

Reference Document

"The One Verse They Can't Translate"

Every Claim, Source, and Verification Status

How to Use This Document

Each entry identifies a specific factual claim made in the video, the source it is based on, where to verify it, and any notes on confidence level. Claims are organized in the order they appear in the video.

Verification levels:

- **PRIMARY** — Sourced from the publication being analyzed (Watchtower's English and Modern Greek New World Translation editions on jw.org), peer-reviewed academic articles in Journal of Biblical Literature, published academic books from named scholars, or original correspondence from the named scholar. Primary sources can stand on their own.
 - **SECONDARY** — Sourced from established Christian apologetic and academic resource sites that reproduce primary documents in full (e.g., Christian Research Institute / equip.org, areopage.net's reproductions of JBL articles), or reputable theological reference sites. Secondary sources are most defensible when paired with the primary they reproduce.
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SECTION 1: The English Rendering and Watchtower's Defense

Claim: The English New World Translation renders John 1:1 as: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god."

- **Source:** *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (2013 revision), published by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania
- **URL:** <https://www.jw.org/en/library/bible/study-bible/books/john/1/>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Direct quotation from Watchtower's own published Bible translation, accessed on jw.org.
 - **Key quote:** *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god."*

Claim: Every other major English Bible translation (King James, NIV, NASB, ESV, NRSV) renders the final clause of John 1:1 as "the Word was God," not "a god."

- **Source:** King James Version, New International Version, New American Standard Bible, English Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version — verifiable against any standard Bible publisher.
- **URL:** <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1%3A1&version;=NIV;ESV;NASB;KJV;NRSV>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Direct comparison across published translations, all viewable in parallel on BibleGateway.

Claim: The Watchtower has defended the "a god" rendering for approximately seventy-five years (since the 1950 first edition of the New World Translation).

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, November 1, 2008, "Was the Word 'God' or 'a god'?" — Watchtower's own apologetic defense of the rendering, published on jw.org.
- **URL:** <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20081101/was-the-word-god/>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Watchtower's own publication defending the rendering.
 - **Key quote:** "In the New World Translation, the verse is rendered: 'In the beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god.'"

Claim: Watchtower cites Greek grammarians E.C. Colwell, Philip B. Harner, and Julius R. Mantey in defense of the "a god" rendering.

- **Source:** Watchtower study notes for John 1:1 on jw.org, which cite Colwell, Harner, and Mantey (via Dana-Mantey Greek Grammar). Mantey was footnoted in the Kingdom Interlinear Translation for twenty-four years.
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1001070669>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Watchtower's own study notes citing these scholars.

SECTION 2: What the Cited Scholars Actually Said

Claim: Julius R. Mantey, co-author of the Dana-Mantey Greek Grammar that Watchtower cited for twenty-four years, wrote a letter to the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society on July 11, 1974, demanding they stop quoting his grammar in defense of "a god."

- **Source:** Letter from Julius R. Mantey to Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, July 11, 1974, reproduced in full by Christian Research Institute.
- **URL:** <https://www.equip.org/articles/john-11-and-the-new-world-translation/>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — Christian Research Institute (equip.org) reproduces the full text of Mantey's 1974 letter and his subsequent published article. The original letter is the primary source; CRI's archive is the most accessible reproduction.
 - **Key quote:** "In view of the preceding facts, especially because you have been quoting me out of context, I herewith request you not to quote the Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament again, which you have been doing for 24 years."

Claim: Mantey called the New World Translation rendering of John 1:1 "a grossly misleading translation."

- **Source:** Julius R. Mantey, "A Grossly Misleading Translation," originally published as a two-page article responding to Watchtower's misuse of his grammar. Reproduced by Christian Research Institute.
- **URL:** <https://www.equip.org/articles/a-grossly-misleading-translation-the-new-world-translation/>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — equip.org reproduces Mantey's article in full. Original is by Mantey himself (primary author).
 - **Key quote:** "John 1:1, which reads 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God,' is shockingly mistranslated, 'Originally the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god,' in a New World Translation."

Claim: E.C. Colwell, in his 1933 *Journal of Biblical Literature* article "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament," concluded that the anarthrous theos in John 1:1 should be understood as definite, not indefinite.

