

## Appendix O: A Reply to Greg Stafford<sup>1</sup>

••313•• Greg Stafford has published an enlarged second edition of his scholarly book *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended* (copyright 2000, Elihu Books). On pages 18-36, he evaluates this book, *The Tetragrammaton and the Christian Greek Scriptures*.

Stafford's evaluation is fair and carefully written. His comments are well worth reading for comparison with what has been said in this book.

### Our basic agreement

Greg Stafford and I agree on many fundamental Biblical issues. We agree that all of Scripture was inspired by God. We agree that it is imperative to translate Scripture in a way which communicates God's intended message. We agree on basic issues of the transmission of the text; namely that we possess no original manuscripts (autographs) but only Greek Scripture copies. We agree on the dates of those copies; the earliest reliable dates are best placed in the first part of the second century. I certainly believe that God has preserved Scripture through the ages with remarkable freedom from both copying and intentional error. This did not result because each copy was accurate. Throughout the centuries, hand written copies of the Greek manuscripts have introduced many errors. In addition, there most certainly *have* been intentional errors introduced into the text for theological reasons. Nonetheless, coming from the scholarly work of textual criticism, the end result today is a Greek Scripture text which is remarkably close to that produced by the Christian Scripture writers. In spite of his criticism at this point, I believe Stafford would agree with me on this also.

We most certainly agree that the divine name was used in the Hebrew Scripture almost 7,000 times and that it is appropriate to use it freely today. (Though he would use a stronger imperative than my choice of *appropriate*.)

### Our fundamental area of difference

*The reader must be aware that the difference between Greg Stafford's final conclusions and my own stems from a difference in our initial frame of reference.* In all likelihood, you the reader will also have a frame of reference which is similar to one or the other of ours. Ultimately you will agree with one of us and dismiss what the other has to say. You must also understand that my analysis does not allow Brother Stafford a rebuttal—he, too, would have his own answer. (However, before this present response was published, I sent Mr. Stafford a copy asking for his comments, lest I had misstated his position. I stated my willingness to make any necessary corrections before publication. I received no reply from him.) Understanding the risk of not having his response, however, I ••314•• suggest the following two statements as representative of our respective initial frames of reference:

1. In all probability, Greg Stafford has a frame of reference which asserts that *the Greek Scripture (New Testament) writers could not identify Jesus with Jehovah.*<sup>2</sup> This frame of reference requires that the entirety of the Greek Scriptures—including the history of the early church—must be reconciled with this singular idea.
2. My initial frame of reference asserts that *under inspiration of God, the inspired Christian writers could say of Jesus what God directed them to say.* No restriction is imposed which prevents the Christian writers from identifying Jesus with Jehovah.

### Consider the ramifications

• When Scripture is viewed from the first initial frame of reference, *no citation in all of the Greek Scriptures could say of Jesus that which is exclusively restricted to Jehovah.* Consequently, this frame of reference must establish that the divine name was used in the original writings because many verses

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<sup>1</sup> This appendix was written after the Second Edition of *The Tetragrammaton and the Christian Greek Scriptures* was published.

<sup>2</sup> I am using the term *identify* in the sense I used it in Chapter 14. This first frame of reference could not allow the inspired Christian writers to say of Jesus regarding his eternal characteristics that which they also understood to be true uniquely of Jehovah.

would be inappropriate (blasphemous) if applied to the *Lord*. • When Scripture is viewed from the second initial frame of reference, we can allow the inspired Christian writers to speak as God directed them when applying these Hebrew Scriptures to Jesus. In this case, it is acceptable if the word *Lord* was chosen by the original writers. This second initial frame of reference does not deny the use of the divine name today, but it does not force it into the Greek Scripture text to preserve a distinction between *Lord* and *Jehovah*. This frame of reference allows the inspired Christian writer to read יהוה in his Hebrew text, but under inspiration quote it in the Greek Scriptures as Κύριος (*Lord*). (See Chapter 14 of this book.)

- Guided by the first frame of reference, there *must* be a heresy in the early life of the church which removed the Tetragrammaton from the Greek Scriptures. This must be true irrespective of the absence of supporting manuscript or historical evidence. • The second frame of reference does not require a heretical conspiracy and all of the problems of improbability and lack of evidence it requires. (See Chapter 10.)

### The perspective of authority

- 315•• Greg Stafford objected to my statement that the New World Translation Committee gave greater authority to Hebrew translations than to the Greek Scriptures. Yet he himself lists a total of 144 references (from the 237 total) to *Jehovah* in the NWT Greek Scriptures (NT) which have no Hebrew Scripture precedent of any kind. The remaining 93 are quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures which use יהוה in the Hebrew Scripture text but Κύριος (*Lord*) in the Greek text. It matters little if the *authority* behind this change was selected Hebrew translations or simply the subjective preference of the New World Translation Committee as Stafford affirms. To an objective outsider, this substitution of *Jehovah* for *Lord* in the Greek text certainly appears as an appeal to a higher authority than the Greek text itself.

### The final obstacle

We reach our final debate on a very simple conceptual level. For any of Jehovah's Witnesses, it is imperative that certain passages in the Greek Scriptures identify *Jehovah* rather than *Jesus*. These are the passages which identify the addressee with attributes of Jehovah. (See the discussion in Chapter 11.) Some are passages quoted from the Hebrew Scriptures; some are passages which have no Hebrew Scripture source. The science (or art) of textual criticism has reproduced a Greek Scripture text which is almost entirely free of error. All of us, including both myself and Greg Stafford, are dependent on this reliable text for the foundation of our doctrinal faith. If we did not have a reliable text, we would be theologically adrift.

For myself, I must allow the original writers to speak for themselves. If, under inspiration from God, those writers identify Jesus with Jehovah in certain passages, then I must allow them to speak for God and reconcile my faith with their writing. (This must be true in *all* issues of faith. Frankly, there are areas in which Jehovah's Witnesses have been more faithful to the Biblical text than translators within my own tradition. The use of the divine name in the Hebrew Scriptures [Old Testament] is an outstanding example. See Chapter 12.)

The Watch Tower Society faithfully acknowledges the same Greek text. They also have an identical objective of recovering the exact wording of the original writers.<sup>3</sup> However, they must ••316•• introduce one important exception. *They must establish a textual apparatus which brings the divine name into the Greek Scriptures.* They have done this by developing a hypothesis of textual change from יהוה to *Kyrios (Lord)* without a single ancient Greek Scripture document to verify this change; for their claim to be plausible, they must postulate a heresy in the early life of the church without any mention of it in copious post-New Testament writings; and finally, they used Hebrew translations from 1385 CE and later derived primarily from the *Textus Receptus* (the King James' Greek text which does *not* use יהוה) to buttress their argument that the divine name was used by the Christian writers.

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<sup>3</sup> This reference is to the Greek text itself and not its interpretation or translation.

*As a reader, you must be aware of the important change to the meaning of Scripture this exception by the Watch Tower Society imposes. Ultimately, you must ask yourself if your final authority is Scripture itself, or if it is another authority, whether that authority is Hebrew versions, the New World Bible Translation Committee, or the Watch Tower Society.*



I trust the reader will understand the nature of the debate between Greg Stafford and myself. We each have a different frame of reference which leads us to differing expectations from Scripture. However, *this does not imply lack of respect or courtesy.* Brother Stafford's book represents a scholarly approach to many Biblical issues. I respect him for his work and can learn from him as I consider his point of view. I also respect him for his courtesy in dealing with objections to my book. *Scholarly debate—when it is free from rancor—is profitable to both of us as writers. It should be profitable to you as a reader as well.*

Stafford's book *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended* is available from:

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