

## Are the Jehovah's Witnesses Right that John 1 which says Jesus is the Word and the Word is God is mistranslated?

The opening line in this chapter says, "In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was God" and later "...The word became flesh." This seems to say that Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word is actually God.

The Word is the Greek word Logos. I prefer the notion that the word Logos means Information. In the beginning was the Information. It was with God and it was God.

The Stoics believed in fate as a force and power so that what was going to happen was going to happen. Why do people want to believe that? It makes them feel they have to accept things as opposed to trying to accept. Having to accept takes the pressure off. It probably is the most popular form of faith though you would think otherwise when you hear how people go on about God so much. The Stoics regarded gods as forces and thus as another way of looking at fate. Gods and fate were one and the same thing. Their term logos referred to the gods and/or to fate. They emphasised the idea of the logos permeating the universe and controlling it.

In context then, there is no reason to think that John is saying Jesus had no equal. The gods who composed the logos were far from being equal with each other. Thus it is not necessarily saying Jesus was God.

So that is the philosophy but there is a case to be made for mistranslation.

The definite article THE is missing where you expect to see it. So you get "In the beginning was the Word and the word was with THE God and the word was God". THE God is God but the word is described as God but is not THE God. That is poetry. What is the text saying? It is saying that you can describe Jesus as God but you cannot identify him as God. It is not talking about identity. The son can be descriptive of his father but not his father.

"Almost all English translations of the gospels start more or less as the KJV does in the first two clauses of John 1:1. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.' This clearly states that the Word existed before Creation and, as stated below, Jesus is identified with the Word. One should remember, however, that there is a distinction between being pre-existent (i.e. having existed before birth) and existing before creation. The second part of John 1:1 is usually translated 'and the Word was God' (KJV). However, The New World Translation of the Holy Scripture (NWT), a translation made by Jehovah's Witnesses, translates it 'and the Word was a god'. In a footnote this is justified by the fact that the word used for God is simply Theos and not ton Theon, which has the definite article. The absence of the definite article does not, however, justify the indefinite article used in this translation. The nature of Koine Greek (common tongue) makes the distinction rather difficult. The five words that are involved are: kai (and) Theos (God), en (was), ho (the) and Logos (Word). In Koine Greek, the function of the words is not dependent on their position in the sentence but rather on their endings. The os ending implies that the word is a subject and an on ending implies that the word is an object (e.g. theon). Hence in the third clause the (the) first word in the English translation (the subject) is not found by the suffix, since both are in a 'nominal inflected form' (i.e. end with os) but by which has the definite article. By placing theos first in the clause, emphasis is added to theos, which disallows 'a god' as a justifiable translation. The absence of the definite article, however, makes theos descriptive rather than identificational. One may therefore wish to opt for the New English Bible's translation, 'What God was the Word was'" (page 59, 60, Jesus and Early Christianity in the Gospels).

The chapter says that the word was with God in eternity or in the beginning and that the word was God and that the word has become a man, Jesus Christ. This no more proves that Jesus was God and lived before he was born with God in Heaven than the even more literal sounding and stronger things Wisdom says about herself that she was in the beginning with God and was present when he made all things in Proverbs 8 does. There she says she was a person with God who is eternal like God and is God. It is a mystical parable that is not meant to be taken literally. Both John 1 and Proverbs 8 are poems and poems are often not to be taken literally. The strictly monotheistic book of Sirach speaks of divine wisdom as a female and she says that God created her from all eternity and instructed her and that she ministered before God in the holy tabernacle (chapter 24). This is not literal though there is no hint that it is not literal for the author was writing to an audience that would have understood that. Speaking of God's wisdom as if it were a separate person from him was a device that was popular in those days. We are meant to realise that the fact that the wisdom is God's and God is wise means that God is the wisdom. The wisdom here seems more separate from God than the word ever was in the gospel of John and yet it is not literal. John 1 does not prove that Jesus was being declared to be literally God but says that was a manifestation of the word of God. Funny how the Christians say that Jesus could be both fully God and fully man which to our minds is impossible and yet he can't be the word which is God and not be literally God.

Ignore the Jehovah's Witness Bible, the New World Translation, which says that the word was a god. They do this because

the definite article in the original Greek. But if John omitted it to show that the Word was a small god he would have used the word *heios* and not *theos* the word for the normal God that he said the Word was (Do Christians Believe in Three Gods? Page 12). The Witnesses do not translate every occurrence in the chapter of the word *theos* without the article as a god which exposes their dishonesty. According to Bishop John AT Robinson “the word was God” translation gives the wrong impression of what the phrase is trying to convey which is, “what God was, the word was” (page 71, *Honest to God*). Robinson takes this to show that Jesus expresses God but isn’t necessarily God. That is why Robinson recommends that we should not be dogmatic and say that Jesus claimed to be God. He cited Jesus’ saying that if he claims anything for himself we should not believe him. He takes this as evidence that Jesus does not want to be believed if he claimed to be God (page 72, *ibid*).

The word is the reason of God, his revelation. God is his attributes according to John’s philosophy – in his first epistle he says that we must love for God is love - so he is his truth, his revelation. This revelation, the communicating power of God, has become a man. This does not mean that this man is God for the Bible is God’s word and God is not the Bible though God is his word. It does not say that Jesus was with God in all eternity though he would have been like the rest of us if he had a definite origin in time before which he never existed in time. Time is part of eternity so Jesus was in eternity in no unique way. We can speak for God and be his revelation which is him without becoming him. All John says is that Jesus is the unique word of God.

