

Does Hebrews 1:8 say that Christ is God?

What does the original text say?

Does it say “O God” or “God is your throne”?

Has the “New World Translation” got it right with “God is your throne”?

The results of research by
Dr Trevor R Allin
on the translation of
“O God” in the Bible

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

² Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005

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Introduction: The Question

The Standard view

The New Testament letter to the Hebrews quotes in chapter 1 verse 8 from Psalm 45:6. As is common in the New Testament, this verse is applied to Christ. In most translations, the original is rendered:

But about the Son he says,
‘Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;
a sceptre of justice will be the sceptre of your kingdom.’ (NIV, 2011 revision³)

Psalm 45:6 addresses the following words to God:

“Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;
a sceptre of justice will be the sceptre of your kingdom.” (NIV translation from the Hebrew)

The theme of Hebrews 1 is Jesus Christ and in applying this verse to him, it addresses him as “God”.

All other translations consulted understand that the original statement is addressed to God, and when the Greek ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] is addressed to God, it is usually translated “O God”. This is the vocative case. In some other contexts and translations this may be rendered, “You, God”, which is also the vocative case and has the same meaning. So, according to Hebrews 1:8, Christ is addressed as “God.”

It is interesting to note that the translators of “A New English Translation of the Septuagint”⁴ render this verse from the Psalms (44:7 in the Septuagint numbering) as follows: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever”, showing that they, too, understand ὁ θεός [“ho theos”] to be a vocative in the source text, the very rendering that is rejected by the New World Translation⁵ and the Jehovah’s Witness writer Jason BeDuhn⁶.

The academics who made this translation of the Greek version of the Jewish Scriptures are experts in these texts and do not necessarily have a Christian viewpoint, so it is not possible to disregard the importance of their understanding of the meaning of the original.

The Jehovah’s Witness view

The Jehovah’s Witnesses deny the deity of Christ, and therefore in their “New World Translation” (hereafter, “NWT”) they have had to change this verse, following the pattern throughout their “translation” of changing all verses that refer to the deity of Christ. For Hebrews 1:8, the NWT reads:

But with reference to the Son:
“God is your throne forever, and [the] scepter of your kingdom is the
scepter of uprightness.”

The square brackets are in the New World Translation, and are used by the publishers to show that the word “the” is not in the original Greek. *However, they fail to add brackets*

³ “The Holy Bible, New International Version ® NIV ®” Copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, formerly the International Bible Society

⁴New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 569.

⁵ “New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures”, Copyright © 1961, 1984 by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania

⁶ Jason David BeDuhn, “Truth in Translation: Accuracy and Bias in English Translations of the New Testament”, 2003, Lanham, MD, University Press of America, Inc

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round the word “is”, which is also not in the original Greek and which they have also added, in order to create the phrase “God is your throne”.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses published their version of the New Testament in 1950, but did not complete their version of the Old Testament until 1960, publishing the whole of the Bible in their version in 1961 for the first time.

Naturally, in their translation of the Old Testament they also changed Psalm 45:6, in order to make it match the wording that they had created ten years earlier for Hebrews 1:8.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses say that the original statement in Psalm 45:6 is not addressed to God but is addressed to people, talking about God. Thus, they claim, when it is applied to Christ in the New Testament, the meaning is that it is talking to him about God, without implying that He is God.

Who is right? What does the original text say? What does it mean? This paper – and the research on which it is based – aims to answer these questions.

Does Hebrews 1:8 say that Christ is God?

Why look at the Greek text?

The Old Testament (the Jewish Scriptures, which are also known as the Tanakh) was written in Hebrew and Aramaic, but in approximately the third century B.C. it was translated by the Jews into Greek. This translation became known as the Septuagint, and this name is generally represented with the Latin characters for the number seventy: LXX.

After their captivity in Babylon, the Jews no longer spoke Hebrew in everyday life, speaking Aramaic instead. As the Greek empire expanded, the Greek language spread to the areas occupied by Jews and at the time of Christ most Jews spoke Greek fluently and read their Scriptures in the Greek translation.

Not only was the New Testament written in Greek; it is clear that both Christ and the first believers spoke Greek (as well as other languages in many cases). There are many quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament, and it is clear that most of these quotations come from the Septuagint translation into the Greek, not from the Hebrew original. Thus, the Septuagint was adopted by the first Christian believers as the Scripture that they read and used.

When investigating the accuracy of translations of the New Testament into English (or into other languages), in the case of quotations from the Old Testament it can be important to look at the Septuagint Greek text. One of the principal sources for New Testament quotations from the Old Testament is the book of Psalms.

The numbering of the Psalms

The numbering of most of the Psalms in the Septuagint is different from the numbering in the Masoretic Hebrew text (which is referred to as “MT”.) Most English translations, apart from those made by or for the Roman Catholic Church, follow the MT numbering, apart from a few verse boundaries. Roman Catholic Bibles frequently follow the Septuagint numbering, in which Masoretic Hebrew Psalm 45:6 is numbered 44:7. In this article, in cases where doubt may exist as to the exact reference, the letters “MT” are used for the Hebrew text and “LXX” for the Septuagint text.

PART 1: WHAT THE TEXT SAYS

Section 1: The Meaning Of The Original Text

The actual Greek of Psalm 45:6 (LXX: Psalm 44:7) is: ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεός εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος [“ho thrónos sou, ho theós, eis ton aiōna tou aiōnos”] The literal translation of this is “Your throne, O God, [is] forever and ever”.

This is the sentence that the Jehovah’s Witness Bible renders as “God is your throne.”

Four comments on the Jehovah’s Witness “translation” of this sentence are in order:

1. We must ask if the Greek original means “God is your throne”.
2. However, “God is your throne” seems to be a meaningless sentence: it does not appear to have any meaning in the context of the Psalm itself nor when applied to Christ in Hebrews 1:8. After all, “God is your throne” seems to mean “You sit on God”, which is absurd, whether applied to Christ or to the original reader or hearer of the Psalm.⁷
3. As indicated below, “God is your throne” in Greek would be “ὁ θεός ἐστὶν ὁ θρόνος σου” [“ho theós estin ho thrónos sou”], which is not remotely like what the Greek text of Hebrews 1:8 or Psalm 45:6 (LXX: 44:7) actually says. Such a sentence also does not occur anywhere in the Bible.
4. When faced with two different translations of a text in a foreign language, one of them meaningless and the other one meaningful, we must ask which of the two translations is more likely to be accurate. After all, it must be assumed that the original is not meaningless.

The structure of Psalm 45:6 (LXX 44:7)

A look at the structure of Psalm 45:6 (and Hebrews 1:8) will help us to see what it must mean.

Like many phrases in the Psalms, it is a declaration to God. Such sentences often have the phrase “O (+ my/our) God” at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the sentence. Psalm 45:6 has it in the middle. The structure has the following pattern:

First part of the statement or petition	– “O God” –	Second part of the statement or petition
ὁ θρόνος σου	– ὁ θεός –	εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος
“ho thrónos sou”	“ho theós”	“eis ton aiōna tou aiōnos”
Your throne	– O God –	to forever and forever

The NETS translation⁸ of this is “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever”.

⁷ After having written this article, I discovered what Eugenio Danyans says in his book “Respuestas bíblicas y doctrinales a los Testigos de Jehová” [“Biblical and Doctrinal Answers to the Jehovah’s Witnesses”] (Viladecavalls (Barcelona): Editorial CLIE, 2014). Danyans writes: “bearing in mind the background context, it is impossible to adopt the translation of the «Witnesses». Indeed, the Jews always placed God above everything and everyone. The blasphemous idea of putting him at a level that was inferior to or below something would never have occurred to them. This would be the case if God were converted into someone’s throne, when He is always above all thrones. Moreover, such a version does not benefit the Russellists in any way, but rather the contrary; it is equivalent to recognising that Christ is more than God, since according to the *New World Translation* the effect would be that the Son is seated on top of the Father.” (p. 118, note 1 Translation of this above quotation by the author of this article. The original Spanish can be found in the Spanish version of this article, on this website.)

⁸ “NETS” is the standard abbreviation for “A New English Translation of the Septuagint” New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

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This is just the same structure as Psalm 40:8 (LXX 39:9).

τοῦ ποιῆσαι τὸ θέλημά σου	– ὁ θεός μου –	ἐβουλήθην
“tou poiēsai to thélēma sou”	“ho theós mou”	“eboulēthēn”
To do your will	– O my God –	I desired

NETS translates this as “To do your will, O my God, I desired”.

The NWT renders the Greek phrase ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] in this verse correctly: “To do your will, O my God, I have delighted.”

Another example of this structure can be seen in Psalm 55:1 (LXX 54:2)

ἐνώτισαι	– ὁ θεός –	τὴν προσευχὴν μου
“enōtisaí”	“ho theós”	“tēn proseuchēn mou”
Give ear	– O God –	to my prayer

NETS translates this as “Give ear, O God, to my prayer”.

In this verse, too, the NWT renders the Greek phrase ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] correctly: “Do give ear, O God, to my prayer”.

There are many other examples of this structure in the Psalms, correctly translated by the NWT. Some further examples are included in the following table:

Reference	First part	“O God”	Second part
Psa 55:23 (LXX: 54:24)	But you,	O God,	will bring down the wicked
Psa 60:10 (LXX: 59:12)	Is it not you,	O God,	you who have rejected us?
Psa 65:1 (LXX: 64:2)	Praise awaits you,	O God,	in Zion
Psa 69:29 (LXX: 68:30)	may your salvation,	O God,	protect me
Psa 71:17 (LXX: 70:17)	Since my youth,	O God	you have taught me
Psa 139:23 (LXX: 138:23)	Search me,	O God,	and know my heart

Table 1: Some examples of verses with “O God” between the two parts of the sentence

To save space, in this table only a translation into English has been presented (the NIV). Furthermore, the verses in this table serve merely as examples. This format is extremely common in the Psalms.⁹

In all these cases – and in many more – the NWT translates the Greek phrase ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] correctly, although sometimes it moves the “O God” to the beginning of the sentence.

