

CHRISTMAS IN THE GOSPEL
OF JOHN
Or
Who Is This Jesus of Christmas?
Message 4

INTRO: Welcome to 2016! This is New Year's day. Why do we have church today? Ask the fiddler on the roof. Yes, it is tradition! I don't mind at all. You see, we are to seek first the kingdom of God. Here is how to do that. Talk with Him first thing in the morning. You know how that is done? When you read His word, He is speaking to you; and when you pray, you are speaking to Him! Then, give Him the first part of your money, the tithe. And then on the first day of the week, go to church! And then, on new years day, start the year off by going to church! Well, anyway, I am glad to get to preach on the first day of the year. In actual fact, this is only new year's day on the calendar. The real new years day must be found on the Hebrew calendar, because the real new year's day happens on the day God created the heavens and the earth!

I began on the Sunday before Christmas, to do some messages on John 1:1-5, and what a passage this is! I called it, "Christmas in the Gospel of John" or, "Who Is This Jesus Of Christmas?" Surely, in the NT, there is no better introduction to the Christ of Christianity, whose birth we commemorate this time of year, than that of John 1. In this very first chapter, he starts us off way back in eternity past, and then takes us forward to when He was 30 years old.

I trust that by this time, the idea of the pre-existence of the One who became the Son of God is a familiar idea to you. I trust that you have no difficulty understanding that He was God before He became man, and existed in eternity past with God. And I trust it gives you a greater appreciation for what God did for man.

This morning we are to look at the words of John 1:1 that say, "...and the Word was God." One of the major questions I want to deal with is this: Could this passage legitimately be translated as the NWT of the JW's does, "...and the Word was 'a' god."

I. THE PRIMARY HISTORY OF THE WORD

C. What The Word Was

We have come now, then, to the third and last clause in the opening sentence of the Gospel of John. Notice that the English translation of the last clause in John 1:1 is, "and the Word was God." Now for those who deny that Jesus was God, that statement cannot be left to read like that. How do you solve a verse that clearly speaks of Jesus as being God? Well, the translation the Jehovah's Witnesses have written has inserted the indefinite article and it says, "...and the word was 'a' god, small g. And, as we saw in the last message, that according to this teaching, the small g god was the firstborn of all creation. He was the first one made by God, and thus He had a beginning and thus he was not God.

For over 40 years I have pondered this problem. I have never given major time to it, and have always been puzzled by this clause and the JW translation of it. I have studied the doctrine of the Trinity to some degree, and have concluded that if you interpret the Bible objectively, you cannot come to any other conclusion. But this doctrine has been fought vehemently by most, if not all of the major cults; and the JW's being in the forefront of the fray.

And over the years as I pondered this, I thought that the answer to this translation must be looked for in grammar of the clause itself. And over the years I have come across various grammatical considerations of this verse, but I have never yet been satisfied by any. And so, this year I felt led to speak on the subject of Christ, from the book of John. I had gone through Matthew and Luke, as they dealt with the subject of the birth of Christ, and decided to take the subject of the birth of Christ up in John. To interpret and preach on these verses in John is far more difficult than dealing with the birth of Christ in Matthew or Luke.

And so, having concluded over the years that one must be able to settle this matter grammatically, I began to search for grammatical evidence either for or against the JW claim that Jesus was 'a' god. I sought evidence from the 'to be' verb that is used three times in this passage; the verb 'was'. As simple as those verbs seem to be, they can be very taxing, as I have mentioned earlier.

Well, in my studies I came upon a rule in Greek grammar first published in 1933. It is the most well known rule

generated in the 20th century among Greek scholars. This rule says, "Definite predicate nouns which precede the verb usually lack the article...a predicate nominative which precedes the verb cannot be translated as an indefinite or a 'qualitative' noun solely because of the absence of the article; if the context suggests that the predicate is definite, it should be translated as a definite noun..."

Well, with that rule in mind, here is our clause. "...and the Word was God." The JW's, because they vehemently deny that Jesus is God, translate it like this, "...and the Word was a god" small 'g' god. If this clause reads 'the Word was God', the JW's are finished, along with other cults. Now, one grammatical challenge is to determine which noun, God, or the Word, is the subject. Most, if not all would agree that 'the Word' is the subject of the verb. All of this can make a very huge difference to the interpretation. In English, if the subject is the Word, it should then read either, "...and the Word was God" or "...and the Word was 'a' god." Now, according to Colewell's rule, it appears this passage should be translated, "...and the Word was God."

