

John 1:1 Again:

*The Jehovah's Witnesses claim support
for their version of the Bible
from the Sahidic Translation*

An evaluation by Dr Trevor R Allin

<https://livingwater-spain.com/>

First published: 14th August 2026

© Trevor R Allin 2026

This revision: 15th August 2026

Notes

NIV = New International Version, 2011 revision
NRSV = New Revised Standard Version, 1989
NAS = The New American Standard Version, 1995 revision
NWT = “New World Translation” (the English version of the Jehovah’s Witness Bible)
JW = “Jehovah’s Witness(es)”, an abbreviation previously considered disrespectful, although subsequently adopted by them for their website.

About the Author

Dr Trevor R Allin graduated from the University of Leeds with a 1st Class Honours degree in Phonetics, French, Spanish and Philosophy and History of Religion. Following studies in linguistics, he undertook original research on a South American indigenous language, for which purpose he lived within the indigenous community and studied the language with native speakers over a period of more than a year. The University of St Andrews subsequently awarded him the degree of Ph.D. for his thesis “A Grammar of Resígaro”.

For many years he taught a range of languages up to “Advanced” level standard in state schools in England and in Germany, and in state-recognised schools in Scotland and Spain. He also worked full time over a period of many years supporting and inspecting qualified Modern Language teachers and giving them professional development training. Teaching and examination materials written by him for French, German and Spanish at a wide range of levels, up to and including “A” Level, have been published by mainstream U.K. educational publishers and examination boards, for whom he has written and marked examination question papers.

He is also the published translator of books from Spanish and German into English and is the author of “Curso de Griego Bíblico: Los elementos del Griego del N.T.”¹, the Spanish edition of the leading textbook on New Testament Greek, Jeremy Duff’s “The Elements of New Testament Greek”.² He has taught New Testament (Koiné) Greek to Spanish-speaking adult students in Spain and has delivered lectures in various places in Spain and England on the principal earliest Greek manuscripts of the Bible.

For more than fifteen years his website <https://livingwater-spain.com/> has provided information and careful textual analysis of key passages of the Greek text of the New Testament and the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament, with most articles being available in both English and Spanish.

Dr Allin has made audio recordings of the Koiné Greek text of all 260 chapters of the New Testament. These recordings are available free of charge on the internet, with links provided on his website, here: <https://livingwater-spain.com/NTGk00.htm>

¹ CLIE, 2019 See <https://www.clie.es/curso-de-griego-biblico>

² Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005

Introduction

John's gospel chapter 1 verse 1 states:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

The Greek is so straightforward³ that most translations into English say precisely this. For instance, this is exactly the translation in the New International Version, 2011 revision, in the New Revised Standard Version (1989) and in the New American Standard Bible 1995 Update.

However, this verse is a danger for the Jehovah's Witness Organization, as it declares clearly and unambiguously that Jesus is God. The Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus is not God, but a created being, “the Archangel Michael”, although they do not normally reveal this weird teaching on the doorstep, preferring to wait until they have persuaded prospective converts that the leaders in USA of their Organization are the only people in the world who have what they call “the Truth” and that all Christianity, worldwide and over the course of nearly 2,000 years, is “false” (their word).

For a detailed study of the meaning of the Greek text of John 1:1, see the article “What is the Correct Translation of John 1:1?” on this website, here:

https://livingwater-spain.com/John_1_1.pdf

The aim of this website is not to convert people nor to teach doctrine, but to look at the clear meaning and correct translation of the Greek text of the New Testament.

The Jehovah's Witnesses change this verse, so their Bible says, “the Word was a god”. They then say that there are many “gods”, of which Jesus is merely one. We will look at their claims below.

The Jehovah's Witnesses now claim that their rendering of John 1:1 (which is clearly faulty) is supported by a seventh-century Sahidic translation.

“A what translation?”, I can hear my readers exclaiming. “What on earth is Sahidic?”

The question is understandable. At the time of writing in August 2026 the Wycliffe Bible Translators UK website reports that the whole Bible has been translated into 805 languages and the New Testament into 1,842 languages.⁴

The Jehovah's Witness Organization has teams of people working full-time in their world headquarters in Warwick, New York state, USA searching for any scrap of information that they could use to claim support for any disputed verse in their version of the Bible.