Yet when the translators of the NWT met a verse with the same structure in Psalm 45:6, they ignored the structure and came up with something completely different.

⁹ There is a complete list in the tables at the end of this article.

Section 2: The Scope Of This Study

The Vocative Case in the Psalms

When we speak to someone, the word referring to that person is described by linguists as being “in the vocative case”. Thus, if we say, “John, can you come here a minute?”, the word “John” is in the vocative case. “Vocative” comes from the word “call”, and we are obviously calling out to John, to attract his attention and so that he knows that it’s him that we want to come here for a minute.

However, if we speak about someone, we are not using the vocative. For instance, if we tell someone else, “John is my friend”, we are obviously not talking to him and the word “John” is not in the vocative case. (It would here be “in the nominative case”, which just means that it is the subject of the verb.)

The difference between the vocative and the nominative cases is not usually important in English and so can generally be ignored. However, it is important in the Greek in which the New Testament was written, and in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

Leaving aside for the present the meaning of the whole sentence in Psalm 45:6 (LXX: Psalm 44:7), key to the dispute concerning this verse is the translation of the Greek ὁ θεός [“ho theós”]. Is it addressed:

- to God (therefore best translated “O God”, as in most translations)
- or is it addressed to someone else about God (therefore best translated “God”, as in the Jehovah’s Witness translation)?

Many Psalms are, or include, prayers, which are of course only ever addressed to God, as in the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, prayers, whether by Jews or Christians, are only addressed to God and never to a human being, angel or any other created being.

The most common way of addressing God in the Psalms is to use the phrase ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] and the normal way of translating this into English is with the words “O God”.

The presence of the word “O” in English translations of the Bible normally indicates that the following word is in the vocative, i.e., the person or people referred to are being addressed by the speaker. (Some Psalms are addressed to people, and in such a case, “O” may be used, and the people referred to are in the vocative. However, the present study is limited to looking at the references to God, and to determining whether they are vocative or not.)

The use of “O” may be considered somewhat old-fashioned in English, and so it may not be present in some translations. Its absence does not indicate that the word in question is not in the vocative, and other indicators, referred to below, can help to determine if the word in question is in the vocative. In simple terms: the context will tell us. It will be obvious if the Psalm or the sentence in question is a prayer.

Some other parts of the Psalms are not prayers. They are addressed to people, telling them about God. In such cases, if the phrase ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] “God” is used, it is in the nominative case. As can be seen, the nominative form of this word in Greek is identical with the vocative form (as, indeed, it is in English and many other languages).

The context makes it easy to distinguish whether ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] is vocative (talking to God) or nominative (talking about God), and tips on how to spot the difference are given in Part 3 of this article.

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This study looks at the use of ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] with a vocative meaning in the Septuagint translation of the Psalms. It lists in tables at the end of the article all such examples of the vocative, and shows how they are translated in three translations: the literal translation of the Greek by the New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS), the New International Version (NIV, 2011 revision) and the Jehovah’s Witness “New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures” (NWT, 1961).

Naturally, the NIV and allegedly the NWT translate the Psalms from the *Hebrew*, not from the *Greek*, which may account for some minor differences between them and NETS, especially if the NIV and the NWT agree with each other but differ from the Greek.

A note on “O Lord my/our God”

LXX 98:8a (MT 99:8a) starts, in both the Greek and the Hebrew, with a vocative “O Lord our God” (in the Greek, κύριε ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν [“kurie ho theós hēmōn”]). Many other verses in the Psalms have the phrase κύριε ὁ θεός μου ([“kurie ho theós mou”], “O Lord my God”).

It could be argued that in these phrases only the word κύριε (“O Lord”) is vocative, while ὁ θεός ἡμῶν (“our God”) and ὁ θεός μου (“my God”) are simple descriptions of who the Lord is.

However, it appears better to understand both these phrases as being part of one vocative phrase with the word κύριε (“O Lord”) in each case. The speaker is not saying “O Lord (who is also my/our God)” but “O Lord my/our God”.

An alternative grammatical analysis would be to view ὁ θεός ἡμῶν (“our God”) and ὁ θεός μου (“my God”) as phrases in apposition to the vocative κύριε (“O Lord”) in the same sentence, in which case it would be in the same grammatical case as κύριε (“O Lord”), i.e., vocative.

Thus, regardless of the preferred grammatical analysis, in both cases ὁ θεός ἡμῶν (“ho theós hēmōn”, “our God”) and ὁ θεός μου (“ho theós mou”, “my God”) are vocative and are therefore included in the lists that follow.

It has been decided to list ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] and ὁ θεός μου [“ho theós mou”] / ὁ θεός ἡμῶν [“ho theós hēmōn”] in separate columns in the data sheets at the end of this article, and on different lines in Tables 2 and 3, below, because of the different translation that is common in each case. However, the meaning of ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] itself is the same in both cases, so a common running total of both occurrences is also given.

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Section 3: What The Data Shows

Has the New World Translation been consistent in its translation of the vocative phrase ὁ θεός [“ho theós”, “O God”]? The following two tables summarise the data on the translations by NETS, NIV and NWT.

Occurrences of each vocative form in the Greek and frequency of translation as vocative in the three translations studied, expressed as a number and as a percentage of the occurrences in the Greek:

	Greek text	NETS		NIV		NWT	
		N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
Vocative ὁ θεός (“O God”)	96	96	100%	96	100%	88	91.67%
Vocative ὁ θεός μου/ ἡμῶν (“(O) my/our God”)	32	32	100%	32	100%	31	96.88%
Total:	128	128	100%	128	100%	119	92.97%

Table 2: Assuming that doubtful NWT cases are *not* vocative

On two occasions, it is not clear whether or not the NWT intends to indicate a vocative meaning for ὁ θεός [“ho theós”, “O God”]: Psalm 51:14 (second occurrence) (LXX: 50:16) and Psalm 60:10 (second occurrence) (LXX: 59:12). In the above table, these two unclear translations are assumed *not* to be vocative.

If in fact they *are* intended to be vocative, that results in the following revisions to the above table:

	Greek text	NETS		NIV		NWT	
		N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
Vocative ὁ θεός (“O God”)	96	96	100%	96	100%	90	93.75%
Vocative ὁ θεός μου/ ἡμῶν (“(O) my/our God”)	32	32	100%	32	100%	31	96.88%
Total:	128	128	100%	128	100%	121	94.53%

Table 3: Assuming that doubtful NWT cases *are* vocative

On seven further occasions, the NWT is alone in not giving a vocative meaning. One of them involves the phrase ὁ θεός μου [“ho theós mou”]; it is Psalm 18:28 (LXX 17:29). All the other six cases involve ὁ θεός without the word μου: Psalm 5:10 (LXX: 5:11), 43:2 (42:2), 45:6 (44:7), 59:9 (58:10), 59:17 (58:18) and 68:28 (67:29).

Thus, the NWT has recognised ὁ θεός as vocative in the Psalms 121 times, and translated it as “O God” / “O my/our God” (with or without the word “Jehovah”). On seven occasions it has unambiguously translated the vocative original into a non-vocative form in English. In other words, it says that in these cases the phrase in question is not addressed to God (i.e., vocative) but to someone else about God (i.e., non-vocative).

Percentages

As will be clear from the above tables, NETS translates ὁ θεός ± μου / ἡμῶν [“ho theós ± mou / hēmōn”] as vocative in 100% of the cases where it occurs in the Greek with a vocative meaning. The NIV (2011), likewise, translates all of these occurrences – 100% – as vocative.

Assuming that the two ambiguous renderings in the NWT, indicated above, are vocative, it renders vocative occurrences of ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] on its own as vocative in just under 94% of cases, vocative occurrences of ὁ θεός μου / ἡμῶν [“ho theós ± mou / hēmōn”] as

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vocative in fractionally under 97% of cases and a total of both forms as vocative in just under 95% of cases.

However, *in only one verse does the NWT produce a rendering that is totally different in meaning from the other versions studied*: in Psalm 45:6 (LXX: 44:7). Here, an original that is rendered in most translations as “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever” (with minor stylistic variations such as use of the word “Thy”) inexplicably becomes “God is your throne to time indefinite, even forever”.

Of course, such a transformation is only inexplicable as a rendering of the meaning of the original. But it is not inexplicable in terms of Jehovah’s Witness doctrine, which *require* such a change, in the light of the application of the verse to Jesus Christ in Hebrews 1:8.

Other departures from accurate translation of the Psalms by the NWT

A detailed study of the whole of the NWT translation of the Psalms is beyond the scope of this study, and it has not been undertaken. However, on some occasions departures from a literal translation have been observed, as in Psalm 79:9 (78:9), where both the Septuagint and the Hebrew original have “O God our savior” (NETS) / “God our Saviour” (NIV) but the NWT has “O God of our salvation”. This may have been influenced by the Authorised (King James’) Version, which has “O God of our salvation”.

This adds to the impression, commented on in my review of BeDuhn’s book, that the NWT “translators” actually worked, not from the Hebrew original, nor even from the Greek Septuagint, but from the English Authorised Version (known in America as the “King James Version”), which was originally published in 1611 and came to be considered as authoritative during many centuries. Indeed, before they published their own version, the Jehovah’s Witnesses used the Authorised (or King James) Version in English-speaking countries.

This influence by the Authorised Version has also been observed in other parts of the Bible, for instance, with regard to their use of capitalisation in Exodus 3:14. At very least, they were more influenced by the AV and other English translations than by the Hebrew or Greek text, except when it suited them not to follow such translations, because such translations demonstrated the falseness of doctrines held by the Jehovah’s Witness organisation.