So, does this rule finally settle the question? Well, the JW scholars, I found, are aware of this rule, and here is what they say, "Some claim, however, that such renderings violate a rule of Greek grammar published by Greek Scholar E. C. Colewell back in 1933." They then give the rule and then they give a number of examples where this rule does not work. Then they say this, "Colewell had to acknowledge this regarding the predicate noun, for he said: 'It is indefinite ['a' or 'an'] in this position only when the context demands it.' So even he admits that when the context requires it, translators may insert the article in front of the noun in this type of sentence", end quote. And then they say this, "Does the context require an indefinite article at John 1:1?" Their question is this, does the context require the translator to put in the indefinite article as the JW's have done? And this is what they say, "Yes, for the testimony of the entire Bible is that Jesus is not Almighty God. Thus, not Colewell's questionable rule of grammar, but context should guide the translator in such cases" (pg. 28).

But the question now is, does the context give any indication whether this should read God or a god? So, here is the rule once more: "Definite predicate nouns which

precede the verb usually lack the article...a predicate nominative which precedes the verb cannot be translated as an indefinite or a 'qualitative' noun solely because of the absence of the article; if the context suggests that the predicate is definite, it should be translated as a definite noun..."

Consider first then, that in the previous clause it says, "...and the Word was with God." I mentioned this in the last message. It literally says, "...and the Word was with 'the' God." And I have no doubt the article is used here in the original because it is pointing out a monadic noun. If that is true, that means there is only one God. This is 'the' God. There is no other. And since that clause precedes the clause we are in, we must conclude that the clause, "...and the Word was God" means the Word was this one and only God. You see, this is the immediate context. But the JWs do not even mention that the original has the definite article in the preceding clause. Nor do they mention that it is in the following clause in exactly the same way, nor does their translation indicate these definite articles in the original. Why not? These things they do not mention, and there are others, would not favor their translation. The point in the context seems to want to favor Colewell's rule.

So, consider now verse 3. It says, "All things were made by Him (the Word), and without Him nothing was made that was made." Here is the NWT of this clause, "All things came into existence through him, and apart from him not even one thing came into existence." Now, if that is true how can it be true that Jesus was created? Did He make Himself come into existence? Again, the immediate context indicates that the translation of our Bibles is correct.

Consider now a most interesting piece of information in the context itself. Our English says, "...and the Word was God." Let me read a literal translation of this verse: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with the God, and **God was the Word.**" Now I mentioned the 'to be' verbs earlier. Sometimes it is hard to establish the subject of the sentence when you have a 'to be' verb. But the subject is 'the Word'. So in English we would say, "...and the Word was God." But in Greek, because of the way the language is written, you can put a sentence in any order. Our English order is subject, verb and object or predicate nominative. But in Greek, you put it in the order you want to stress.

The stress in this phrase, clearly, is God, not the Word. So John said, "...and God, was the Word!" Here the writer stresses the amazing fact that the Word was God.

But let us go to the farther context. You see, in doctrine or theology, the farthest outreaches of context is the whole of Scripture. In other words, you cannot hold to a doctrine in one point of Scripture that contradicts another part of Scripture. And here is the point: If John 1:1, the last clause should read, "...and the Word was 'a' god", the conclusion has to be that there are more gods than one. If Jehovah is Almighty God and Jesus is a god, you have more than one god. And here is the question: How many God's are there?

Well, if we consider the context of the rest of Scripture, or if we take systematic theology, we must answer that question from the rest of Scripture. So listen to what God says in Deuteronomy 4:35, "To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD Himself is God; there is none other besides Him". How many are there? And again, "Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that the LORD Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other", (Deuteronomy 4:39). And yet again, "Now see that I, even I, am He, And there is no God besides Me", (Deuteronomy 32:39).

Isaiah 44:6, "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God.'" Isaiah 45:5, "I am the LORD, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me." Isaiah 45:6, "That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting That there is none besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other." Isaiah 46:9, "Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me."

But if you listened carefully to every verse I just read it they may be summed up like this, "There is only one God." Period. Those verses do not say that there is only one Almighty God; they say there is only one God! But, if the verse says, "...and the Word was 'a' god", how many god's might there be? Two at minimum, and at the other end, the possibility of more than the Hindu's 33 million gods.

Let me add a further thought from the remoter context that may help you if you ever discuss the Trinity with the JW's. The JW's say there is only one Almighty God. In the booklet I have referred to they say, "That is why nowhere in the Bible is anyone but Jehovah called Almighty. Otherwise it voids the meaning of the words 'almighty'" (13). So, let us examine the JW claim that only God the Father is Almighty God and there can be only one Almighty God. Go to Revelation 1. In the NT God is referred to 10 times as 'Almighty'. Once the same word is translated, 'Omnipotent.' Now, 9 of those 10 occurrences are in the book of Revelation.

