

# JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES VERSIONS

## B. F. Wilson's "Diaglott"

Among the versions of the Scriptures circulated by "Jehovah's Witnesses" B. F. Wilson's "*Emphatic Diaglott*" has occupied an important place since 1902, when a reprint was undertaken for the *Watchtower Bible and Tract Society*. This organisation obtained the plates about that time, and in 1927 they had the type re-set for printing on their own presses. B. F. Wilson was born in England in 1817 and was a member of a baptist church in Halifax, where he came under the influence of Campbell's "Restoration Movement" and joined the "Disciples of Christ". In 1844 Wilson settled in Geneva, Illinois, in the U.S.A. Although the "Disciples" there were in touch with John Thomas, who broke away and formed the "Christadelphian Church", the Geneva group did not join the Christadelphians, but became known as the "Restitution Church of God."

B. F. Wilson set up a printing press and published "The Gospel Banner" for many years. During this period he worked on his literal and "emphatic" translation, for which he also set the type in Greek and English and made the electro-type plates. The title page of the 1865 edition reads—"The Emphatic Diaglott, containing the Original Greek Text of what is Commonly Styled the New Testament (According to the Recension of Dr. J. J. Griesbach), with an Interlineary Word for Word English Translation; A New Emphatic Version, based on the Interlineary Translation, on the Renderings of Eminent Critics, and on the various readings of the Vatican Manuscript, No. 1209 in the Vatican Library: Together with Illustrative and Explanatory Footnotes, and a copious selection of references; to the whole of which is added a valuable Alphabetical Appendix. Fowler and Wells 1865."

Like many more recent editors, Wilson claimed that—"Scrupulous fidelity has been maintained throughout this version in giving the true rendering of the original text into English; no regard whatever being paid to the prevailing doctrines or prejudices of sects, or the peculiar tenets of theologians." However, the strong prejudice of the editor against the Authorised Version and its underlying text is indicated by the erroneous statements in the preface "To the Reader", that the versions of Tyndale, Matthew, Coverdale and Geneva were "all translated from the Vulgate Latin", and that "the Authorised Version is simply a revision of the Vulgate", whereas all of these versions were the fruit of diligent and competent Greek scholarship far beyond the capacity of Wilson to appreciate.

### The New World Translations

The "Diaglott" became *Jehovah's Witnesses'* property by adoption, and they have circulated several hundred thousand copies of it during the present century. The *Watchtower Bible and Tract Society* and *International Bible Students Association*, publishers of *Jehovah's*

*Witnesses'* literature, issued in 1950 "The New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures, Rendered from the Original Language by the New World Bible Translation Committee". In the Foreword the editors state that they used as the basis of their translation "the widely accepted Westcott and Hort text (1881), by reason of its admitted excellence." They also took into account the text of D. Eberhard Nestlé, and that compiled by the Spanish Jesuit, Bover (1943), and the edition of another Jesuit, A. Merk (1948 — 6th edn.).

The complete Bible under the title, "New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures," incorporating the "Christian Greek Scriptures", was published by the *Watchtower* in 1961, and the revised edition of 1970 is described on the title page as the "New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures Rendered from the Original Languages by the New World Bible Translation Committee". Up to 1970 sixteen million copies had been printed in English, and translations had also been published in Dutch, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish. While the work on the Old Testament was in progress the translation was published a portion at a time in five separate volumes in 1953, 1955, 1957, 1958 and 1960. In the one-volume edition many of the readings which had been printed as foot-notes in these separate volumes were moved into the main text. The editors express their gratitude to "the Divine Author" and profess to have trusted "in his spirit to co-operate with them in this worthy work."

In 1969 the *Watchtower* published "The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures," presenting "a literal word-for-word translation" of the Westcott and Hort Greek text, together with the Revised Edition of the "New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures." A preface entitled "By Way of Explanation" says that the literal interlinear English translation is designed to show what the Greek says "without any sectarian religious coloration". The first edition numbered 500,000 copies.

#### **"The Bible in Living English"**

In 1972 the *Watchtower* printed the first 100,000 copies of "The Bible in Living English" translated by Steven T. Byington (not to be confused with Taylor's "Living Bible"). Byington was born in 1868 and first expressed an interest in the translation of the Scriptures when he was only thirteen years of age, but it was not until 1898 that he began his task and translated the opening chapters of Matthew. He continued slowly with the project until 1940 when he was able to devote most of his time to the work and bring it to completion. After his death in 1957 the *Watchtower Bible and Tract Society* acquired the publication rights, but the translation was withheld from publication until 1972. The volume does not offer any evidence that Byington ever associated with *Jehovah's Witnesses*. For many years he attended a Congregational Church that later merged with another to form the United Church of Ballard Vale, Massachusetts.

