



## What to Say to Jehovah's Witnesses ... Ch.2 Biblical texts used against the Deity of Christ

Mike Licona

### Chapter 2

#### Biblical texts used by JWs against the Deity of Christ

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In this chapter, we will examine the six (6) main arguments given by JWs to support their belief that Jesus is not God but was created by God. First, the verse used will be cited as it appears in the translation used by JWs (New World Translation – NWT). Next the JW interpretation of the verse will be provided. A refutation of their interpretation follows. Finally, a summary of each discussion is provided as a “Bottom Line.”

**1. Revelation 3:14:** “*And to the angel of the congregation in Laodicea write: These are the things that the Amen says, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation by God.*”

**JW Interpretation:** “*the beginning of the creation by God*” means Jesus was the first thing created by God.

To understand why the Watchtower’s interpretation is incorrect, a little knowledge of Greek is helpful. The Greek word for “beginning” is *arche* (which rhymes with “parkay”). *Arche* is used with different shades of meaning throughout the Bible. The following illustrate a few:

**A. Time.** The apostle John writes, “*In the arche (beginning) the Word was ...*” (John 1:1). In other words, in the beginning of time the Word existed. The same word is used in Genesis 1:1 in the Septuagint.[1] In the verse we are presently considering (Revelation 3:14), if John meant *arche* in the sense of time, the verse may be

translated as the New World Translation renders it, “*the beginning of the creation by God.*” If translated as such, Jesus was the beginning of God’s creation by being the first thing created by God. “*Beginning*” is used in a passive sense; in other words Jesus is receiving the action (being created). However, *arche* could also be translated as the majority of translations render it, “*the beginning of the creation of God.*” If translated this way, “*beginning*” can be interpreted in an active sense. When a word is used in the active sense, it is producing the action; in other words, Jesus was the “*beginning one*” or the originating source of creation (ie. the Creator).

**B. Political.** When *arche* is used in this manner it means a government or ruler. For example, Luke 20:20: “*... so as to turn him over to the arche (government) and to the authority of the governor.*” Colossians 1:16: “*... whether they are thrones or lordships or archai (governments – archai is a plural form of arche) or authorities ...*” Most translations render *arche* in these verses as “*rule*” or “*rulers.*” The sense, however, is the same. *Arche* is the top (or beginning) of a power hierarchy. Imagine the pyramid structure of a corporation. The President is at the top or *beginning* of the pyramid. A few Vice Presidents are below him. And below them are more managers who oversee even more employees.[2] If John means *arche* in a political sense, the verse may be translated “*the ruler of God’s creation*” (NIV).

What in fact does John mean when he says Jesus is the *arche* (beginning) of the creation of (by) God? In order to translate and interpret a verse correctly, there are four general rules that can be helpful.

A) *Consider the various meanings of a word.* We have already done this and observed that the word for “beginning” could have any of several meanings.

B) *Consider the verse and see if any particular meaning fits best.* The NWT renders this verse in such a manner that Jesus was the first thing created “*by God.*” However, the preposition *hypo* (by) does not appear in the Greek text.[3] Therefore, this verse does not help us.

C) *Consider the context.* Unfortunately, “*the beginning of the creation of (by) God*” is a title given to Jesus by John and is not explained by the context surrounding Revelation 3:14.

D) *Consider other Scriptures that would support a*

view. You can support taking “beginning” in the active sense with John 1:3, “*All things came into existence through him ...*” and Colossians 1:16, “*because by means of him all [other] things were created in the heavens and upon the earth ...*” (NWT).[4] Both verses support Jesus as Creator and would justify understanding Revelation 3:14’s description of Jesus as the originating source of creation. “*Ruler*” is also justified since *arche* is frequently used in the political sense and agrees with other New Testament verses which say the same thing (Revelation 1:5; 19:16). Unless the JW’s can produce other verses that legitimately indicate God created Jesus, they are not justified in translating *arche* in a passive sense.