So, look at Revelation 1:8 which says, "'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,'" says the Lord, "'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'" Now we note that the Almighty is called the Alpha and the Omega. What does that mean? Well, alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and omega is the last letter. So, what it is saying is that He is the first and the last. Then note, it says that He is the beginning and the end. Again, the meaning is that He is the first and the last. Now let me ask you how many can be first and last? Only one, of course!

Now go to verses 10-17 (read). Here is the One who is the first and the last. And whom is this talking about? Well, look at the next verse which says, "I am He that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." Who is that? Who is He that lives and was dead? Jesus Christ! And He is the Almighty? And how many did the JW's say could be Almighty? Only one! What then does this make Jesus, but Almighty God!

So, let us now go to our passage once more. It says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God!" Our conclusion is that the Word was capital G God. And now, let me put into your mind the highest and most difficult and loftiest of all thoughts you will ever think about, by way of asking a few questions: How would you define God? What does the word 'God' mean. Who, or what is God? How is God different from everything or everyone else? You will never ponder higher questions than those.

Let me ask you a lesser question: What is a small 'g' god? Well, there are all kinds of false views of who God is. We don't have time to look at the false views of God but I understand that the supreme God is the One who is over all, and small g gods are over a part of what God has created. For us, as Christians, God must be defined from Scripture. And among those who are classed as 'Christians' there are different views. I won't deal with the various views, but one of the common sayings among Mormons, for instance, is this: *As man is, god once was; as God is man may become.* Well, you can tell immediately that this is not truly Christianity.

Let me give a word of warning here about those we refer to as Cults. Sometimes when people are made to question their faith or are invited to a faith not familiar to them by the Cults, at first appearance all is wonderful with that new teaching. And then, the further in you get, the more is revealed, and then the true faith of that group emerges. That is the case with Mormons and that is the case with Jehovah's Witnesses. For the Jehovah's Witnesses definition of God, let me quote from an internet article from "Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry: "According to Jehovah's Witness' theology, God is a single person, not a [Trinity](#),..." That is what we have dealt with thus far in John 1:1. But when you learn further what they teach about God beyond this, their faith begins to get more difficult. So, let me begin again, "According to Jehovah's Witness' theology, God is a single person, not a [Trinity](#), who does not know all things and is not everywhere. He first created Michael the Archangel through whom He created all 'other things,' including the universe, the earth, Adam and Eve, etc. This creative work took God 42,000 years... When it came time for the savior to be born, Michael the Archangel became a human in the form of Jesus. Jesus grew and kept all the laws of God and never sinned. Finally, when Jesus died, it was not on a cross but on a torture stake where he bore the sins of mankind--but this did not include Adam's sins. Jesus rose from the dead as a spirit, not physically (his body was dissolved and taken by God), and during his visitations to people on earth, he manifested a temporary physical body for them to see and touch. Thus began the true Christian church of Jehovah's followers."

Well, it is very easy to tell from that, that they are not true to the Bible in areas other than Jesus being a god.

And so, if we believe the Bible to be the Word of God, we must get our definition of God from the Bible. And once we ask this question: What is the meaning of the word 'God', capital G, or what is the meaning of the word 'god' small 'g', we have engaged our minds on the greatest thoughts we can ever seek to process.

Tell me now, if my reasoning in the next statement is correct: If there is a capital 'G' God, one thing that must be immediately apparent to anyone is that He must be responsible for the existence of the universe. Would you agree with that? And if that is true, immediately you see whoever He is, He is far beyond us. Now, let me ask this, if capital 'G' God is the creator of the universe, what then is a small 'g' god?

I don't want to be tedious to you, but I want to mention a few more things about JW's again. This is what they teach about creation. God first created Michael the Archangel through whom He created all "other things," including the universe, the earth, Adam and Eve, etc. This creative work took God 42,000 years... When it came time for the savior to be born, Michael the Archangel became a human in the form of Jesus. So, this small g god, it appears, is over the created universe and Almighty God, Jehovah God is over him.

Now let me add something else here with regard to JW teaching. Their people cannot do their own interpretation of the Bible. They must get their interpretations from the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. The article I am quoting from gave some further information on all this. It said, "At one point, The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society taught that God ruled the universe from somewhere in the Pleiades star system. They have since modified this to say that the 'Pleiades can no longer be considered the center of the universe and it would be unwise for us to try to fix God's throne as being at a particular spot in the universe.' Such changes and even contradictions in their teaching are frequent in the Watchtower organization, and when a doctrine changes, they tell their followers that the light of truth is getting brighter."

Well, our thought was that if there is a capital G God, and we do not doubt that, then He is the cause of the universe. Go to Acts 17 (read 22-23). "Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I

perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:"

You see, they worshipped all kinds of gods, small g gods. There was the rain god the harvest god and the sun god and on and on. And in case they had missed one, there was an altar to the unknown god. So I gather a small g god is less powerful. Maybe one god is only over rain, another is over the wind and so on.