The *Watchtower* organisation also publishes an edition of the Bible with the text conformable to the King James Version with marginal references. When it is necessary to consider any aspect of the teaching of *Jehovah's Witnesses*, it is therefore important to keep

in view at least ten different sources of information. (1) Wilson's Greek text following Griesbach; (2) Wilson's Interlinear literal rendering; (3) Wilson's "Emphatic" translation; (4) The New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures; (5) The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures; (6) The Kingdom Interlinear Translation Greek text (following Westcott and Hort); (7) The Kingdom Interlinear literal rendering; (8) The Bible in Living English by S. T. Byington; (9) The Greek text underlying the K.J.V.; (10) The Authorised or King James Version. With the exception of the ninth item all of these are published by Jehovah's Witnesses and have been circulated by them in considerable quantities.

### Erroneous translations

The inconsistencies between these versions are so numerous that it would be possible to demonstrate the doctrinal errors of Jehovah's Witnesses from some renderings and to disprove the errors from the others. In the present short article a few examples only can be examined. It will be noticed that most of these are concerned with the doctrine of the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. *John 1.1.* "*The Word was God.*" The Greek editions are the same, but the English renderings published by the *Watchtower* vary—"a god was the Word, the Logos was God, the Word was a God, god was the Word, and the Word was God."
2. *John 1.14.* "*The glory as of the only begotten of the Father.*" Again the Greek editions agree, but the renderings vary—"A glory as of an only begotten from a father; a glory such as belongs to an only begotten son from a father; glory as of only-begotten (one) beside of a father; glory such as that of an only son from the Father." Some omit "begotten", some omit "son", some have both.
3. *John 1.18.* "*The only begotten Son.*" There is an important variation in the Greek text adopted by Westcott and Hort, giving rise to the renderings—"the only-begotten god; only begotten god; an Only Born God."
4. *Hebrews 1.2.* "*God . . . hath spoken unto us by His Son.*" The same Greek is variously rendered—"by a son, by a Son, by means of a Son, in Son, in a Son, by His Son."
5. *Hebrews 1.8.* "*Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.*" Again the same Greek is translated in a variety of ways to avoid the declaration made by the Father to the Son that the Son is *God*. "The throne of thee the God; God is your throne." The expression "for ever and ever" is rendered—"for the age, of the ages, forever, into the age of the age."
6. *Colossians 1.16.* "*By Him were all things created.*" Some of the *Watchtower* versions alter this to avoid the assertion that the Son was with the Father before the creation—"In him were created . . . ; by means of him all *other* things were created; in him everything was created." In Col. 1.15-17 the word "*other*" is added four times, to give the impression that the Son was a creature by whom "other things" were created.
7. *Romans 9.5.* "*Christ . . . who is over all, God blessed for ever*".

- Wilson rendered this "He who is over all, God blessed to the ages", but the New World Translation has "God who is over all be blessed for ever", and this verse no longer asserts the Godhead of Christ. Byington's "Bible in Living English," however, reads, "He who is over everything, God blessed forever."
8. *Mark 1.1.* "*The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.*" Wilson's interlinear—"a son of the God"; Wilson's Emphatic—"the Son of God"; Byington—"God's son Jesus Christ." The New World Translation, and the text which it follows, and the Kingdom Interlinear all omit "the Son of God."
  9. *1 Timothy 3.16.* "*God was manifest in the flesh*". Here all of the Jehovah's Witnesses Versions and their underlying Greek texts drop the word "God" and replace with "who" or "he who", so that Christ is not declared to be *God* manifest in the flesh.
  10. *Acts 20.28.* "*the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood*". The word here rendered "church" also appears as "congregation" and "ecclesia", and Wilson preferred "congregation of the Lord". As the text stands in the King James Version and its underlying Greek, the Scripture asserts that the blood which purchased the Church was the blood of one who was God. Most of the Jehovah's Witnesses versions change this to—"the blood of his own" or "the blood of his own (son)", but Byington has—"God's church, which he secured by his own blood."
  11. *Acts 8.37.* "*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*" is omitted by all of the Jehovah's Witnesses versions, and is found only in their edition of the King James Version.
  12. *Matthew 25.46.* "*Everlasting punishment*". As the doctrine taught in this verse is rejected by Jehovah's Witnesses, their versions modify it in various ways—"everlasting cutting-off; everlasting lopping off; the aionian cutting off"; but Byington has "eternal punishment."

#### Unitarian bias

In many passages which assert the Deity, Eternity and unique Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ, the *Jehovah's Witnesses* versions adopt a Greek text or offer an English rendering which has the effect of diminishing the testimony of these vital doctrinal passages. While Byington's version is by no means reliable, in several places it retains the older readings and renderings which the New World Translations displace. In common with other modern versions, the *Watchtower* translations conform with the theory that the text in its purest form is preserved in the 4th century Codex Vaticanus and similar documents. This abbreviated form of the text was developed in the period when the Arian heresy flourished, and not surprisingly, editions constructed on this basis have been adopted by "unitarians" in preference to the *Received Text*, in which the clearest testimonies to the Deity of Christ have been preserved. The "Improved Version" of 1808, based upon Griesbach's edition of the Greek, had a strong unitarian bias, and the *New World Translations* based on the Westcott-Hort-Nestlé text are of a similar character.