Psalm 83:1 (MT) (LXX 82:2) begins and ends with the words “O God” in both the Hebrew and the Greek. The NWT translates both of these as vocatives, but whereas it translates the first occurrence with the words “O God”, it inexplicably translates the second one as “O Divine One”. This failure to reflect the meaning of the original text is not on this occasion copied from the AV (KJV), which has “O God” in both instances.

Section 4: Conclusions

Before summarising the data, we asked the question, “Has the New World Translation been consistent in its translation of this phrase?”

The above summary of the data indicates that has not.

1. As indicated in the introduction to the data (in Part 3, below), one of the indicators that ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] is in the nominative is that in such cases it is normally followed by a verb in the third person singular (e.g., “God is ...”). There is no such verb present after ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] in Psalm 45:6 (LXX: Psalm 44:7), but the Jehovah’s Witness translation of the verse ignores this fact.
2. It inserts a verb, “is”, that is not in the original text (in Greek or Hebrew). This verb is often unnecessary in Greek and Hebrew, so it may need to be added in an English translation, but the position in the sentence where it has been inserted by the NWT translators has changed the meaning of the sentence.
3. For all versions of the NWT prior to the 2013 revision, the publishers claim that when a word is added that is not in the original text, this is indicated by putting the added word in square brackets. Yet this is not done with the added word “is” in Psalm 45:6, thus concealing the fact that it has added the word.
4. Why have the Jehovah’s Witnesses not let readers of the NWT know that they have added a word here? Could it be that they realise that if they did reveal this, it would be clear that they have changed the meaning of the original text?
5. In this verse, the NWT ignores the context of the phrase ὁ θεός (“O God”), which is clearly vocative.
6. Their translation of this phrase violates their own translation principles, which they claim to apply consistently throughout their translation of the whole Bible. It ignores their own translation of the phrase ὁ θεός (“O God”) approximately 120 times elsewhere throughout the book of Psalms (as well as elsewhere in the Bible).

It is thus clear that on the basis of consistency, the NWT rendering of Psalm 45:6 (LXX 44:7) stands condemned by the way that they themselves translate the same phrase elsewhere throughout the Psalms.

PART 2: WHAT THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES SAY

Introduction

This part of this article is taken from my review on this website of Jason BeDuhn's book "Truth in Translation", with the addition of information arising from the further research that I have undertaken on the use of the phrase "O God" in the Bible. BeDuhn is an apologist for the Jehovah's Witnesses and he presents their doctrines and defends the New World Translation throughout his book.

Naturally, his book has been seized upon by the Watchtower organisation and they repeatedly quote from it in their publications and on their website.

Readers are referred to my review for further information on his book and his comments on some other Bible passages where the version produced by the Jehovah's Witnesses deviates from standard translations.

The New World Translation is used only by the Jehovah's Witnesses, and furthermore they use it to the virtual exclusion of all other translations in their publications and meetings.¹⁰

BeDuhn dedicates a whole chapter of his book (chapter nine) to defending the NWT mistranslation of Hebrews 1:8 and to attacking all the other translations that he looks at, all of which he claims are wrong.

An important note about Dr Jason BeDuhn

When academics review publications or claims made by other academics, they seek to engage with *the arguments presented* and not to discuss *the suitability of the author* concerned to make the claims that he or she makes. In other words, if they consider the arguments to be flawed, they seek to demonstrate this and to avoid criticising the author *per se*.

Unfortunately, in the case of BeDuhn's book, *one of the main claims made by BeDuhn is precisely his own, personal suitability* to make these arguments about Bible translations, *his status* as an academic, a historian and a theologian, and his own lack of bias, which *he claims make him unique* in the academic world.

Given these claims by BeDuhn, which he repeatedly makes throughout the book and which are constantly reiterated by the Jehovah's Witnesses, any review is forced into evaluating whether the author's statements *about himself* can be substantiated.

I must emphasise that I have no desire to make any sort of personal criticism of Dr BeDuhn; throughout my review of his book I endeavour to treat him with respect. However, any review of his book cannot avoid *the foundational argument that BeDuhn himself presents* to substantiate his other claims: who he is *as a person* and *the importance of his standing and his qualifications*.

¹⁰ Occasional references are made to other translations, either to claim the support of an isolated phrase in one translation or another, or to condemn them for being different, as the case demands.

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Section 1: Unfortunately, BeDuhn repeatedly reveals a lack of thoroughness in his studies of the Greek text

He is determined to demonstrate that “O God” in Hebrews 1:8 is an inaccurate translation of the Greek. He says that this form of address to God (technically known as the vocative) “occurs just three other times in the New Testament” (p. 98), referring to Luke 18:11, Luke 18:13 and Hebrews 10:7. However, he inexplicably misses at least a further six occurrences (Mark 15:34 (twice), John 20:28, Revelation 4:11, Revelation 15:3 and Revelation 16:7).

F. F. Bruce points out a further possible vocative form of “God”, in the very next verse, Hebrews 1:9: “Indeed, our author may well have understood ‘God’ in the vocative twice over in this quotation; the last clause could easily be construed ‘Therefore, O God, thy God has anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.’ ”¹¹

BeDuhn insists that ὁ θεός [“ho theos”] in Hebrews 1:8 cannot mean “O God”, but he does not look at how the NWT translates *the same phrase* in the other passages that I have referred to above. He would find that in fact the NWT translates this phrase as “O God” in all three of the verses that he mentions.

*It is particularly relevant that one of these verses is in the **same** New Testament letter!* The NWT translates Hebrews 10:7 as: “Then I said, ‘Look! I am come (in the roll of the book it is written about me) to do your will, **O God.**’ ” – correctly using the vocative.

Precisely as in the case of Hebrews 1:8, Hebrews 10:7 is a quotation from a Psalm, on this occasion from Psa 40:7-8, MT (= LXX Psa 39:8-9). Significantly, the NWT *also* uses the vocative form (correctly) in its translation of this Psalm: “To do your will, **O my God,** I have delighted.”

The NWT *also* translates ὁ θεός [“ho theos”] as “O God” in Mark 15:34, and it translates it as other, equivalent, forms of the vocative in all of the other four verses (adding the word “Jehovah” in each of the verses from Revelation, even though this word is not present in the Greek).

It should also be noted that in Matthew 27:46, which is a parallel passage to Mark 15:34, the evangelist translates the Lord’s words from the cross (which were spoken in Hebrew) with the alternative Greek vocative form θεέ [“the’é”], showing that in the Koiné Greek of the day both that form and ὁ θεός [“ho theos”] were equivalent vocative forms. The NWT in fact confirms this by also translating Matthew 27:46 with the vocative.

Other examples of the use of the nominative article with a vocative meaning in the New Testament

Let us remember that BeDuhn states that this form is used so infrequently in Greek that it is found only three times in the New Testament. Above, we have already indicated six other places in the New Testament where one finds the phrase Ὁ [“ho”, “el”] + θεός [“theos”] with a vocative meaning.

Some grammatical definitions

The word “the” (and its Greek equivalents) is known in grammar as an “article”.

The form Ὁ [“ho”] is defined grammatically as a “masculine singular nominative article”,

¹¹ F. F. Bruce, “The Epistle to the Hebrews, Revised”, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990, p. 60.

but it is used with a vocative meaning in the examples quoted.

“Vocative” means the form used to address God or someone.

A “noun” is a word used to denote something or someone (words such as “God”, “Lord”, “Master”, or any other object, such as “house”, “city”).

In the Koiné Greek that used in the Septuagint translation of the Jewish Scriptures and that was spoken by Christ and by those who wrote the New Testament, the nominative article was commonly used followed by a noun when addressing God or a person. This is called vocative use and it is what is found in Hebrews 1:8, according to all translations other than the one produced by the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Ὁ [“ho”] is also repeatedly used with a vocative meaning when God is addressed in prayer as ὁ πατήρ [“ho patēr” – “Father”] in the New Testament: in Matthew 11:26, Mark 14:36, Luke 10:21, Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6. In the first three occurrences, it is Christ Himself who uses ὁ [“ho”] with a vocative meaning. In every single one of these occurrences the NWT translates ὁ [“ho”] as vocative.

Ὁ [“ho”] is also used as a vocative with other nouns in the New Testament. See, for example, ὁ βασιλεὺς [“ho basileus”] in John 19:3. The NWT correctly translates ὁ [“ho”] in this verse as a vocative, adding the word “you” in the English as a way of showing that it is vocative. Other occasions in the New Testament when ὁ [“ho”] is used as a vocative with various nouns include John 13:13 (with two different nouns), Mark 14:36, John 20:28 and Revelation 4:11 (both of these verses with ὁ κύριος [“ho kurios”, “O Lord”], as well as the examples of ὁ θεὸς [“ho theos”] mentioned above), Revelation 6:10 (ὁ δεσπότης [“ho despotēs”, “O Sovereign Lord”] and Revelation 15:3 (another example of ὁ βασιλεὺς [“ho basileus”])). All of these are translated as vocatives by the New World Translation.

Examples of this use by Christ and his disciples

There are also other examples of the use of this structure by the disciples when addressing Christ, and it is Christ himself who points this out to us. In John we read, 'You call me "Teacher" and "Lord", and rightly so, for that is what I am.' (John 13:13 NIB) The Greek is: ὑμεῖς φωνεῖτέ με· ὁ διδάσκαλος, καὶ ὁ κύριος, καὶ καλῶς λέγετε· εἰμὶ γάρ. [humeis fōneite me ho didáskalos kai ho kurios, kai kalōs legete, eimi gar]. A translation that is closer to the Greek text would be, “You call out to me, ‘Teacher!’ and ‘Lord!’ and you do well to say this, for that is what I am.”

It is appropriate to point out other aspects of the text in John 13:13.