**Bottom Line:** The Greek word for “beginning”, *arche*, is used in several ways. In John 1:1 it means the “beginning of time.” In Colossians 1:16 it means a “ruler.” In Revelation 3:14 *arche* can be used in a passive sense (he was created), or in an active sense (he was creating). The context provides no clue to what he means. So we look at other Scriptures. John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16 clearly speak of Jesus as Creator and justify taking *arche* in the active sense. Unless the JW’s can give you any Scriptures that clearly speak of Jesus being created, they cannot use this verse as proof that he was.

**2. Proverbs 8:22ff:** “*Jehovah himself produced me as the beginning of his way, the earliest of his achievements of long ago.*”

**JW Interpretation:** Verse 12 identifies “wisdom” as the one speaking in this passage. “Wisdom” is Jesus who says he was “produced” by God and became his “master worker” (verse 30). He was involved in the creation process, *after* he himself was created since he was “the earliest of his achievements.”

First point out that neither Jesus nor any of the writers of the New Testament apply Proverbs 8 to Jesus. Next, point the JW to verse one in the same chapter where wisdom is also talking.

*Does not wisdom keep calling out, and discernment keep giving forth its voice?*

Ask: If “wisdom” is an actual person (Jesus) in this text, then who is “discernment” in verse 1? And who is “shrewdness” in verse 12 with whom “wisdom” is said to reside?

*I, wisdom, I have resided with shrewdness ...*

At this point, the JW usually does not have an answer except to ask how you understand these verses. Solomon is using a figure of speech called “personification.”[5] He attributes the qualities of being a person to character qualities in order to make the reading more enjoyable and to have a greater impact. This is obvious throughout Proverbs.[6] Consider Chapter 7:4-5.

*Say to wisdom: “You are my sister;” and may you call understanding itself “Kinswoman;” to guard you against the woman stranger, against the foreigner who has made her own sayings smooth.[7]*

Solomon teaches that if we are intimately acquainted with wisdom and understanding in our lives, we will not be ensnared by the enticements of the adulteress described in verses 6 and following.

Finally, point out that the purpose to which Solomon wrote Proverbs was

*... for one to know wisdom and discipline, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive the discipline that gives insight, righteousness and judgment and uprightness, to give to the inexperienced ones shrewdness, to a young man knowledge and thinking ability. (Proverbs 1:2-4)*

We would expect Solomon, therefore, to talk about these qualities. A history of Jesus would be out of place, totally unrelated to the rest of Proverbs.[8] Moreover, just a few verses after Solomon states his purpose behind writing Proverbs (1:1-6), he personifies wisdom (1:20ff). That wisdom is personified as a figure of speech

is apparent in Proverbs 9 where folly is likewise personified alongside of wisdom.

In another of his books, Solomon tells his readers that he has used literary tools throughout his writings:

*And besides the fact that the congregator had become wise, he also taught the people knowledge continually, and he pondered and made a thorough search, that he might arrange many proverbs in order. The congregator sought to find the delightful words and the writing of correct words of truth. (Ecclesiastes 12:9-10)*

In Proverbs 8, Solomon is telling his readers that if God used the quality of wisdom to create the universe, think of how it can be used in your own life for avoiding pitfalls and being successful at your endeavors. Wisdom, therefore, is not referring to Jesus. So we still have no Scriptures that indicate Jesus was created.

**Bottom Line:** The New Testament writers never employ Proverbs 8 in reference to Jesus. If “Wisdom” in Proverbs 8 is in fact “Jesus,” who is “Shrewdness” in verse 1 and “Discernment” in verse 12? Finally, referring to Jesus in this passage is both out of place and goes against what Solomon is trying to teach. Solomon is not referring to Jesus in Proverbs 8, but is simply using a figure of speech called personification, as he does throughout Proverbs in order to be creative.