- **Source:** E.C. Colwell, "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 52 (1933): 12-21.

- **URL:** <https://www.areopage.net/ColwellRule.pdf>

- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Direct PDF of Colwell's 1933 JBL article.

- **Key quote:** *"The opening verse of John's Gospel contains one of the many passages where this rule suggests the translation of a predicate as a definite noun... The absence of the article does not make the predicate indefinite or qualitative when it precedes the verb; it is indefinite in this position only when the context demands it."*

Claim: Philip B. Harner, in his 1973 *Journal of Biblical Literature* article, concluded that the construction in John 1:1 is qualitative, closer to "divine" than to "a god."

- **Source:** Philip B. Harner, "Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92, no. 1 (March 1973): 75-87.

- **URL:** <https://scholarlypublishingcollective.org/sblpress/jbl/article/92/1/75/190309/Qualitative-Anarthrous-Predicate-Nouns-Mark-15-39>

- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Original publication record of Harner's article in JBL via the Scholarly Publishing Collective.

- **Key quote:** *"In John 1:1 I think that the qualitative force of the predicate is so prominent that the noun cannot be regarded as definite... There is no basis for regarding the predicate theos as definite."*

Claim: The cited scholars (Mantey, Colwell, Harner) have been on record disagreeing with the Watchtower's "a god" rendering for more than fifty years.

- **Source:** Composite of: Colwell 1933 (JBL 52); Harner 1973 (JBL 92); Mantey 1974 letter to Watchtower; Mantey's published article "A Grossly Misleading Translation."

- **URL:** <https://www.equipt.org/articles/john-11-and-the-new-world-translation/>

- **Verification:** PRIMARY (composite) — Each underlying scholarly statement is a primary source. Christian Research Institute aggregates them in its overview article.

- **Note:** The dates 1933 (Colwell), 1973 (Harner), and 1974 (Mantey) all predate the present by more than fifty years. Watchtower has continued to cite these scholars in its publications throughout that period.

SECTION 3: The Modern Greek Edition

Claim: Watchtower published a Modern Greek edition of the New World Translation in 1997 and revised it in 2017.

- **Source:** *Η Αγία Γραφή — Μετάφραση Νέου Κόσμου* (The Holy Bible — New World Translation), Modern Greek edition, published by Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.

- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/el/wol/binav/r11/lp-g>

- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Watchtower's own published Modern Greek edition, accessed on the Watchtower Online Library (Greek language portal).

Claim: The Modern Greek New World Translation renders John 1:1 as: "Στην αρχή ήταν ο Λόγος, και ο Λόγος ήταν μαζί με τον Θεό, και ο Λόγος ήταν θεός." (Literal English: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was god.") The final word θεός is anarthrous (no article) and lowercase — there is no Greek indefinite article ένας before it.

- **Source:** *Η Αγία Γραφή — Μετάφραση Νέου Κόσμου*, Κατά τον Ιωάννη 1:1 (Modern Greek edition), accessed on the Watchtower Online Library.
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/el/wol/b/r11/lp-g/nwt/43/1>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Watchtower's own published Modern Greek translation as it appears on jw.org's Greek-language portal.
 - **Key quote:** "Στην αρχή ήταν ο Λόγος, και ο Λόγος ήταν μαζί με τον Θεό, και ο Λόγος ήταν θεός."

Claim: The Modern Greek New World Translation attaches a footnote to the final θεός in John 1:1 that reads: "Ἡ αλλιώς «ήταν θεϊκός»." (Literal English: "Or alternatively, 'was divine.'")

- **Source:** *Η Αγία Γραφή — Μετάφραση Νέου Κόσμου*, footnote to John 1:1 (Modern Greek edition), accessed on the Watchtower Online Library.
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/el/wol/b/r11/lp-g/nwt/43/1>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Watchtower's own published footnote, visible on the same jw.org page as the verse.
 - **Key quote:** Footnote: "Ἡ αλλιώς «ήταν θεϊκός»." ('Or alternatively, was divine.')

Claim: Modern Greek possesses an indefinite article (ένας / μία / ένα) that the Koine Greek of the New Testament era did not have.