1. The verb that Christ employs for “you call out to me” is φωνέω [fōneō], which means to call out as in when calling to someone so that they respond or come. In his “Analytical Greek Lexicon”, Friberg defines the meaning of this verb as: “of a person *call or cry out, speak loudly* (LU 8.8)”¹² In his “Greek NT Lexicon”, Gingrich defines this verb as “*call or cry out, speak loudly, say with emphasis* Mk 1:26; Lk 8:8, 54; 23:46; Rv 14:18.—**2.** *call someone—***a.** *in the sense address as* J 13:13.—**b.** *call to oneself, summon* Mt 20:32; Mk 9:35; 10:49; Lk 19:15; J 1:48; 2:9; 9:18, 24; 10:3; Ac 9:41.”¹³

Thus, Christ is not here saying, “You say to me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’”. For “you say to me”, Christ would have used the verb λέγω [legō], just as Luke records him saying in Luke 9:20 ὑμεῖς δὲ τίνα με λέγετε εἶναι; [humeis de tina me legete einai], “But who do you say that I am?” Another possibility would have been to use the verb καλέω

¹² Friberg, *Analytical Greek Lexicon* in the electronic version included with Bibleworks 10.

¹³ Gingrich, *Greek NT Lexicon* in the electronic version included with Bibleworks 10

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[kaleō], as in Luke 6:46: Τί δέ με καλεῖτε· κύριε κύριε, καὶ οὐ ποιεῖτε ἃ λέγω; [ti de me kaleite kurie kurie kai ou poieite ha lego], “Why do you say ‘Lord’, ‘Lord’ and not do what I say?”

But in John 13:13, in contrast, Christ is saying, “to attract my attention, you shout out “ὁ διδάσκαλος” [ho didaskalos] or “ὁ κύριος” [ho kurios].” This is a use with a clearly vocative meaning for both phrases, using the nominative form of the article.

2. The verb is in the present, so it indicates that this is the way that the disciples habitually called out to him, on any and every occasion. In other words, Christ is enabling us to see that the disciples always or nearly always used the nominative of the article with a vocative meaning, to attract his attention.
3. The verb is in the plural. This means that all of the disciples were in the habit of calling out to him using the nominative of the article with a vocative meaning.
4. Christ gives examples of two different words, one of them κύριος [kurios], and he shows that with both words the disciples used with the grammatical form “nominative article + noun” with a vocative meaning.
5. So all of this is summarised in a few phrases in one verse, but it represents the hundreds of times that the disciples must have called out to Christ in the course of three years of living and travelling with him. When they were not going somewhere by boat, they normally “travelled” on foot. We know that Christ frequently walked fast and that the disciples had to make efforts to follow him. See, for example, Mark 10:32, 9:2, 9:34. They were so far from Christ that they thought that he couldn’t hear what they were saying, even when they were arguing. On such occasions, they will often have had to shout out in order to call to Christ. They did this using the nominative of the article + a noun, with a vocative meaning.

Ὁ [“ho”] is the masculine singular form of the Greek article (the word “the”). As may be expected, the feminine, neuter and plural forms of the Greek article are also sometimes used with a vocative meaning in the New Testament. See, for instance, Luke 8:54, where Jesus addressed a girl with the words ἡ παῖς, ἔγειρε [hē pais, egeire], “Child, get up!” (The word παῖς [pais] is feminine.) This is a command addressed to the girl, and by definition, commands (technically known as imperatives) are always in the vocative. The presence of an imperative is often indicated by translators by the use of an exclamation mark at the end of the sentence. Even the NWT translates this imperative correctly as a vocative, even including an exclamation mark: “Girl, get up!” Mark uses a neuter word, τὸ κοράσιον [to korasion], and has τὸ κοράσιον, σοὶ λέγω, ἔγειρε [to korasion, soi lego egeire], “Little girl, I say to you, get up!” (Mark 5:41) Again, the NWT renders this as an imperative, again including the exclamation mark: “Maiden, I say to you, Get up!”

For the use of the article in the plural with a vocative meaning, see the masculine plural in Ephesians 5:25: Οἱ ἄνδρες [hoi andres], “Men, husbands!” The NWT translates this as an imperative, although without the exclamation mark. In the same context, just three verses earlier, the feminine plural words Αἱ γυναῖκες [hai guniakes], “Women, wives” (Ephesians 5:22) are also in all probability vocative, although the verb has not been included in this verse, being understood from the context.

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In fact, Ὁ θεός (“ho theos”) is regularly used with the vocative meaning in the Septuagint Greek translation of Psalms, which was the version that was usually quoted from in the New Testament (rather than re-translating from the Hebrew original).¹⁴ This does of course correspond to the appropriate vocative form in the original Hebrew, and it is indeed translated as such, even by the NWT. To give merely a few examples, I refer to Psalm 22:1 (LXX numbering, 21:2), 25:1 (LXX: 24:1), 25:22 (LXX: 24:22), 27:9 (LXX: 26:9), 30:2 (LXX: 29:3).

Anyone who reads the Greek translation of Psalm 45:6 (LXX numbering: 44:7) after having read the previous 44 psalms (43 in the LXX numbering) – and other prayers in the Old Testament – will be forced to recognise that in this verse ὁ θεός [“ho theos”] can only be vocative.

Thus, Hebrews 1:8 is the **only** occasion where the New World Translation does **not** translate into an appropriate, vocative, form in the English a phrase in which God is addressed with the phrase ὁ θεός [“ho theos”].

This reveals a lack of consistency by the translators of the NWT.

Their refusal to translate ὁ θεός [“ho theos”] in Hebrews 1:8 as a vocative thus looks all the more remarkable and difficult to justify. To depart from their normal translation principles for this one verse only shows clearly that the translation has been dictated by theological bias on the part of the translators of the NWT.

It is unfortunate that BeDuhn has not observed this fact (or chooses not to report it).

His handling of the use of the vocative “Oh God” in the Greek text of the New Testament, and of the different ways that the NWT translates this phrase, and his total failure to refer to the usage in the Greek Septuagint, the source text of Hebrews 1:8, shows a complete lack of academic rigour and on the contrary reveals a fundamental bias by him in favour of Jehovah’s Witness doctrine, to the point of ignoring most of the data, which are not favourable to the JW claims.

¹⁴ The “New English Translation of the Septuagint” states: “Not only did the Septuagint become Holy Writ to Greek speaking Jews but it was also the “Bible” of the early Christian communities: the scripture they cited and the textual foundation of the early Christian movement.” (NETS, back cover.)

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Section 2: The statement by the Jehovah's Witnesses themselves that "ho theós" means "O God"

The mis-translation of Hebrews 1:8 by the NWT translators is all the more indefensible, since they themselves state in one of the Watchtower Society's publications that the nominative form in Greek is often used with the vocative meaning (e.g., "O God"). In their own "Kingdom Interlinear Text"¹⁵, the NWT translators state: "when, in addressing a person or a thing, the nominative case is used instead of the vocative, then the nominative case of the definite article may be used along with it".¹⁶

Although this statement is couched in grammatical terminology that seems more designed to intimidate or impress than to enlighten¹⁷, it does show that the translators knew that ὁ θεός ["ho theos"] can (and in fact, on numerous occasions does) mean "O God". However, when they translated Hebrews 1:8, they went against this fact that was well-known to them, since the verse, when correctly translated, disproves their theology concerning Christ. Thus, they showed that it was in fact they who were influenced by theological bias in their translation of this verse.

It is quite remarkable that Dr BeDuhn missed this contradiction between what the translators stated and how they actually translated. Their statement also clearly shows that the argument that he presents on this grammatical point does in fact go against the way the Greek language actually works. It is difficult to understand how Dr BeDuhn was not aware of this.

Section 3: Unfortunately, BeDuhn repeatedly shows a weak grasp of Koiné Greek

I will limit myself here to his handling of Hebrews 1:8. (There are many, many more examples in my study of his book, which can be found on this website.)

Seeking to justify the NWT "translation" of Hebrews 1:8 BeDuhn says, "there is no other way to say 'God is your throne' [in Greek] than the way Hebrews 1:8 reads" (p. 99). This is inaccurate. In Greek, "God is your throne" would be "ὁ θεός ἐστίν ὁ θρόνος σου" ["ho theos estin ho thronos sou"] (or "ὁ θεός ὁ θρόνος σου ἐστίν" ["ho theos ho thronos sou estin"]), neither of which is remotely like what the Greek text of Hebrews 1:8 actually says. It is difficult to understand how BeDuhn was unaware of this.

¹⁵ The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures, Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1969

¹⁶ "THE PECULIARITIES OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE IN GREEK", op.cit., printed inside back cover

¹⁷ See the discussion of the technique of intellectual intimidation in my review of BeDuhn's book and in my article on John 8:58, both to be found on this website.

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Section 4: Sentence structures

BeDuhn and the Jehovah's Witnesses act as though the structure of Hebrews 1:8 (and Psalm 45:6, LXX 44:7) were:

“A” “is” “B”

where “A” is one phrase and “B” is another phrase that explains “A”. Unfortunately for them, this is not the case, and one of the clear indicators of this is the presence of the vocative “O God”.¹⁸

In fact, the word order in Greek is generally extremely flexible and the component phrases or words of sentences can be re-arranged to change the emphasis subtly. Thus, in “A = B” statements, the ordering of the “blocks” in Greek is flexible. It may, for instance, be:

“A” “B” “is”

In moving the word “is” in an English translation to the position between the two “blocks”, “A” and “B”, we are not changing the meaning but merely conforming to the rules of English grammar and style.

There are of course verses in the Old Testament that do indeed have the structure that the JW's claim for Psalm 45:6. One of them is Isaiah 5:7, which in the Septuagint translation reads:

ὁ γὰρ ἀμπελῶν κυρίου σαβαωθ οἶκος τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ἐστίν
[“ho gar ampelōn kuriou sabaōth oikos tou Israēl estin”]

NETS translates this as follows:

“For the vineyard of the Lord Sabaoth is the house of Israel”.

The New Revised Standard Version¹⁹ renders this as:

“For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel.”

The New World Translation gives:

“For the vineyard of Jehovah of armies is the house of Israel.”