**3. John 3:16:** *“For God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son ...”*

**JW Interpretation:** “Only-begotten” means Jesus was begat or given birth by God. So he had a beginning.

Ask the JW to define “*only-begotten*.” His answer is usually that God brought him into existence; he created him and no other son. Then ask the JW to read Hebrews 11:17.

*By faith Abraham, when he was tested, as good as offered up Isaac, and the man that had gladly received the promises attempted to offer up [his] only-begotten [son].*

Was Isaac Abraham’s only begotten son in the sense that he brought him and no other son into existence? No. Remember Ishmael? Ishmael was Abraham’s son through Hagar.[9] Ishmael was born to Abraham prior to Isaac. So when the author of Hebrews calls Isaac Abraham’s “*only-begotten son*,” he must mean something other than Abraham’s only son. Isaac was unique to Abraham. He would be the son through whom God’s covenant would be fulfilled.[10] “*Only-begotten*,” therefore, means “*unique*,” “*chosen*,” “*special*,” or “*exalted*” in some sense.[11] The Greek word for “*only-begotten*” in Hebrews 11:17 is the same word used in John 3:16. The JW may respond, “*But, ‘begotten’ signifies a beginning to existence.*” Ask if it does in Hebrews 11:17. So we still have no Scripture that indicates Jesus was created.

**Bottom Line:** In John 3:16, “*only-begotten*” does not mean “*only-born*,” but special in some sense as indicated by Issac being called Abraham’s “*only-begotten*” son in Hebrews 11:17 in spite of Ishmael being Abraham’s son as well.

**4. Colossians 1:15:** *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”*

**JW Interpretation:** Jesus was the first thing created by God.

Does the word “*firstborn*” indicate Jesus was created? The Greek word for “*firstborn*” is *prototokos*. It appears throughout both the Old Testament (Septuagint) and the New Testament with different shades of meaning.

**A. Chronological:** Emphasis is on the order of birth (Genesis 10:15; 19:30-31; Exodus 13:15).

**B. Positional:** Emphasis is on the position of being the firstborn, with all of the honor and favor that is due to one being born first. For example, look at the following: “*Also, I myself shall place him as firstborn, The most high of the kings of the earth.*” (Psalm 89:27)

This Psalm refers to King David.[12] Yet David was not the first king appointed by God. Saul was.[13] And it is clear that God chose Saul to be king.[14] David was firstborn in the positional sense; he was God’s chosen and favored king, although he was not the first.

In Colossians 1:15, when Paul calls Jesus “*the firstborn of all creation,*” is he using “*firstborn*” in a chronological or a positional sense? Paul is helpful in the verses that follow by explaining what he means when he says “*firstborn.*”

Verse 16: “*because by means of him all [other] things were created in the heavens and upon the earth ... All [other] things have been created through him and for him.*”

“*Other*” is in brackets indicating it does not appear in the Greek text. The NWT translators have inserted it, because they assume the chronological sense of “*firstborn.*”[15] However, if Paul had meant the chronological sense, he would have probably used a different preposition. Instead of saying, “*in him*” or “*by means of him,*”[16] he could have said, “*after him,*”[17] i.e. “*after him all things were created.*” But Paul says “*by means of him all things were created*” and establishes Jesus as Creator of the universe – a position.

Verse 17: “*Also, he is before all [other] things and by means of him all [other] things were made to exist.*”

The Greek word for “*made to exist*” means “*to place or hold together, to frame, to cause to exist.*”[18] In other words, Paul says the universe exists because of Jesus who put it together. Verse 17, therefore, reinforces verse 16 by stating Jesus is

the Creator and Sustainer of the universe – a position.

Verse 18: “*and he is the head of the body, the congregation. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that he might become the one who is first in all things.*”

Jesus is the head of the Church – a position. He is also the firstborn from the dead. This second use of *prototokos* could be either the chronological or positional sense. Jesus was either the first risen from the dead with an immortal body or stands in a position over all those who will be resurrected. Why is this important? The final statement provides the answer, “*that he might become the one who is first in all things.*” The Greek word for “*the one who is first*” means “*to hold the highest rank or dignity, to be chief.*”[19] He is firstborn from the dead so he might now be chief of everything. As Christ holds rank over all creation and the Church, he especially does so as risen Lord.[20] Once again, Paul points to position. In fact, there is nothing in this passage that lends support to a chronological interpretation of “*firstborn*” in verse 15.