But Paul then continues like this: " Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you..." Paul will now proclaim this capital G God, and note how he does it. He said, "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth..." There is capital G God.

Well, our question is: what does the word 'God' mean? Who, or what is God? Well, let me give you a longer definition of the God of the Bible:

God is the one supreme eternal, spiritual and personal being, who alone is a God by nature; and He eternally exists and is constituted of three divine personal beings known as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and these three distinct Personalities coexist in complete equality but with distinct roles. The God of the Bible is the Creator of the universe and is sovereign over all creation; angels, man and all living beings. He is known by His attributes. In Scripture these attributes reveal what God is like: He is Eternal; holy; unchanging; impassible; infinite, that is, not subject to any limitations; all-powerful; everywhere present; all wise; all knowing; self existent; immaterial; good; loving; gracious; merciful; just; sovereign; and surprisingly, He is a jealous God.

Everyone of these attributes would be worth a whole message and some even more. You see, when it says, "...and the Word was God", this is what He was and is. And now, who God is, is further revealed in His names. He is known by the names; El Eloah, that is mighty, strong prominent; and Elohim, God, Creator, mighty, Strong; and El Shaddai, God Almighty; Adonai, the substitute name for the name the

Jews did not pronounce; Jehovah, or LORD in KJV, the most sacred name of God.

Let me mention here that if you converse with the Jehovah's Witnesses, they will tell you that our Bible leaves out the most important name of all. They will tell you that the name 'Jehovah' occurs thousands of times and only a few times has the KJV translate it 'Jehovah'. Go to Genesis 2:4 (read). If you look at the word "LORD" all in capitals, that is what the JW's will tell you is the Tetragrammaton. That is the name of four letters for God, that we call either Jehovah or Jahwey. So, they say our Bibles leave it out almost altogether. But our Bibles have translated the name Jehovah as LORD, all capital letters.

It may be that the KJV translated the name for God like this because this name, to the Jews, was so sacred that they never pronounced it. When they came to this name, they read it as Adonai. When the Jews, in later years placed vowels under the Hebrew words so the younger generation could read the OT, they put vowels under this name for God that makes it unreadable. So the translators have sought to give the highest honor in translating this name LORD all in capital letters.

Well, we go on, there are the names; Jehovah Jireh, the Lord will provide; Jehovah Rapha, the Lord who heals; Jehovah Nissi, the Lord our Banner; Jehovah M'kaddesch, the Lord who sanctifies; Jehovah Shalom, the Lord our peace; Jehovah Elohim, LORD God; Jehovah Tsidkenu, the Lord our Righteousness; Jehovah Rohi, the Lord our Shepherd; Jehovah Shammah, the Lord who is there; Jehovah Sabaoth, the Lord of hosts, or the heavenly armies; El Eljon, the most high God; El Roi, the God who sees; El Olam, the everlasting God; El Gibhor, Isaiah 9:6, the mighty God.

You see, besides what the Bible directly tells us about God, in all the attributes of God and in all the names given to God, we get an understanding of what the word 'God' means in the Bible. In our clause it says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." We have looked at what the Word 'God' means in the Bible, and when it says the Word was God, that is the significance of this clause.

CONCL: Why does John begin with the subject of the Word when He opens his book of Jesus Christ? We are in the season in which we commemorate the birth of Jesus. But the birth of which Jesus do

we commemorate? As Warren Smith points out in the book, "Another Jesus Calling", there are other Jesus's. The apostle Paul speaks of another Jesus. Which Jesus's birth do we commemorate? You see, the Mormon's Jesus is a brother to Lucifer. The JW's Jesus is Michael the archangel in the flesh. May it be that when many professing Christians have a Jesus in mind that He is not the Jesus of the Bible? Is He the Jesus that is just love?

When it says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God", can you define Him by saying, "He is the One who loves?" Is that not but a very small part of a definition? And does that not leave a lot out? Is He not also the One who is holy, holy, holy? Is He not also the God of justice? Is He not the God who will pour out His wrath on mankind in the end? Is He not also the God who will cast the majority of mankind into hell? Oh yes, He is the God who loves, and how we rejoice in that. But we must be reminded of the rest as well.

In the last message we read that the Lord said, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts." And we put distance into light years, and found such staggering numbers our minds refuse to calculate further. And higher than that number are God's thoughts and ways above ours. And the Word was this God!

And we said that if you and I walk faithfully with Him until He comes for us or until we die, no matter how far ahead you go, there we will be with our Redeemer! And then we asked, "Is it worth it to live this wee, tiny little life-span entirely for Him?" Yes! And amen, and amen!