The following table clarifies the structure:

“A”	“B”	“is”
ὁ γὰρ ἀμπελῶν κυρίου σαβαωθ	οἶκος τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ	ἐστίν
“ho gar ampelōn kuriou sabaōth”	“oikos tou Israēl”	“estin”
For the vineyard of the Lord Sabaoth	the house of Israel	is

Likewise, the structure of the sentence of the Jehovah's Witness rendering “God is your throne”, *if it existed in the Bible*, would be:

“A”	“B”	“is”
ὁ θεός	ὁ θρόνος σου	ἐστίν
“ho theos”	“ho thronos sou”	“estin”
God	your throne	is

or:

¹⁸ Another indicator is the absence of the word “is”, which is commented on elsewhere in this article.

¹⁹ “New Revised Standard Version”, Copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

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"A"	"is"	"Bs"
ὁ θεός	ἐστίν	ὁ θρόνος σου
"ho theos"	"estin"	"ho thronos sou"
God	is	your throne

Unfortunately for BeDuhn and the Jehovah's Witnesses, such a sentence does not appear in the Bible, so *the NWT translation corresponds to a sentence that is not in the original text.*

By their correct rendering of Isaiah 5:7 the translators of the NWT show that they recognise this sentence structure. However, they do not have such a structure in Psalm 45:6.

Section 5: BeDuhn claims support by an academic expert

Dr BeDuhn struggles to justify the translation of Hebrews 1:8 made by the NWT, which stands alone amongst all the translations that he has chosen to examine, disagreeing with all of them. BeDuhn concludes his chapter on it by quoting (on p.101) from Rolf Furuli, the author of a book with a title that is remarkably similar to that of BeDuhn's book. It is called, "The Role of Theology and Bias in Bible Translation", which BeDuhn's bibliography indicates was published by Elihu Books in 1999.

According to the Elihu website, it is run by a certain Greg Stafford "to help promote accurate knowledge and understanding among people in general and, specifically, where it concerns the beliefs and practices of Christian Witnesses of Jah" – http://www.elihubooks.com/content/online_papers.php (downloaded on 19.10.12).

He also quotes from Furuli on p. 54 in support of his contentious interpretation of a word in Philippians 2:6.

But what BeDuhn fails to reveal on either occasion is that Rolf Furuli is in fact a Jehovah's Witness! Furuli has written in defence of Jehovah's Witness doctrines since at least the 1980s and has regularly been quoted from in Jehovah's Witness publications.

The former leading Swedish Jehovah's Witness Carl Olof Jonsson states in his book "The Gentile Times Reconsidered – Chronology and Christ's Return" (Commentary Press, Atlanta, 2004), "*Rolf Furuli* is a Jehovah's Witness who lives in Oslo, Norway. He is a former district overseer and is regarded by Norwegian Witnesses as the leading apologist of Watch Tower teaching in that country, and Witnesses often turn to him with their doctrinal problems." (p. 308) On p. 354 of the same book, Jonsson provides further information on Furuli: "for a long time he has produced apologetic texts defending Watchtower exegesis against criticism. His two books on Bible translation are nothing more than defenses of the Witnesses' *New World Translation* of the Bible."

BeDuhn's argument is thus reduced to this: "The Jehovah's Witnesses are right because this Jehovah's Witness says they are."!

By concealing the nature of the source that he has quoted, BeDuhn blows the cover of neutrality that he constantly claims. Far from demonstrating scholarly impartiality, BeDuhn here reveals his bias, while at the same time trying to hide it from the reader. Apart from anything else, the use of this source reveals the weakness of BeDuhn's defence of the New World translation of Hebrews 1:8. More fundamentally, it discredits BeDuhn himself.

To state the facts simply, it is a prerequisite that any professional academic would carry out a thorough search of all available publications before publishing a book on any topic. Furthermore, normal academic criteria would require such a search to include publications in the principal languages in which the topic in question was addressed. Dr BeDuhn dedicates a whole chapter to Hebrews 1:8, so here we are not referring to a passing comment by him on a minor detail that he might not have researched thoroughly.

We must therefore conclude that, in spite of presumably having carried out appropriate research for this book, *BeDuhn was clearly unable to find a single independent scholar world-wide who supported the JW mistranslation of this verse.*

Section 6: This meaning is determined “on the basis of linguistics”

BeDuhn also uses other arguments to defend the JW version of Hebrews 1:8.

On page 99 he writes, “on the basis of linguistics, *ho theos* is more likely to mean ‘God’, as it does hundreds of times throughout the New Testament, than ‘O God’ ” One should point out that this argument has nothing to do with *linguistics*. As his sentence goes on to indicate, his claim is based on *statistics*. However, “linguistics” sounds more impressive than “statistics”.

To apply the argument that BeDuhn now invents, we would have to say, “In ninety percent of the New Testament the name “John” refers to John the Baptist²⁰, therefore in 100% of the New Testament the name “John” refers to John the Baptist.” This is precisely the statistical argument that BeDuhn has used to justify the NWT mistranslation of Hebrews 1:8. It is, of course, not a linguistic argument, and it is patently an illogical claim.

It may be asked why there are not more examples of the vocative use of “O God” in the New Testament. The reason is that this phrase is mostly used in prayers and in declarations of praise to God, and all occasions where it is used in the New Testament are examples of prayer or praise to God. It is indeed precisely because there are so many declarations of praise to God (and to Jesus!) in Revelation that the phrase repeatedly occurs in that book, as indicated by the references given earlier. But the New Testament as a whole does not consist principally of prayers and declarations of praise to God.

If there can be said to be a “Book of Prayer and Praise” in the Bible, it is, of course, the book of Psalms, and in this book the vocative use of the phrase “O God” is common.

Use of the phrase ὁ θεός [“ho theós”, “O God”] elsewhere in the Old Testament

The vocative phrase ὁ θεός [“ho theós”, “O God”] also occurs repeatedly in prayers and declarations of praise to God throughout the rest of the Old Testament, among them (and here excluding the occurrences in the Psalms, which are listed elsewhere in this article): Genesis 32:9 (LXX: 32:10), Numbers 12:13, 1 Kings 8:26 (LXX: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΩΝ Γ’/Regnorum III: 8:26, NETS: 3 Reigns), 1 Kings 8:28 (LXX: Regnorum III: 8:28), 1 Chronicles 16:35, 1 Chronicles 17:17, Nehemiah 4:4 (LXX: ΕΣΔΡΑΣ Β’ 13:36, NETS: 2 Esdras 14:4), 5:19 (LXX/NETS: B’ 15:19), 6:14 (LXX/NETS: B’ 16:14), Isaiah 26:13, Daniel 2:23 (LXX: text from Theodotion). Many other examples could be given.

In *all these cases*, the NWT translates the original with the phrase “O God” (in some cases adding the word “Jehovah”).

It is thus clear that, even statistically, the use of ὁ θεός [“ho theós”], “O God”, as a way of addressing God is *common throughout the Bible*, and it is recognised and translated as such even by the New World Translation.

When we look at the whole of the relevant data, rather than taking Hebrews 1:8 in isolation, as BeDuhn does, it becomes clear that statistically, linguistically and culturally, the use of ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] to mean “O God” was the norm over a period of hundreds of years, both in the Hebrew [using Hebrew words] and in the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament, as well as in the New Testament. These facts destroy the supposed validity of BeDuhn’s claim and make even more obvious that the NWT translation in Hebrews 1:8

²⁰ The precise percentage might be more or less than 90%; I won’t waste my time right now working it out, since the argument is so risible.

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(and in their subsequent “translation” of Psalm 45:6) is a departure from the decisions of the NWT translators in the rest of the Bible.

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Section 7: BeDuhn even appeals to Jewish denial that Old Testament verses apply to Christ, in order to support his claims

The writer to the Hebrews quotes (in chapter 1 verse 8) from Psalm 45:6 and says that it applies to Jesus Christ, whom he refers to as God (see Hebrews 1:1-13).

In rejecting this attribution of deity to Christ, BeDuhn appeals to “the Jewish tradition” (p. 100). This is one of the most astounding arguments presented by Dr BeDuhn in his book.

Starting in Matthew chapter 1 (vv 22-23) and throughout the whole of the New Testament, verses are taken from the Old Testament and applied to Jesus Christ. The application of these verses to Jesus was rejected by the Jewish people of New Testament times and is still not accepted by them today. Therefore, when an Old Testament prophecy about Christ is quoted in the New Testament and it is stated explicitly there that this passage applies to Jesus Christ, for anyone to claim that it is in fact not about Christ at all, or that it does not say that Christ is God, *on the basis of Jewish interpretation of the source verse*, is to go against not only the writers of the New Testament but against the very teachings of Christ himself, who said, “These are the [Old Testament] Scriptures that testify about me” (John 5:39, NIV).

The consistent message of the New Testament and of Christ himself is that many Old Testament passages were in fact prophecies about him and had a meaning that “the Jewish tradition” (to use BeDuhn’s phrase) had not recognised. (See, for example, 1 Peter 1:10-12.)

BeDuhn may by all means claim that these Old Testament passages do not refer to Jesus Christ, or that they do not support Christ’s claim to be God, and Jewish groups would welcome such claims, but in doing so he is arguing against the message of the New Testament itself.

Let us read Christ’s own teachings on this in Luke 24:44-46: “ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: ..." ”(NIV)

Is it really possible that Jason BeDuhn is unaware of these teachings of Christ? Surely, as “an expert” in the Bible (his description of himself, p. ix), he must be aware of this.

Is it really possible that he is unaware of the use of Old Testament scriptures throughout the New Testament, giving them a meaning that was not recognised or accepted by “the Jewish tradition”? Surely, as “a biblical scholar” (his description of himself²¹), he must be aware of this.

Is it really possible that he is unaware that central to the disputes between Jews and Christians from the first century to the present day has been disagreement on the meaning of key Old Testament verses? Surely, as “a historian” (his description of himself²²), he must be aware of this.