So what are these verses saying? Paul defines Jesus as “*firstborn*” by saying he is the Creator of the universe, the Sustainer of the universe, the Head of the Church, and the Risen Lord, so that he can be chief over all things. This entire passage points only to the position definition! Then lest there be any doubt in the reader’s minds that Jesus, the image of God and chief of everything, possesses the very essence of God, Paul makes that very clear in verse 19 when he says all the fullness of God dwells in Christ. He states the same even more clearly in 2:9, “*Because it is in him that all the fullness of divine quality dwells bodily.*” This verse is discussed in depth in the next chapter. Since Jesus is “*firstborn*” in a positional sense, this verse may not be used as a text in support of the view that Jesus was created. If anything, it points to the deity of Christ. Therefore, we still have no Scriptures that indicate Jesus was created.

**Bottom Line:** The word “*firstborn*” can be used in a chronological sense (first to be born or first created) or in a positional sense (one who has the honor and rights of a firstborn son [Ps. 89:27; Jer. 31:9]). We are fortunate that Paul explains what he means by “*firstborn*” in the verses that follow. If Paul had meant “*firstborn*” in a chronological sense (order of creation), he would have said “*after him all things were created.*” Instead, Paul says Jesus is the Creator of the universe, Sustainer of the universe, Head of the Church, Risen Lord and, therefore, Chief of all things. This points only to the positional sense, not the chronological.

## 5. John 14:28: “... the Father is greater than I am.”

**JW Interpretation:** “*How can Jesus be God when He says, “the Father is greater than I am?”* Jesus may be referring to his incarnate position, not his essence.

A husband and wife are one in essence (one flesh),<sup>[21]</sup> yet two distinct persons. Likewise, God is one in essence, yet three distinct persons. In theology, this is referred to as the “*Godhead.*” The biblical standard is that the husband is positionally greater than the wife in the home,<sup>[22]</sup> yet both he and his wife are equal in essence – one flesh. As the wife voluntarily submits herself to her husband, the Son voluntarily submits himself to the Father.

Perhaps another analogy may be helpful. Consider the New York Yankees. There are many members on the team: players, coaches, the manager, and the owner. The members are, in essence, one team. Positionally, there is an authority structure. The owner is the final authority (as many Yankee managers have found!). The manager has authority over the players. The team is one, in essence, but is made up of many members that have different levels of authority. Likewise, all three members of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) make up the Godhead. The Godhead is one in essence, but the Son submits to the authority of the Father. There are

Scriptures that say Jesus and the Father share the same essence of God (see the next chapter). Since the JW’s still cannot provide biblical reasons to support their view of Christ (ie. that he was created), their particular interpretation of John 14:28 should not be preferred. So we still do not have any Scriptures that teach Jesus was created.

**Bottom Line:** When Jesus said the Father was greater than himself, he was referring to the Father’s position, not his essence.

## 6. Passages where the Father is called the God of Jesus (Mark 15:34; John 20:17; Ephesians 1:3, 17) or where God is referred to being distinct from Jesus (John 17:3).

**JW Interpretation:** Both the New Testament writers and Jesus himself called the Father the God of Jesus on several occasions. If Jesus was God, why would he call the Father his God?

Of all the reasons provided by the Watchtower to support their view of Jesus, this is the most difficult to answer. The prominent New Testament scholar Raymond Brown says although the question, “*Did New Testament Christians call Jesus God?*” must be answered in the affirmative, there are nevertheless “*Passages that Seem to Imply that the Title ‘God’ Was Not Used for Jesus.*”<sup>[23]</sup> What are we to make of these passages?