- **Source:** Standard reference grammars of Modern Greek; widely documented linguistic feature.
- **URL:** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_Greek_grammar#Articles
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — Reference summary; the underlying linguistic fact is uncontested across all Modern Greek grammars and is taught in any introductory Modern Greek language course.
- **Note:** The presence or absence of an indefinite article in any given language is a standard, non-controversial observation in descriptive linguistics. Modern Greek's indefinite article ένας corresponds in usage roughly to English "a/an." Koine Greek had no equivalent form.

SECTION 4: Jason BeDuhn and "Truth in Translation"

Claim: In his 2003 book *Truth in Translation*, Jason BeDuhn states that his preferred rendering of John 1:1 is "divine," not "a god."

- **Source:** Jason David BeDuhn, *Truth in Translation: Accuracy and Bias in English Translations of the New Testament* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003), pp. 123-129.
- **URL:** <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9780761825562/Truth-in-Translation-Accuracy-and-Bias-in-English-Translations-of-the-New-Testament>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Direct citation from BeDuhn's published academic book.
 - **Key quote:** "I am in basic agreement with Harner that *theos* in John 1:1[c] is used qualitatively. I think the best translation would be: 'And the Word was divine.'" (BeDuhn, p. 129)

Claim: Watchtower cites Jason BeDuhn in defense of its English John 1:1 rendering.

- **Source:** Watchtower's John 1:1 teaching page on jw.org, which quotes BeDuhn's *Truth in Translation* in support of the "a god" reading.
- **URL:** <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/bible-verses/john-1-1/>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Watchtower's own publication directly citing BeDuhn.
 - **Key quote:** "Scholar Jason David BeDuhn states that the absence of the definite article makes the two occurrences of 'God' 'as different as 'a god' is from 'God' in English.'" (citing BeDuhn, *Truth in Translation*, pp. 115, 122, 123)

SECTION 5: The 2 Corinthians 5:20 Comparison

Claim: The Greek preposition in 2 Corinthians 5:20 is ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ (hyper Christou), meaning "for Christ" or "on behalf of Christ."

- **Source:** The Greek New Testament (Nestle-Aland 28th edition / SBLGNT), 2 Corinthians 5:20.
- **URL:** <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+5%3A20&version:=SBLGNT>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Standard scholarly Greek text of the New Testament.
 - **Key quote:** "ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ οὖν πρεσβεύομεν..." — the Greek preposition ὑπὲρ with the genitive Χριστοῦ.

Claim: Every major English Bible translation (King James, NIV, NASB, ESV) renders the key phrase in 2 Corinthians 5:20 as "ambassadors for Christ," "Christ's ambassadors," "on Christ's behalf," or "in Christ's stead" — none use the word "substituting."

- **Source:** King James Version, New International Version, New American Standard Bible, English Standard Version — verifiable against standard Bible publishers.
- **URL:** <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+5%3A20&version:=NIV;ESV;NASB;KJV>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Direct comparison across published translations, viewable in parallel on BibleGateway.

Claim: The English New World Translation renders 2 Corinthians 5:20 as "we are ambassadors substituting for Christ" and "as substitutes for Christ, we beg."

- **Source:** *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (2013 revision), 2 Corinthians 5:20, accessed on jw.org.
- **URL:** <https://www.jw.org/en/library/bible/study-bible/books/2-corinthians/5/>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Direct quotation from Watchtower's own published English translation.
 - **Key quote:** "We are therefore ambassadors substituting for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us. As substitutes for Christ, we beg: 'Become reconciled to God.'"

Claim: The Modern Greek New World Translation (2017) renders 2 Corinthians 5:20 with the verb αναπληρώνουμε ("we substitute / fill in for") and the noun αναπληρωτές ("substitutes"), carrying both English insertions through to the Greek edition.