When BeDuhn says that an Old Testament verse quoted in the New Testament does not have the meaning attributed to it by the New Testament writer *because the Jews say that it does not have that meaning*, he is saying nothing at all that is relevant to an understanding of what the New Testament actually says. Here I am laying no

²¹ “I am a biblical scholar ... by training.” (p. ix)

²² “I am a committed historian dedicated to discovering what Christians said and did two thousand years ago.” (p. xix)

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claims to the validity of the arguments made by the New Testament writers. I am merely pointing out what the New Testament texts actually say.

BeDuhn stated in his Preface, “I am writing because I understand how to take on the role of a neutral investigator” (p. ix), but there is nothing neutral here; he is saying that the New Testament is wrong because the Jews say that it is wrong!

Why does he do this? Only he can answer that question. However, we must observe the facts: the Jehovah’s Witnesses deny the deity of Jesus Christ, so does BeDuhn, so do the Jews.

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Section 8: BeDuhn claims that when Old Testament verses are applied to Christ in the New Testament “slight changes in how the verses are quoted ... are *always* made” (p. 100).

This is factually inaccurate and I am surprised that Dr BeDuhn is not aware that this is the case. There are hundreds of quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament, and many of them quote verbatim – i.e., “word for word, exactly as spoken or written”²³ – from the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. In fact, the quotation that BeDuhn is discussing – and to which he dedicates a whole chapter – is a case in point: there is not one letter different between the Septuagint text and the quotation in Hebrews.

It is difficult to understand how BeDuhn can make such sweeping statements that he, as “a biblical scholar ... by training” (p. ix) should know are totally mistaken. It is quite remarkable that he has made such an erroneous claim – and so emphatically – without checking the facts before going into print.

Is he really so unaware of the Greek text of the New Testament and the Greek text of the Septuagint? That is the best conclusion about him that we could draw from such fundamental errors, so brazenly stated.

Unfortunately, readers of BeDuhn’s book who do not have a familiarity with the original texts may take his categorical and unambiguous statements at face value. If they do so, they will be misled. I regret that there is no other way to say this. This statement by BeDuhn is wrong. Not my opinion. Fact.

²³ Definition taken from “Longman’s English Larousse”, Harlow & London: Longmans, Green & Co Ltd, 1968

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Section 9: BeDuhn claims that he is not influenced by theological considerations, but he then uses the doctrinal stance of the Watchtower organisation to defend his interpretations of passages

He says, “I am not going to enter into a debate over interpretation” (p. 47), yet uses theological considerations to justify his conclusions, not only in the case of the translation of the word προσκυνέω [“proskuneo”], as indicated below, but also on numerous other occasions.

In chapter nine he uses a *theological* argument – and one remote from the linguistic point in question, moreover – to justify the NWT translation of Hebrews 1:8. I will not take the reader’s time with a point-by-point refutation; the start of the relevant paragraph is sufficient to substantiate my statement. On page 100 BeDuhn writes, “It’s really quite simple: Jesus is the Messiah. The Messiah is the rightful king of Israel.” The paragraph in question concludes with BeDuhn’s interpretation of Psalm 45, which is used as support for his interpretation of Hebrews 1:8. This from the man who stated as one of his foundational principles that “I am not going to enter into a debate over interpretation” (p. 47). [See also Howe p. 77.]²⁴

²⁴ Thomas A Howe, “Bias in New Testament Translations?”, 2010, Charlotte, NC, Solomon’s Razor Publishing. Dr Howe is an established academic who has served on the faculty of Bible and Biblical Languages at Southern Evangelical Seminary since 1993.

In 2015 a new book by Dr Howe on the same theme was published: “The Deity of Christ in Modern Translations”. This book is available from Amazon (and possibly elsewhere). It appears to be a revised and slightly abbreviated version of the earlier book.

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Section 10: BeDuhn makes blanket condemnations of all other translations for supposedly translating inconsistently, while hiding the fact that the NWT does exactly the same thing, even with the same words

As an example, he objects to the translation of the Greek word προσκυνέω [“proskuneo”] as “worship” with reference to Jesus, stating (p. 47) “the presence of such an idea cannot be supported by selectively translating a word one way when it refers to Jesus and another way when it refers to someone else.”

However, this is *precisely* what the NWT does, translating the word as “do obeisance” when referring to Jesus, but as “worship” in other occasions, not only when it applies to God but also even when it applies to “the Beast” in Revelation 13:4, etc.

Does he not realise that this is what the NWT has done? He does, after all, dedicate a whole chapter to this one Greek word. How is it possible that he did not see that what he was criticising other translations for doing is precisely what the NWT does *with the same word* – with the difference that their *normal* rendering of the word is “worship”, but that they “selectively translate [it] ... another way” when it applies to Jesus, to prevent their readers seeing the Biblical evidence that Jesus was in fact *worshipped*.

This is clearly determined by the doctrinal orientation of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and one is led to the inescapable conclusion that BeDuhn shares the same theology, in spite of his protestations that he would not allow theological considerations to influence his decisions (see the previous section).

BeDuhn writes elsewhere (p. 108) that “Inconsistency in translation is often an indicator of bias.” The inconsistency in the translation of προσκυνέω [“proskuneo”] and of ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] by the New World Translation reveals precisely that bias, and BeDuhn’s handling of these words is a very partisan account that promotes Jehovah’s Witness doctrine while ignoring or hiding the evidence of the bias that is clearly present specifically in the New World Translation. In doing this, BeDuhn reveals his own profound bias.

Such is the defence of the JW translation of Hebrews 1:8 that is made by Jason BeDuhn, in a book that is repeatedly quoted from by the Jehovah’s Witnesses as justification of their translation decisions.

The final part of this article contains the textual data in the Psalms and introductory comments on its use of ὁ θεός [“ho theós”], “O God”.

PART 3: THE DATA

Section 1: Introduction to the data: vocative or not?

How to recognise when Greek ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] is used with a vocative meaning, and when it is not

Many Psalms address God, and the most common way of addressing God in the Psalms is to use the phrase ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] and the normal way of translating this into English is with the words “O God”.

Some other parts of the Psalms are not prayers. They are addressed to people, telling them about God. In such cases, if the phrase ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] “God” is used, it is not vocative; it is in the nominative case. As can be seen, the nominative form of this word in Greek is identical with the vocative form (as, indeed, it is in English and many other languages).²⁵

The context makes it easy to distinguish whether ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] is vocative (talking to God) or nominative (talking about God). To the reader who is proficient in Greek it will be obvious whether the phrase is vocative or not. For those with less Greek I give the following pointers, which will help the reader to determine whether ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] is vocative or not.

Indicators of the vocative use of ὁ θεός [“ho theós”]

1. The context is clearly a prayer (i.e., it is addressed to God).
2. Words such as “you” or “your” may appear in the same phrase. For example:

ἐξομολογησόμεθά	<u>σοι</u>	ὁ θεός
[“exomologēsómethá	<u>soi</u> ,	ho theós,”]
We will acknowledge	<u>you</u> ,	O God;
ἐξομολογησόμεθα	καὶ ἐπικαλεσόμεθα	τὸ ὄνομά <u>σου</u>
[“exomologēsómethá	kai epikalesómetha	to ónomá <u>sou</u> ”]
we will acknowledge	you and call upon	<u>your</u> name
Psalm 75:1 (LXX: 74:2) English translation by NETS		

3. If an action by God is described, the verb will be in the second person singular (the form that goes with the singular word for “you”).

Example 1: verb (“you are”) in the second person singular, indicative:

τὸ κράτος μου πρὸς σὲ φυλάξω
[“to krátos mou pros se fulaxo”]
O my might, for you I will watch,
ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἀντιλήμπτωρ μου <u>εἶ</u>
[“hoti, ho theòs, antilēmptor mou <u>ei</u> ”]
because <u>you</u> , O God, <u>are</u> my supporter
[Greek word order here:
because, O God, supporter my <u>you are</u>]
Psalm 59:9 (LXX 58:10) English translation by NETS

Example 2: verb (“create”) in the second person singular, imperative (so the word “you” does not appear):

²⁵ In Greek there is an exclusively vocative form of the word “God”, θεε [“theé”], but it is very rarely used, ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] being the preferred way of expressing the vocative “O God” in the vast majority of cases in the whole of the Bible.

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καρδίαν καθαρὰν κτίσον ἐν ἐμοί ὁ θεός
[“kardían katharân ktíson en emoi ho theós”]
A clean heart create in me, O God
Psalm 51:10 (LXX: 50:12) English translation by NETS

(Note that many prayers in the Psalms – as elsewhere – contain verbs in the imperative, urging God to act.)

4. The Greek word for “Lord” has separate nominative and vocative forms. The nominative is κύριος [“kurios”]. The vocative is κύριε [“kurie”]. (This is frequently transliterated elsewhere as “kyrie”. That transliteration is not used in the current paper as it does not appear to reflect accurately the pronunciation of the original Greek at the time when it was written.) In the nominative (i.e., talking about God, not to Him), the phrase “Lord God” will be κύριος ὁ θεός [“kurios ho theós”] but in the vocative (addressing the phrase to God) it will be κύριε ὁ θεός [“kurie ho theós”]. Thus, if κύριε [“kurie”] is used before ὁ θεός [“ho theós”], it is a clear indication that ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] is in the vocative.

On other occasions, as the Psalms frequently repeat the same idea or expand on it with a similar idea in two or three lines of text, κύριε [“kurie”] may be used in one of those “parallel” lines, making clear that the ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] in the parallel line of text is vocative.