**A. The New Testament writers, particularly John and Paul, clearly say Jesus is God and refer to the Father as the God of Jesus.** So there was a sense in which they understood these two beliefs to be compatible. See John’s writings (John 1:1; 20:17, 28; Revelation 22:13) and Paul’s writings (Ephesians 1:3; Colossians 2:9).

**B. The Earliest Church Fathers, particularly**

**Ignatius and Polycarp, clearly call Jesus “God,” and also refer to the Father as the God of Jesus.**[24] Just like the New Testament writers, they did not appear to see a tension between the two. Ignatius was the Bishop of Antioch and wrote seven letters to the Churches while en route to his execution in Rome around the year AD 110. In Ignatius’ letter to the Ephesians 18:2 he states:

*For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary according to God’s plan ...*

In 19:3 he states:

*Consequently all magic and every kind of spell were dissolved, the ignorance so characteristic of wickedness vanished, and the ancient kingdom was abolished, when God appeared in human form to bring the newness of eternal life ...*

And in 1:1 ...

*Being as you are imitators of God, once you took on new life through the blood of God you completed perfectly the task so natural to you.*

In his letter to the Smyrnaeans 1:1 he states:

*I glorify Jesus Christ, the God who made you so wise ...*

Polycarp also testifies to the teachings of the early Church regarding Jesus’ deity. The early Church fathers, Irenaeus (circa AD 120-190) and Eusebius (AD ?-342) write that Polycarp was “instructed” and “appointed” by the apostles, “conversed with many who had seen Christ,” and “having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles.”[25] So his view of Jesus is very important. In *The Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians*, he mentions “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” and “our Lord and God Jesus Christ.”[26]

*Now may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the eternal High Priest himself, the Son of God Jesus Christ, build you up in faith and truth and in all gentleness and in all freedom from anger and forbearance and steadfastness and patient endurance and purity, and may he give to you a share and a place among his saints, and to us with you, and to all those under heaven who*

*will yet believe in our Lord and God Jesus Christ and in his Father who raised him from the dead.*

Thus, Polycarp agrees with the teachings of the apostles, which we will study in the next chapter, that Jesus is God. The JW’s may point out that some Church leaders before the fourth century did not believe in the deity of Christ. However, these are much later than Ignatius and Polycarp (80-200 years). The historian is more interested in knowing what the earliest Church leaders believed than later ones, realizing that heretical teachings form over time. However, what one finds when you read the very Church Fathers cited by the Watchtower in support of the inferiority of Jesus, is that every one of them actually supports the deity of Jesus![27]

### **C. The Father may be God to Jesus in the sense that he is the final authority to Jesus.**

Verses such as John 1:1 and Colossians 2:9 clearly speak of Jesus having the same essence of deity that the Father has (see Chapter 3). Nevertheless, Jesus submits to the Father who is his final authority. The “one flesh” analogy is again helpful. The parents, Mom and Dad, are the final authority to their children. Mom and Dad share the same essence as persons and are “one flesh.” However, there is a divinely ordained authority structure within the marriage; the husband is head. Therefore, Mom can accurately tell her children, “Your dad is my final authority and yours.” By doing this she acknowledges her husband’s position as final authority and gives up nothing of her own position and essence as parent and final authority to her children.

**Bottom Line:** Jesus referred to the Father as his God. This does not mean Jesus himself was not God, for the Apostles and the earliest Church fathers all recognized him as God while at the same time recognizing that the Father was Jesus’ God with no apparent tension. Furthermore, the Father may be God to Jesus in the sense that he is his final authority before whom unswerving and unquestioned love and devotion are given above

all others.

## Here are some other arguments Jehovah's Witnesses use

### 1. "The word 'Trinity' is not found in the Bible."

Neither are the terms "Jehovah's Witnesses" and "theology." Trinity is the term we use to describe the Godhead, one in essence but three persons. The question is not what we call it, but if the concept is taught in Scripture.

