this passage four times between the words "all" and "things." (All NWT versions before 2013 had "other" in parentheses.) I have never seen any other Bible translation that includes that word in those verses. I have researched it extensively and cannot find that word in any ancient New Testament Greek manuscript text. Even the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, does not show the word "other" in the Greek text.

Actually the two English words "all things" translates *panta* (or *pantas*), a single Greek word which literally means "all things" or "everything." Can you tell me why the translators added the word "other" when it

clearly is not in the Greek text? Is it possible they were trying to obscure the impact of the passage which asserts that *Jesus Christ* was the Creator of all things, something only God could do? (By the way, who were the translators of the NWT? Their names are not listed in any editions I have seen.)

I am aware that the Jehovah's Witnesses' theological position about the preexistent Jesus is that he was Michael, Jehovah's first created being, and was not the ultimate creator of "all things" in the universe. According to Watchtower Bible and Tract Society theology, Jehovah God created Michael (i.e.: Jesus) who then only assisted Jehovah to make all "other" things. It seems to me that the passage, when translated as it is in Greek, says that *everything* that exists was created by and for Jesus, was reconciled by Jesus, and is sustained by Jesus, who is the fullness of God.

Now my second question: Mr. and Mrs. ****, why does the NWT translate the common Greek words for Lord (*kurios*) and God (*Theos*) as "Jehovah" 237 times in the "Christian Greek Scriptures" (New Testament)? I have noticed that it is only rendered that way when *kurios* is used in the context of a reference to God in a generic sense, or when used in a passage that quotes from the Old Testament. I have noticed that *kurios* (exact same Greek word) is never translated as "Jehovah" in the nearly 400 other times in the New Testament when it is applied as a title to Jesus Christ. Why is there a distinction when it applies to Jesus?

In any case, what textual or linguistic justification is there for ever using "Jehovah" to translate *kurios*? No other Bible translation would ever think of making such an audacious change from what is in the Greek texts. The word *kurios* should always be accurately translated, according to context, as "Lord" or "Master," and the word *Theos* always translated as "God."

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Neither Greek word can ever be translated legitimately as "Jehovah."

It is obvious that the NWT's illegitimate use of "Jehovah" to translate *kurios* (Lord) or *Theos* (God) 237 times in reference to God, but never as a title of Jesus, is to reinforce the distinction between God and Jesus in the minds of Jehovah's Witnesses like yourselves.

Mr. and Mrs. ****, it is clear to me that the NWT is full of biased and, in many cases, outright distorted renderings of key biblical passages affirming the deity of Jesus Christ. Of course, I know that Jehovah's Witnesses deny the full deity of Jesus Christ and the historic doctrine of the Holy Trinity. In their view, only the Father, that is, Jehovah, is the one true God. Jesus was, in his preexis-

tence, a created super angel who was in no way equal in power or majesty to Jehovah.

Mr. and Mrs. ****, again I appreciate the invitation to attend the memorial of Jesus' death. But I cannot consider the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society and the Jehovah's Witnesses as authentic representatives of God in the world until I can get answers to the two questions I posed above (and others I did not address in this letter). I would appreciate your response to the issues I have raised. You may respond by mail or, preferably, by email at tal@marketfaith.org.

I hope to hear from you soon. Thank you again.

Sincerely
Tal Davis

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