Example

βοήθησον ἡμῖν ὁ θεός ὁ σωτήρ ἡμῶν
[“boēthēson hēmin, ho theós ho sōtēr hēmōn”]
Help us, O God our saviour;
ἐνεκα τῆς δόξης τοῦ ὀνόματός σου κύριε ρῦσαι ἡμᾶς
[“hēneka tēs doxēs tou onōmatos sou, kurie, rusai hēmas”]
for the sake of the glory of your name, O Lord, rescue us
Psalm 79:9 (LXX: 78:9) English translation by NETS

5. The word “my” or “our” may be used: ὁ θεός μου [“ho theós mou”]: “O my God” or ὁ θεός ἡμῶν [“ho theós hēmōn”]: “our God”. Note that because of the recent unpleasant trend in the English-speaking world to the use in popular slang of the phrase “O my God”, without any intended actual reference to God, some translations have decided to translate ὁ θεός μου [“ho theós mou”] as “my God”, without the initial “O”.

Indicators of the non-vocative, or nominative, use of ὁ θεός [“ho theós”]

1. The context is clearly not a prayer, but a statement about God addressed to the reader or to the listener.

Example

ὁ θεός ἐλάλησεν ἐν τῷ ἁγίῳ αὐτοῦ
[“ho theós elálēsen en tō hagíō autou”]
God spoke in his-holy-place
Psalm 108:7 (LXX: 107:8) English translation by NETS

2. Note that in this case the verb is in the third person singular, active, indicative, past (aorist) tense, so it means “he spoke”. In this sentence, the word “theos” is the subject of the verb.
3. In some Psalms, it is God who addresses the people, e.g. Psalm 81:7-14 (LXX: 80:8-15). In such cases, ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] naturally cannot occur in the vocative sense. (God would be speaking to Himself!) In Psalm 81:10 (LXX: 80:11) we find one of the

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“I am” statements of God: “I am the Lord your God”. Here, the verb is of course in the first person singular and ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] is the noun in apposition to “I”, which is the subject of the verb. Thus, both “I” and “God” are in the nominative in this sentence.²⁶ (This is really a sub-set of type 1 in the above paragraph.)

Example

ἐγὼ γὰρ εἰμι κύριος ὁ θεός σου
[“egō gar eimi kúrios ho theós sou”]
For <u>I am</u> <u>the Lord your God</u>
ὁ ἀναγαγὼν σε ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου
[“ho anagagōn se ek gēs Aigýptou”]
who brought you up out of the land of Egypt
Psalm 81:10 (LXX: 80:11) English translation by NETS

4. If ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] is the subject of the sentence, it is normally followed by a verb in the third person singular (for instance as in “God is ...”).

Example

ἤκουσεν ὁ θεός
[“ēkousen ho theós”]
God <u>heard</u>
Psalm 78:59 (LXX: 77:59) English translation by NETS

Other ways of addressing God

Some Psalms do not figure in this list of the Psalms in which one or other of the phrases ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] – “O God” – or κύριε ὁ θεός [“kurie ho theós”] – “O Lord God” – is used. These are two ways in which God is frequently addressed in the Psalms.

However, in cases where neither of these phrases occurs in a Psalm, there can be either of two reasons for this:

- The Psalm in question may not be (or may not include) a prayer addressed to God (see above). In this case there will be no vocative phrases addressed to God.
- Alternatively, in the Psalm, God may be addressed in a different way. In some Psalms He is simply addressed as κύριε [“kurie”], “O Lord”, without the addition of the word “God”. Psalm 92 (LXX: 91) is a good example of a Psalm in which κύριε [“kurie”], “O Lord”, is repeatedly used on its own without ὁ θεός [“ho theós”].

A study of the use of κύριε [“kurie”], “O Lord”, on its own without ὁ θεός [“ho theós”], “(O) God”, is beyond the scope of the present study.

A note on the Hebrew text

Consulting the Hebrew (Masoretic) text may help to determine whether the phrase ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] is intended to be nominative or vocative, and it must be borne in mind that most modern translations of the Psalms are from the Hebrew text, not from the Greek Septuagint.

However, two considerations must be remembered:

1. The Septuagint sometimes departed slightly from the Hebrew. This may be because the translators in the third century B.C. understood the Hebrew text that they had before them differently from the way that modern translators understand the Hebrew. Or of course it may be that their Hebrew text differed in some small detail from the text which

²⁶ cf Wallace, D.B., “Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics”, pp. 48-49 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996)

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is used today, which is based on the Masoretic text that was prepared about 1,300 years after the Septuagint was produced.

2. In any case, it must be remembered that it was the **Greek** text that was used by the early Christians and the writers of the New Testament. Therefore, an appeal to the Hebrew may not be relevant, in instances where there is a difference between the two texts. It is for this reason that the present study of the text of the Greek Septuagint is important and relevant.

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Section 2: The Data Tables

The following pages give the data. It is the information in these tables that provides the factual evidence on which the summary and conclusions in Part 1, above, are based.

VOCATIVE ὁ θεός [“ho theós”] IN THE PSALMS: THE DATA

Use of ὁ θεός with Vocative meanings in the Septuagint (LXX), standard text edited by Rahlfs²⁷, with translation of the Greek by the New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS), and of the Hebrew Masoretic Text by the New International Version (NIV, 2011 revision) and by the New World Translation (NWT, 1961)

The numbering of the Psalms in the Septuagint differs from the Hebrew numbering. Translations by and for the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox churches usually follow the Septuagint numbering. Other churches follow the numbering in the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT), with a few minor exceptions that affect the boundaries between some verses.

Where the vocative ὁ θεός occurs more than once in a verse, that verse is listed separately for each occurrence. ὁ θεός (“O God”) and ὁ θεός μου/ἡμῶν (“(O) my/our God”) are listed in separate columns.

Running Total	Gk (LXX) numbering	Heb (MT) numbering	Running Total	ὁ θεός	Running Total	ὁ θεός μου/ἡμῶν	NETS	Translated as vocative?	NIV (2011)	Translated as vocative?	NWT	Translated as vocative?
1	3:8	3:7			1	ὁ θεός μου	O my God	Yes	my God	Yes	O my God!	Yes
2	5:3	5:2			2	ὁ θεός μου	my God	Yes	my God	Yes	O ... my God	Yes
3	5:11	5:10	1	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	God	No
4	7:2	7:1			3	κύριε ὁ θεός μου	O Lord my God	Yes	Lord my God	Yes	O Jehovah my God	Yes
5	7:4	7:3			4	κύριε ὁ θεός μου	O Lord my God	Yes	Lord my God	Yes	O Jehovah my God	Yes
6	7:7	7:6			5	κύριε ὁ θεός μου	O (Lord) my God	Yes	my God	Yes	O Jehovah	Yes
7	9:33	10:12	2	κύριε ὁ θεός			O Lord God	Yes	Lord! ... O God	Yes	O Jehovah. O God	Yes
8	12:4	13:3			6	κύριε ὁ θεός μου	O Lord my God	Yes	Lord my God	Yes	O Jehovah my God	Yes
9	16:6	17:6	3	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	my God	Yes	O God	Yes
10	17:29	18:28			7	ὁ θεός μου	O my God	Yes	my God	Yes	My God himself	No
11	21:2	22.1	4	ὁ θεός			God	Yes	My God	Yes	My God	Yes
12	21:2	22:1			8	ὁ θεός μου	my God	Yes	my God	Yes	my God	Yes
13	21:3	22:2			9	ὁ θεός μου	O my God	Yes	My God	Yes	O my God	Yes
14	24:1	25:2			10	ὁ θεός μου	O my God	Yes	my God	Yes	O my God	Yes
15	24:22	25:22	5	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
16	26:9	27:9	6	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God	Yes	O my God	Yes
17	27:1	28:1			11	ὁ θεός μου	my God	Yes	you	Yes	O my Rock	Yes

²⁷ Rahlfs, Alfred, revised by Hanhart, Robert, “Septuaginta”, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006

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Running Total	Gk (LXX) numbering	Heb (MT) numbering	Running Total	ὁ θεός	Running Total	ὁ θεός μου/ἡμῶν	NETS	Translated as vocative?	NIV (2011)	Translated as vocative?	NWT	Translated as vocative?
18	29:3	30:2			12	κύριε ὁ θεός μου	O Lord my God	Yes	Lord my God	Yes	O Jehovah my God	Yes
19	29:13	30:12			13	κύριε ὁ θεός μου	O Lord my God	Yes	Lord my God	Yes	O Jehovah my God	Yes
20	34:23	35:23			14	ὁ θεός μου	my God	Yes	my God	Yes	O my God	Yes
21	34:24	35:24			15	κύριε ὁ θεός μου	O Lord my God	Yes	Lord my God	Yes	O Jehovah my God	Yes
22	35:8	36:7	7	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God!	Yes
23	37:16	38:15			16	κύριε ὁ θεός μου	O Lord, my God	Yes	Lord my God	Yes	O Jehovah my God	Yes
24	37:22	38:21			17	ὁ θεός μου	O my God	Yes	my God	Yes	O my God	Yes
25	39:6	40:5			18	κύριε ὁ θεός μου	O Lord, my God	Yes	Lord my God	Yes	O Jehovah my God	Yes
26	39:9	40:8			19	ὁ θεός μου	O my God	Yes	my God	Yes	O my God	Yes
27	39:18	40:17			20	ὁ θεός μου	O my God	Yes	O my God	Yes	O my God	Yes
28	41:2	42:1	8	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	my God	Yes	O God	Yes
29	42:1	43:1	9	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	my God	Yes	O God	Yes
30	42:2	43:2	10	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	You ... God	Yes	the God	No
31	42:4	43:4	11	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
32	42:4	43:4			21	ὁ θεός μου	my God	Yes	my God	Yes	my God	Yes
33	43:2	44:1	12	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
34	44:7	45:6	13	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	God is your throne	No!!!!
35	47:10	48:9	14	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
36	47:11	48:10	15	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
37	50:3	51:1	16	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
38	50:12	51:10	17	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
39	50:16	51:14	18	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
40	50:16	51:14	19	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	you ... God	Yes	the God	?
41	53:3	54:1	20	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
42	53:4	54:2	21	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
43	54:2	55:1	22	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
44	54:24	55:23	23	σὺ ... ὁ θεός			you, O God	Yes	you, God	Yes	O God	Yes
45	55:8	56:7	24	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God	Yes	O God	Yes
46	55:13	56:12	25	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	my God	Yes	O God	Yes
47	56:2	57:1	26	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	my God	Yes	O God	Yes
48	56:6	57:5	27	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
49	56:8	57:7	28	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
50	56:12	57:11	29	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
51	58:2	59:1	30	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O my God	Yes
52	58:10	59:9	31	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	you, God	Yes	God is ...	No
53	58:18	59:17	32	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	you, God	Yes	God is ...	No
54	59:3	60:1	33	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	You ... God	Yes	O God	Yes
55	59:12	60:10	34	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	you, God	Yes	O God	Yes