There are translations of the New Testament in over 1,800 different languages, and in many major languages, there are dozens of different translations, resulting in a total of over 2,000 translations of the New Testament. With this vast pool of data, after decades of research, the Jehovah's Witnesses have come up with one translation: Sahidic.

You couldn't make it up.

This alone demonstrates that their perversion of the meaning of the Greek text of John 1:1 is totally unsupported, unsustainable, indefensible and unjustifiable.

Any honest researcher would at this point realise that with their version in this verse they had – *at best!* – made a mistake. Naturally, this is not what the Jehovah's Witnesses do. Their starting point is not the original text of the Bible but the doctrine of their Organization, which contradicts the beliefs and teachings of all mainstream Christian groups over the past 2,000 years. They have a

³ Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. [en archē ēn ho logos, kai ho logos ēn pros ton theon, kai theos ēn ho logos]

⁴ <https://wycliffe.org.uk/statistics/> Accessed on 14.8.26.

simple answer, which they have told me in my own house when faced with large numbers of Bible translations into a range of languages: “They are all wrong!”

It is for this reason that this website does not participate in their argument, “My translation is better than your translation”, but goes back to the original Greek text of the New Testament, to the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, which is known as the Septuagint, and occasionally to the Hebrew in which most of the Old Testament is written.

We will, however, here carefully examine their claims about the Sahidic translation.

Sahidic is a dialect of Coptic, which was a language spoken in Egypt.

The Jehovah’s Witness claim

On their website, the Jehovah’s Witnesses state:

“some Coptic translations render Joh 1:1 in a way that indicates that Jesus, who is referred to as “a god,” is not the same person as Almighty God.”⁵

The JW use of the word “indicates” obscures the fact that even the Coptic translations referred to by them do not in fact say that “Jesus ... is not the same person as Almighty God”, contrary to the JW claim here. No part of this phrase is in any Coptic translation. This statement is simply JW teaching.

In the “Study Edition” of their “New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures”, their note for John 1:1 refers for support to:

“translations of John’s Gospel into the Sahidic and the Bohairic dialects of the Coptic language”⁶

They state:

“The oldest complete Coptic codices of the Gospels available today date from the 11th or the 12th century C.E., but copies of single Bible books, or portions of them, date back to as early as the fourth and fifth centuries C.E.”⁷

They do not state if John 1:1 is included in any of the “portions” that they refer to which they state “date back to as early as the fourth and fifth centuries C.E.”, but this seems not to be the case, or they would obviously have quoted from one of them. By their reference to “as early as the fourth and fifth centuries C.E.” they seek to impress their readers, without providing any relevant evidence with regard to John 1:1. When we realise that there are Greek manuscripts of John’s gospel from the second century (the “one hundreds”), we realise that even manuscripts from “the fourth and fifth centuries C.E.” are comparatively late.

Elsewhere, the Jehovah’s Witness website states:

“The manuscript shown here (dating from about 600 C.E.) contains a translation of the Gospel of John into the Sahidic dialect of the Coptic language.”⁸ “About 600 C.E.” means the beginning of the seventh century.

What is the significance of this claim?

There are many, many problems with this claim from the Jehovah's Witnesses.

First, the New Testament was written in Koiné Greek, so the text in any other language is irrelevant.

⁵ <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1001077371#h=1:0-6:0> Accessed on 14.8.26.

⁶ <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/b/r1/lp-e/nwtsty/43/1#study=discover&v=43:1:1> Accessed on 14.8.26.

⁷ <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1001077371#h=1:0-6:0> Accessed on 14.8.26.

⁸ <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/b/r1/lp-e/nwtsty/43/1#study=discover&v=43:1:1> Accessed on 14.8.26.

Early Dates of Greek Manuscripts

Secondly, many very early manuscripts of John's gospel in Greek have survived. Papyrus P⁵² is dated at about 125 AD, perhaps 30 years after the original text was written. It is from John's gospel. Although it does not contain John 1:1, it shows that this gospel was being read at that time, in the original Greek, hundreds of miles away, in southern Egypt.

Papyrus P⁶⁶ is dated at approximately 150 AD, probably less than 60 years after the gospel was written. It does contain John 1:1, and it does not say "a god".