God is his word as he is love. Jesus was the word of God in the sense that he pictured and revealed God and was the paramount revelation. So God being his own word and the word becoming Jesus does not imply that Jesus was God for God is love and a mother showing love becomes love which is God but does not become God.

It may be exactly the same as Christians saying there is no power but God’s which must mean that the universe is made out of God and still they say that the universe is not God. Reason says that it is God but they say no.

The Christadelphian booklet, *Did Jesus Christ Really Come Down From Heaven?* states that if you replace the word *word* in John 1 with *plan* you see plainly that the chapter neither proves that Jesus was pre-existent or God. “In the beginning was the plan and the plan was with God and the plan was God. He was in the beginning with God and all things were made through the plan. In the plan was life and the life was the light of men. And the plan became man and dwelt among us full of grace and truth. We have seen his glory.” The references to the plan as he can be understood to arise from the fact that the word for *word Logos* is a masculine noun though it should have been a neuter one (page 28, *Jesus God the Son or Son of God?*) The he can be translated as it as William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury noted (*ibid*). He or it depends on what the context says. No proof is given in John that the word should be he before it became incarnate so it should be taken as it. After the incarnation it has to be he for the word took manhood. John would have been more careful if he had meant that the word was a person who took manhood or that the word was personally God. It must be remembered that *word* also means wisdom and in Proverbs 8 and in the Book of Wisdom there was a tradition of personification of divine wisdom. We could have that here in John only there is no proof that the word was personified. In the tradition, the wisdom of God was spoken of as being something separate from God though it was God. It is like us separating our own wisdom from ourselves but there is no real separation but just an abstract one for we are the wisdom. We think of blue cubes as blue but there is a sense in which the blueness can be distinguished from the cube though it is the cube.

Psalms 33:6 may have been the biblical precedent for John chapter 1 for it says that God made all things by his word. God did not make all things out of speech but made it by his power to plan so the word is power to plan. Usually, when the Bible uses a strange term like *Logos* it has something in mind that was in the books preceding that use. John 1 does say that the word made all things so it equates God’s creative power with the *Logos*. All John says then is that God is his power to create and this power always existed and this power became man in Jesus meaning that Jesus was at the very least a man who received the power to use God’s creative power. It’s like me putting my wisdom into a computer. My wisdom becomes a computer then.

It must also be remembered that the belief that the word became man reference in John refers to Jesus’ conception or the first moment of his physical existence is a mere assumption. The word could become man long after that at a later point in Jesus’ life. Jesus could have been an ordinary holy man who was promoted to become the plan of God and the saviour of the world. At that exaltation, the plan became man in him. Had John believed that Jesus was literally God he would have made it clear that Jesus was God from conception. He would have told us how God became man. He never approved the other gospels so it is nonsense to say that he thought they were enough.

Notice that John says the word was the light of God as well. Then that John the Baptist came to witness to the light and the light was coming into the world at this time and then came and was not recognised and then that it became man. This is open to several interpretations. For example, the plan could have been revealed as the light of the world and not been recognised and then it became man at the time of John the Baptist. The order is a clear hint that the word was not a person for it takes too much care to avoid giving the impression that he was. The light was coming when John was ministering and came and then became man.

The Witnesses do not translate the verse saying that a man came as a representative of a God though they should for the article is missing. John could come as the representative of

There is a lot of support for the view that John 1 actually says not that the word became man but the word became flesh. This is a significant difference. Most translations favour the word became flesh. God can become flesh with anybody. If a man is almost totally close to God it would be true to say God lives so strongly in him that God has become flesh. This is not to deny that the man has a personal identity of his own. If he was Jacob Nobody before he got so holy he was still Jacob Nobody after God became his flesh. To say God became man however would imply that the man is literally God and nobody else. But John never says that God became man. He says that God is his message and his message became man which is a careful distinction.

Jesus says that he and the Father are one and later he promises that the apostles will be one even as he and the Father are one. He says that though he is not the Father to see him is to see the Father. These considerations support the notion that Jesus though not God in person was God in every other sense. God was so close to him and a part of him.

In the scholarly, Jesus and Early Christianity in the Gospels pages 59 to 67 we learn:

The John author did not write, "The Word was God," but, "What God was the Word was". He left out the definitive article in Greek to show that he was describing the Word as God but not identifying the Word as God. It doesn't say that God and the Word were the same. It is simply saying that the Word describes God which may mean he is the image of God but not God (page 60). Page 62 shows how the Jewish philosopher Philo was able to call the Word Divine and even the second God without denying that there was only one God for the Word was God's thought but not God. Philo did not think that God was two people, God and God the Word. The John author was perhaps writing in this context.

Page 65 deals with, "And the Word was made flesh". The book verifies that the correct translation is, "And the word came in flesh". This does not suggest a spirit being such as God the Son or God the Word becoming flesh. So even if the gospel did say the word was God it still does not say that Jesus was the Word personally. The word could have been dwelling in Jesus as a separate being or person or thing or force.

John did not write, "In the beginning there was only the Word which is another word for God and God became flesh". The word can be understood as meaning fate, revelation, information or the plan. Or even any combination of those. But at the very least it means Revelation. He wrote in an unclear way which indicates that he thought that God was the plan and the plan became flesh which is not the same thing as saying God became flesh. God is the love we are told. Then we are told love can become flesh when we become loving beings. Same idea.

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