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Running Total	Gk (LXX) numbering	Heb (MT) numbering	Running Total	ὁ θεός	Running Total	ὁ θεός μου/ἡμῶν	NETS	Translated as vocative?	NIV (2011)	Translated as vocative?	NWT	Translated as vocative?
56	59:12	60:10	35	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God, you ...	Yes	as God	?
57	60:2	61:1	36	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
58	60:6	61:5	37	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	you, God	Yes	O God	Yes
59	62:2	63:1		ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	You, God	Yes	O God	Yes
60	62:2	63:1	38		22	ὁ θεός μου	my God	Yes	my God	Yes	you ... my God	Yes
61	63:2	64:1	39	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	my God	Yes	O God	Yes
62	64:2	65:1	40	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	you, ... God	Yes	O God	Yes
63	64:6	65:5	41	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	You ... God	Yes	O God	Yes
64	65:10	66:10	42	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	you, God	Yes	O God	Yes
65	66:4	67:3	43	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	you, God	Yes	O God	Yes
66	66:6	67:5	44	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	you, God	Yes	O God	Yes
67	67:8	68:7	45	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	you, God	Yes	O God	Yes
68	67:10	68:9	46	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
69	67:11	68:10	47	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God, you ...	Yes	O God	Yes
70	67:25	68:24	48	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	Your ..., God	Yes	O God	Yes
71	67:29	68:28	49	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	your ..., God	Yes	Your God	No
72	67:29	68:28	50	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	our God	Yes	O God	Yes
73	68:2	69:1	51	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
74	68:6	69:5	52	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	You, God	Yes	O God	Yes
75	68:7	69:6	53	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God of Israel	Yes	O God of Israel	Yes
76	68:14	69:13	54	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
77	68:30	69:29	55	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	you ...; God	Yes	O God	Yes
78	69:2	70:1	56	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
79	69:6	70:5	57	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
80	70:1	71:1		ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	you, LORD	Yes	you, O Jehovah	Yes
81	70:4	71:4	58		23	ὁ θεός μου	O my God	Yes	my God	Yes	O my God	Yes
82	70:12	71:12		ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	my God	Yes	O God	Yes
83	70:12	71:12	59		24	ὁ θεός μου	my God	Yes	God	Yes	O my God	Yes
84	70:17	71:17	60	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God, you ...	Yes	O God	Yes
85	70:18	71:18	61	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	my God	Yes	O God	Yes
86	70:19	71:19	62	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God	Yes	O God	Yes
87	70:19	71:19	63	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	you, God	Yes	O God	Yes
88	70:22	71:22	64	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	my God	Yes	O my God	Yes
89	71:1	72:1	65	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
90	73:1	74:1	66	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
91	73:10	74:10	67	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God	Yes	O God	Yes
92	73:22	74:22	68	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes

Does Hebrews 1:8 say that Christ is God?

Running Total	Gk (LXX) numbering	Heb (MT) numbering	Running Total	ὁ θεός	Running Total	ὁ θεός μου/ἡμῶν	NETS	Translated as vocative?	NIV (2011)	Translated as vocative?	NWT	Translated as vocative?
93	74:2	75:1	69	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God	Yes	O God	Yes
94	75:7	76:6	70	ὁ θεός Ιακωβ			O God of Iakob	Yes	God of Jacob	Yes	O God of Jacob	Yes
95	76:14	77:13	71	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God	Yes	O God	Yes
96	76:17	77:16	72	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God	Yes	O God	Yes
97	78:1	79:1	73	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
98	78:9	79:9	74	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God	Yes	O God	Yes
99	79:4	80:3	75	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
100	79:5	80:4	76	κύριε ὁ θεός			O Lord God	Yes	Lord God	Yes	O Jehovah God	Yes
101	79:8	80:7	77	κύριε ὁ θεός			O (Lord) God	Yes	God	Yes	O God	Yes
102	79:15	80:14	78	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God	Yes	O God	Yes
103	79:20	80:19	79	κύριε ὁ θεός			O Lord God	Yes	Lord God	Yes	O Jehovah God	Yes
104	81:8	82:8	80	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
105	82:2	83:1	81	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
106	82:2	83:1	82	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O Divine One	Yes
107	82:14	83:13			25	ὁ θεός μου	O my God	Yes	my God	Yes	O my God	Yes
108	83:4	84:3			26	ὁ θεός μου	my God	Yes	my God	Yes	O ... my God	Yes
109	83:9	84:8	83	κύριε ὁ θεός			O Lord God	Yes	Lord God	Yes	O Jehovah God	Yes
110	83:9	84:8	84	ὁ θεός Ιακωβ			O God of Iakob	Yes	God of Jacob	Yes	O God of Jacob	Yes
111	83:10	84:9	85	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
112	84:5	85:4	86	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God	Yes	O God	Yes
113	85:12	86:12			27	κύριε ὁ θεός μου	O Lord my God	Yes	Lord my God	Yes	O Jehovah my God	Yes
114	85:14	86:14	87	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
115	88:9	89:8	88	κύριε ὁ θεός			O Lord God	Yes	Lord God	Yes	O Jehovah God	Yes
116	98:8	99:8			28	κύριε ὁ θεός ἡμῶν	O Lord our God	Yes	Lord our God	Yes	O Jehovah our God	Yes
117	103:1	104:1			29	κύριε ὁ θεός μου	O Lord my God	Yes	Lord my God	Yes	O Jehovah my God	Yes
118	105:47	106:47			30	κύριε ὁ θεός ἡμῶν	O Lord our God	Yes	Lord our God	Yes	O Jehovah our God	Yes
119	107:2	108:1	89	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
120	107:6	108:5	90	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	O God	Yes	O God	Yes
121	107:12	108:11	91	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God	Yes	O God	Yes
122	108:1	109:1	92	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	My God	Yes	O God	Yes
123	108:26	109:26			31	κύριε ὁ θεός μου	O Lord, my God	Yes	Lord my God	Yes	O Jehovah my God	Yes
124	138:17	139:17	93	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God	Yes	O God	Yes
125	138:19	139:19	94	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God	Yes	O God	Yes
126	138:23	139:23	95	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	God	Yes	O God	Yes
127	143:9	144:9	96	ὁ θεός			O God	Yes	my God	Yes	O God	Yes
128	144:1	145:1			32	ὁ θεός μου	my God	Yes	my God	Yes	O my God	Yes

Does Hebrews 1:8 say that Christ is God?

Notes

1. In LXX 42:2 (MT: 43:2) it might be possible to interpret the NIV translation of ὁ θεός as not being vocative. This may, or course, be due to a difference between the Hebrew and Greek texts.
2. In LXX 57:7 (MT 58:6) ὁ θεός is not vocative in the Greek text, but it is vocative in the Hebrew text. NIV and NWT translate it “O God”.
3. In LXX 61:8 (MT 62:7) ὁ θεός may be vocative and is understood as such by NETS. However, Goldingay²⁸ and “The New JPS”²⁹ confirm that the Hebrew text does not have a vocative here, and this is reflected in English translations from the Hebrew, including the NIV and the NWT.
4. In LXX 62:2 (MT: 63:1) the first occurrence of ὁ θεός is clearly vocative in all the translations. It would be possible to interpret the second occurrence in the same verse, this time in fact of the phrase ὁ θεός μου, as non-vocative. This may be due to a difference between the Greek and Hebrew texts.
5. In LXX 84:7 (MT 85:6) there is a vocative ὁ θεός, which is correctly translated in NETS as “O God”. It is, however, an additional phrase that is not in the Hebrew text and therefore does not appear in the NIV or the NWT.
6. In LXX 85:2 (MT 86:2) there is a vocative ὁ θεός μου, which is correctly translated in NETS as “O my God”. The Greek is, however, a rendering of the Hebrew for “You are my God”, which is not a vocative.
7. In LXX 85:15 (MT 86:15) there is a vocative κύριε ὁ θεός [“kurie ho theós”], which is correctly translated in NETS as “O Lord God”. The Hebrew, however, has אֲדֹנָי (“Adonai” – not יְהוָה, “Yahweh”). Adonai means “Lord” or “Master” and usually translated “Lord” or “LORD” in English Bibles. The NWT has “O Jehovah”.
8. In LXX 98:8b (MT 99:8b) there is a vocative ὁ θεός, which is correctly translated in NETS as “O God”. In the Hebrew, however, the structure of the phrase is different and the word “God” is not in the vocative. The NRSV correctly renders this phrase as “you were a forgiving God to them” and other translations have similar renderings.
9. In LXX 107:12 (MT: 108:11)) ὁ θεός occurs twice with a vocative meaning, once in each line of the verse. Many English translations from the Hebrew avoid the repetition of the vocative (in vs 11b) by omitting it completely, and this is the case with the NIV (2011) and the NWT, and also with some other translations, such as the New Living Translation (NLT). However, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and the Authorised Version (AV) do repeat the vocative (as does the Spanish Reina-Valera Revisión de 1960 (RVR60).) In the literal translation in his commentary, Goldingay does include the repetition of the vocative in 11b, as does “The New JPS”. However, the present study does not cover in detail English translations other than NETS, NIV (2011) and NWT.

²⁸ Goldingay, John, “Psalms Volume 3: Psalms 90-150”, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008, p. 270

²⁹ “Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text”, Philadelphia, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985, p. 1241