The greatest Greek manuscripts, Codex Sinaiticus (c. 340 AD), Codex Vaticanus (c. 360 AD) and Codex Alexandrinus (c. 420 AD), all contain John 1:1. All of them predate by centuries the Sahidic translation to which the Jehovah's Witnesses refer. None of them have "the Word was a god".

Textually Secure

The Koiné Greek text of John 1:1 is undisputed: all manuscripts say the same thing: "God", not "a god". The Greek text of John 1:1 can be described as "textually secure". In other words, the New Testament manuscripts of this verse have no competing textual variants. None of them have "a god". They all consistently have "The Word was God".

Capital "G" or lower case "g"?

Another extremely relevant point is that the earliest manuscripts were written entirely in capital letters (known as "uncials" or "majuscules"), so the Jehovah's Witness distinction between a capital "G" and a lower case "g" did not exist. They have introduced this change in support of their doctrine, even though it goes against what the original Greek text actually says. Their version says "the Word was with God and the Word was a god."⁹ This distinction is not present in the original text.

In fact, even the Jehovah's Witnesses cannot do this in the German edition of their version of the New Testament, because of the rules of German writing: all nouns in that language are required to be written starting with a capital letter.¹⁰

As the Jehovah's Witnesses have been forced to admit, there is no Greek word for "a" (an indefinite article), so they have added it in their version of the Bible. This is a distortion of the clear meaning of the Greek text, which is undisputed outside the JW Organization.

This is not based on any feature of the Greek text, and it has been added by them with no justification in the text, but only because John 1:1 as written in the Greek and as correctly translated proves that their teachings about Jesus are contradicted by what the Biblical text actually says.

How to say "a god" in Greek

In fact, although Koiné Greek does not have an indefinite article, it does have an indefinite pronoun, τις [tis], and this is frequently used in the New Testament, including by the author of John's gospel. Depending on the context, this can be translated "a certain", as in "a certain man". See, for instance, Luke 14:16: ἄνθρωπός τις [anthrōpos tis], which is translated as "a certain man" in the NIV 2011.

However, τις [tis] does not appear in any Greek manuscript of John 1:1. If the author had wished to write "a god", he could have used this word.

The meaning of the Greek text of John 1:1 is clear and translating it is easy, so it is not necessary to consult translations into other languages in order to "discover" what it really means.

⁹ <https://www.jw.org/en/library/bible/study-bible/books/john/1/> Accessed on 13.8.26.

¹⁰ See, for instance, on their own website, here:

<https://www.jw.org/de/bibliothek/bibel/bil2/bibelbuecher/johannes/1/> Accessed on 15.8.26.

Judaism: A Monotheistic Faith

In fact, the very idea that a Jewish writer, such as the author of John's gospel, a believer in a fiercely monotheistic faith, could refer to "a god" is impossible to conceive. For the Jews there was (and still is, today!) only "the one true God", and any other so-called God is a false God. See, for instance, Deuteronomy 4:39, 5:7, 6:4, Isaiah 45:5-6, etc.

Jewish monotheism precludes referring to "a god" as a lesser deity, but the Jehovah's Witnesses say that Jesus is not the "true God". The consequence of this claim is that Jesus must therefore be a "false God" – but the Jehovah's Witnesses avoid saying this. They create a polytheistic system in which there are many "gods" and they say that Jesus is "a lesser god". This is unsupported by any Greek manuscript of the Bible, in any passage, and does of course go against one of the core teachings of the whole Bible.

Claiming Support From Other Languages

The very fact that they have had to go as far as another language – and even a *dialect* of another language! – shows how impossible it is for them to find any valid justification for their wrong translation.

Coptic is linguistically unrelated to Greek, so its structures can have no implications for the Greek text and any translation into it can have no relevance to the understanding of the Greek text.

The Jehovah's Witnesses have even had to go to a translation from about 600 AD., according to their own claims. In comparison with the wealth of early manuscripts that we have, this is very late, so what it says can have no authority.

Syriac

They then try to overwhelm readers with irrelevant information. They also refer extensively to translations into *Syriac*.¹¹ They can be reasonably confident that no-one in their target audience knows any Syriac, any Coptic (of any dialect) or probably even any Latin. The aim is to impress and overwhelm the reader, and to win their argument, not to present relevant information.