### 2. "The concept of the 'Trinity' has pagan origins before Jesus."

The story of a catastrophic flood is also found in pagan religions. Does this indicate that it has pagan origins as well? Even if the concept of a Trinity preceded Christianity, it would not prove Christianity copied it from other religions. The question is, "Does the Bible teach that Jesus is God?" As we shall see in the next chapter, the answer is clearly, "yes."

### 3. "If Jesus is God, then he prayed to himself in John 17."

Jesus did not pray to himself. He prayed to the Father, another person of the Godhead, to whom he submits. If we view the Godhead (Trinity) as some sort of team (see #5 above), then there is no contradiction. Remember, the difference is in position, not essence.

[Go to Chapter 3 - Biblical texts for the Deity of Christ]

## References:

[1] The Septuagint is the Greek Translation of the Old Testament. This was the common translation in Jesus' day and used by the New Testament writers the majority of the time when quoting the Old Testament. Genesis 1:1 in the Septuagint reads: "In the arche (beginning), God created the heavens and the earth."

[2] The Apostle Paul was particularly fond of using *arche* in this sense. Of the twelve (12) times he used it in his writings, nine (9) are in the political

sense: Romans 8:38; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Colossians 1:16; 2:10, 15; Titus 3:1.

[3] The translation "by God" is possible, but it is not required.

[4] Notice that the word "other" is in brackets. This means the word is not found in the Greek text but was inserted by the translators of the NWT to clarify their interpretation. Their Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures provides their rationale in the footnote to verse 16, "All [other], as in Luke 11:41, 42" (p.880). But these are not even good texts to support the NWT's interpretation, because "other" might be inserted in order to smooth the translation, but it is not required. Hebrews 2:10 has a Greek construction closer to Colossians 1:16, and yet "other" is not inserted in the NWT. Therefore, the NWT's insertion of "other" in Colossians 1:16 is clearly based on the Watchtower's assumption that Jesus was created and not because the Greek requires it.

[5] For other examples see Genesis 4:10 and Psalm 85:10. Also see E.W. Bullinger, *Figures Of Speech Used In The Bible: Explained and Illustrated* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968).

[6] See also 1:20-21; 3:13-16; 4:5-9; 9:1-6. Also see Psalm 85:10.

[7] One may also ask if "Wisdom" is Jesus, why refer to Him in the feminine gender.

[8] This becomes especially clear when Proverbs 8 is taken in context with Proverbs 7 and 9. Verses 22-30 would seem completely misplaced if they referred to Jesus. However, they fit right in if "wisdom" is taken as a character quality which Solomon personifies.

[9] Genesis 16.

[10] Genesis 17:20-21.

[11] *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 2, p.725 states that the word "is used to mark out Jesus uniquely above all earthly and heavenly beings; in its use the present soteriological [salvific] meaning is more strongly stressed than that of origin."

[12] Verses 3, 20, 35, 49.

[13] 1 Samuel 8.

[14] 1 Samuel 9:15-17; 10:1.

[15] No other major translation renders it as such.

[16] *en auto*.

[17] *meta auton*.

[18] *synesteken*. See Kittel and Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament*,

Volume VII (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p.897.

[19] *proteuon. Ibid.*, Volume VI, pp.881-882.

[20] *Ibid.*, pp.877-878.

[21] Matthew 19:4-5.

[22] Ephesians 5:22-23; Colossians 3:18.

[23] Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, pp.174, 189.

[24] For the writings of Ignatius and other early Church Fathers see J.B. Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer, eds. and transl., *The Apostolic Fathers*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992).

[25] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3:3:4. In this passage, Irenaeus also claims to have spoken with Polycarp when he (ie. Irenaeus) was young. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4:14. In the latter, Eusebius quotes Irenaeus.

[26] Polycarp, Philippians 12:2.

[27] The topic of how the early Church Fathers viewed Jesus is beyond the scope of this book. However, you may find an article on the subject by this author at "The Early Church Fathers on Jesus".

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