

The Jehovah's Witnesses' New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures – Part 3

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Examples of Mistranslation—continued

In the following material we have utilized the Watchtower Society's *New World Translation* [NWT] and *Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures* (1969). It gives the Greek text, a word for word English translation below the Greek text, and, has a column containing the *New World Translation* to the right.

In the following examples we have provided the *New World Translation* and the *New American Standard* translation so the reader may make a quick comparison prior to a brief discussion. The NWT mistranslation is supplied in capital letters for emphasis.

1. Matthew 25:46 [See Part 2 for discussion of this passage.]

2. John 8:58 ["I Am" is translated as "I have been" in order to circumvent Christ's deity].

"Jesus said to them: "Most truly I say to you, before Abraham came into existence, I HAVE BEEN." NWT

"Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I Am.'" NAS

The proper translation of the Greek *ego eimi* is "I Am" not "I have been" (NWT). This is an attempt to deny Christ's statement of deity (cf. context) and to replace it with something compatible to the Witnesses' concept of Christ's limited pre-existence. Dr. Mantey states:

The translation of it as "I have been" by Jehovah's Witnesses is wrong. The footnote stating that it is in "the perfect indefinite tense" is also wrong. No Greek grammar, to my knowledge, has such a statement. In fact, there is no form *eimi* in the perfect tense in the Greek New Testament.¹

It is also noteworthy that Michael Van Buskirk, author of *The Scholastic Dishonesty of the Watchtower* has two official Watchtower Society letters which he quotes showing they have assumed four *different* grammatical positions in regard to *ego eimi*: a) "present indicative first person singular" (the correct designation);

b) “a historical present”; c) the “perfect indefinite tense”—but only “in a general sense,” and d) “perfect tense indicative.”² Again, there is no “perfect indefinite tense” as they claim (see 1950, 1953 eds.). Dr. Mantey also states there is no “perfect indicative in this verse in Greek.”³ The correct answer, of course, is “present indicative, first person singular,” but this translates as “I Am,” *not* as “I have been.” If the Watchtower Society had admitted (at least once) that the grammatical construction was a “present indicative, first person singular,” why did they never translate it as such? In fact, one can look at their own Kingdom Interlinear (p. 467) and directly beneath the Greek *ego eimi* we find “I Am”; but the translation column to the right reads “I have been.”

3. Hebrews 9:27 [This verse has the insertion of “for all time” to justify their belief in conditional immortality.]

“And as it is reserved for men to die once FOR ALL TIME, [i.e., eternally] but after this a judgment.” NWT

“And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.” NAS

Again looking at the Kingdom Interlinear (p. 988) we find the addition of the words “for all time” is without any justification. There is no Greek correspondence. Mantey states:

Heb. 9:27, which without any grounds for it in the Greek, is mistranslated in the J. W. Translation—“And as it is reserved for men to die *once for all time*, but after this is a judgment...” Note that the phrase “for all time” was inserted in the former versions without any basis in the original for it. No honest scholar would attempt to so pervert the Word of God!⁴

4. Luke 23:43 [This verse inserts a comma after “today,” to support their belief in soul sleep.]

“And he said to him: ‘Truly I tell you today, You will [i.e., later] be with me in Paradise.’” NWT

“And he said to him, ‘Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.’” NAS

Their own Interlinear (p. 408) admits “in the original Greek no comma is found.” The noted commentator Lenski explains why the NWT is incorrect here:

It should no longer be necessary to explain that “today” cannot be construed with “I say to thee.” To be sure, Jesus is saying this today—when else would he be saying it? The adverb “today” is a necessary part of Jesus’ promise to the malefactor. In fact, it has the emphasis. It would usually take three or four days until a man would die on the cross, so lingering was death by crucifixion. But Jesus assures this malefactor that his sufferings will cease “today.” This is plain prophecy and at the same time blessed news to this sufferer. But Jesus says vastly more: “Today in company with me shalt thou be in Paradise!” This is an absolution. By this word Jesus acquits this criminal of sin and guilt.⁵

5. Matthew 27:50/Luke 23:46 [The term “spirit” is translated as “breath” and/or

“spirit” in order to support conditional immortality.]

“Again Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and yielded up (his) BREATH.” NWT

“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.” NAS

“And Jesus called with a loud voice and said ‘Father into your hands I entrust my spirit.’ When he had said this he expired.” NWT

“And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.’ And having said this, He breathed His last.” NAS

In Matthew 27:50 *pneuma* (spirit) is translated “breath” rather than spirit, to support their belief that no immortal spirit exists to be “yielded up.” Yet Luke 23:46, the parallel account of this *same* event which includes the actual cry of Jesus, shows that the translation “breath” is an impossible rendering as it would have Jesus crying out, “Father into thy hands I commit my *breath*.”

The question is this—If in the New World Translation *pneuma* is translated “spirit” in Luke, why is it translated “breath” in Matthew unless it is an attempt to deny that Jesus’ spirit continued after His physical death? Clearly, the Witnesses have distorted Matthew 27:50 although nothing could really be done with the passage in Luke.⁶ Again, their interlinear directly beneath the Greek translates “*pneuma*” as “spirit” in both places (pp. 168, 409). Why then not in both translations?

Notes

¹ Julius Mantey, *Depth Exploration in the New Testament* (NY: Vantage Press, 1980), p. 137.

² Michael Van Buskirk, *The Scholastic Dishonesty of the Watchtower* (Santa Ana, CA: Christian Apologetics and Research Information Service, 1976).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Mantey, *Depth Exploration*, pp. 142-43.

⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretations of St. Luke’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishers House, 1961), pp. 1145-46.

⁶ Walter Martin, *Jehovah of the Watchtower* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1974), p. 135.