This has justifiably been called "intellectual intimidation". It is used to confuse their readers and hearers, not to clarify. See, for instance, my article on John 8:58, here:

https://livingwater-spain.com/John8_58.pdf, page 7, where I write:

"This is a technique frequently used by the Jehovah's Witnesses: deliberately writing abstruse "explanations" that are intended to be incomprehensible to the target audience. This use of complex, obscure arguments is nothing less than intellectual intimidation. Unfortunately, this conclusion is unavoidable. But the "explanation" will fulfil its purpose: that of persuading the Jehovah's Witness reader or the person that they are seeking to convert, without being understood by him or her."

Jehovah's Witnesses' claims are based on late, linguistically unrelated translations and misrepresentations of textual evidence.

Their comments about the existence of an indefinite article in Syriac, referred to by them here to overawe their reader, are irrelevant. In fact, they do not even say if the Syriac for John 1:1 contains the indefinite article!

This is for the obvious reason: *it does not contain the indefinite article!* **So the very language that they claim supports their deliberate mistranslation proves them wrong!** This is the ultimate in intellectual dishonesty.

¹¹ See for instance here: <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/s/r1/lp-e?q=Syriac&p=par&r=occ&st=a> and links to other parts of their website from that page. Accessed on 14.8.26.

Here is John 1:1 in Peshitta Syriac:

,൬൭൪൯ ൩൪൬൨ . ൩൪൬൨ ൪൪ ൩൪൬ ,൬൭൪൯ ൩൪൬ ൨൬൨ . ൩൪൬ ൩൪൬ ,൬൭൪൯ ൪൪൬
 . ൩൪൬ ൨൬ ൩൪൬

I do not know Syriac, but reliable sources state that the last phrase of the verse, which is the one disputed by the Jehovah's Witnesses, transliterated into Roman letters reads:

W-alâhâ îtowhy hwâ hwâ meltâ

and that a literal translation of that is “And God was that Word”. See

<https://www.peshitta.eu/nt/john/1.html>

This reflects the word order in the Greek, although a correct understanding of the Greek, perhaps not possessed by the translator into Syriac, reveals that “Word” is the subject of the verb and “God” is the complement, so that the meaning of the Greek is “The Word was God”.

There is no demonstrative adjective in this phrase in the Greek, so the Syriac for the word “that” has been added by the translator into Syriac. I don’t know if some stylistic requirement in Syriac requires the addition of that word, or not, but in any case, all of this is irrelevant: it does not affect the word “God” and in any case we do not need to go to a Syriac translation to find out what the Greek text means.

As regards the repeated unreliability of the Syriac translation, see chapter 6 of my article on John 8:58, to which the link is given above. See also pages 14-15 of the same article on other translations.

Conclusion

With apologies to any speakers of Sahidic, it is clear that a seventh century translation into their language cannot be taken as any sort of authority in determining the correct meaning of the Bible verse John 1:1, especially when the meaning of the Greek original is undisputed and is so clear.

If the Jehovah's Witnesses had been able to find any **Greek** manuscript that supported their claims, they would of course have quoted from it. If they had even found any Sahidic manuscript of John 1:1 earlier than the beginning of the seventh century that supported their claims, they would obviously have quoted from it. The lack of any such support proves the extreme weakness of their claims.

The very fact that the Jehovah's Witnesses ignore the Greek text and refer to translations made many centuries later into a dialect of a language unrelated to Greek shows how feeble their argument is. It clearly demonstrates that their claims are not supported by any Greek text and that their claims are linguistically untenable and indeed indefensible.

Such abusive use of irrelevant information is inexcusable and in fact demonstrates that their claims are unjustifiable and reveal a biased approach.

It is clear that, contrary to the claims that they often make, the Jehovah's Witnesses are not interested in finding out the truth, only in persuading people by any means, no matter how illegitimate, that the doctrines of their sect are right.

In summary, the Jehovah's Witness version ("a god") contradicts Greek grammar and Jewish monotheism and their appeals for support for their version depend on later, unrelated and irrelevant translations (e.g., from the beginning of the seventh century), not early Greek manuscripts.