- **Source:** *Η Αγία Γραφή — Μετάφραση Νέου Κόσμου*, 2 Κορινθίους 5:20 (Modern Greek edition), accessed on the Watchtower Online Library.
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/el/wol/b/r11/lp-g/nwt/47/5>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Watchtower's own published Modern Greek translation as it appears on jw.org's Greek-language portal.
 - **Key quote:** "Είμαστε λοιπόν πρεσβευτές που αναπληρώνουμε τον Χριστό, σαν να απηύθυνε ο Θεός έκκληση χρησιμοποιώντας εμάς. Ως αναπληρωτές του Χριστού, παρακαλούμε: «Συμφιλιωθείτε με τον Θεό»."

SECTION 6: Continuity with the Prior Video

Claim: Watchtower's English New Testament insertion of "law code" at Romans 13:9 carries through to the Modern Greek edition as "νομικού κώδικα" ("legal code").

- **Source:** *Η Αγία Γραφή — Μετάφραση Νέου Κόσμου*, Ρωμαίους 13:9 (Modern Greek edition), accessed on the Watchtower Online Library.
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/el/wol/b/r11/lp-g/nwt/45/13>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Watchtower's own published Modern Greek translation.
- **Note:** This claim was established in the prior EXJW Analyzer video on the New World Translation pipeline. It is referenced here as background context.

Claim: Watchtower's English New Testament insertion of the word "other" five times at Colossians 1:16-17 carries through to the Modern Greek edition.

- **Source:** *Η Αγία Γραφή — Μετάφραση Νέου Κόσμου*, Κολοσσαείς 1:16-17 (Modern Greek edition), accessed on the Watchtower Online Library.
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/el/wol/b/r11/lp-g/nwt/51/1>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Watchtower's own published Modern Greek translation.
- **Note:** The English NWT inserts "other" five times in Colossians 1:16-17 (e.g., "all other things"). The 2013 English revision removed the brackets that had previously flagged these as editorial insertions. The 2017 Modern Greek edition prints the corresponding Greek word for "other" five times in plain text. This claim was established in the prior EXJW Analyzer video on the New World Translation pipeline.

SECTION 7: Additional Supporting Sources

Watchtower's own teaching page on John 1:1

- **Source:** *Was the Word "God" or "a god"?* — Watchtower magazine, November 1, 2008.
- **URL:** <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20081101/was-the-word-god/>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Watchtower's own publication.
- **Contains:** Watchtower's own arguments for translating John 1:1 as "the Word was a god," including its appeal to Sahidic Coptic and the indefinite article reasoning. Useful context for understanding the position the Modern Greek edition quietly steps away from.

Watchtower study notes for John 1:1

- **Source:** *New World Translation Study Edition*, study notes on John chapter 1 — accessed via the Watchtower Online Library.
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1001070669>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Watchtower's own publication.
- **Contains:** Watchtower's most recent study-note defense of the "a god" rendering, including selective citation of Colwell, Harner, and Mantey, and the appeal to Coptic and Hebrew grounds for the rendering.

Christian Research Institute — overview of Mantey's response to Watchtower

- **Source:** "John 1:1 and the New World Translation," Christian Research Institute (equip.org).
- **URL:** <https://www.equip.org/articles/john-11-and-the-new-world-translation/>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — Christian apologetic and academic resource site.
- **Contains:** The full text of Mantey's 1974 letter to Watchtower, his published "A Grossly Misleading Translation" article, and contextual discussion of how Watchtower selectively cited his grammar.

Daniel Wallace — "The Article, Part II" (overview of Colwell's Rule and Harner's response)

- **Source:** Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, ch. on the article (anarthrous pre-verbal predicate nominatives).
- **URL:** <http://www.areopage.net/PDF/Wallace.pdf>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — Standard contemporary New Testament Greek grammar reference, widely used in seminary education.
- **Contains:** A comprehensive overview of how Colwell's 1933 rule has been applied, misunderstood, and revised by Harner (1973) and others, including direct application to John 1:1.

Original PDF of Colwell's 1933 JBL article

- **Source:** E.C. Colwell, "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament," *JBL* 52 (1933): 12-21.
- **URL:** <https://www.areopage.net/ColwellRule.pdf>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Direct reproduction of Colwell's original published article.
- **Contains:** The full text of Colwell's foundational 1933 study, including the rule itself and Colwell's own conclusion that the John 1:1 predicate should be regarded as definite, not indefinite.