

John 1:1 and the Greek Article “the” --- “a god” or “God”?

In the Greek language all nouns have a gender; they appear as masculine, feminine, or neuter; e.g. “**the word**” (ο λόγος [o logos]) is masculine, “**the door**” (η θύρα [ee theera]) is feminine, and “**the water**” (το ύδωρ [to hydor]) is neuter.

In Greek, the definite article “**the**” also has different genders in order to co-ordinate with the gender of the noun to which it refers. The article “**the**” appears in its three genders as 0, H, TO: “**0**” for masculine; “**H**” for feminine; and “**TO**” for neuter. The form of the article “**the**” (0, H, TO) also changes depending on whether the noun to which it refers is found in the singular or plural form, and whether it is in the nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, or the vocative case. Here, I list all its different forms:

Case	Singular			Plural		
	Masc.	Fem.	Neuter	Masc.	Fem.	Neuter
Nom.	ὁ	ἡ	τὸ	οἱ	αἱ	τὰ
Gen.	τοῦ	τῆς	τοῦ	τῶν	τῶν	τῶν
Dat.	τῷ	τῇ	τῷ	τοῖς	ταῖς	τοῖς
Acc.	τὸν	τὴν	τὸ	τοὺς	τάς	τὰ
Voc.	ὦ	ὦ	ὦ	ὦ	ὦ	ὦ

In a sentence, we may have the subject, the linking verb, and a subjective complement or predicate. The subject is a word or a group of words about which something is said, while the predicate makes a statement about the subject.

When one constructs a sentence in English or Greek, one usually places the subject before the linking verb while the predicate is placed after it. In Greek, the predicate may appear in the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a sentence. Usually, when the predicate appears **after** the linking verb, the predicate noun takes the article, and when it appears **before** the linking verb, it does not. The reason for this is so that the predicate will not be confused with the subject.

The above rule, was explained by E. C. Colwell and was published in the Journal of Biblical Literature in 1933, with the title, “A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament.” He wrote: **“A definite predicate nominative has the article when it follows the verb; it does not have the article when it precedes the verb.”**

Towards the end of his essay he concluded:

“The following rules may be tentatively formulated to describe the use of the article with definite predicate nouns in sentences in which the verb occurs.

1. Definite predicate nouns here regularly take the article.
2. The exceptions are for the most part due to a change in word-order:

- a) Definite predicate nouns which follow the verb (this is the usual order) usually take the article;
- b) **Definite predicate nouns which precede the verb usually lack the article;**
- c) Proper names regularly lack the article in the predicate;
- d) Predicate nominatives in relative clauses regularly follow the verb whether or not they have the article.”

Colwell’s study has been accepted as a genuine contribution to the field of Greek biblical scholarship. The following is the statement of L.C. McGaughey from his 1970 doctoral dissertation (completed under Robert W. Funk, one of America’s foremost Greek grammarians, whose dissertation was on the Greek article):

“In a pioneer study of 1933, E.C. Colwell has conclusively demonstrated that such speculative statements [as that nouns with the article are definite while those without the article are indefinite, or that the use or nonuse of the article indicates various theological nuances, or that the fluctuation is merely stylistic], which are mainly based on private hunches, need not serve as the basis for a grammar of the article with predicates of S-II sentences [i.e., sentences with a subject noun, a linking verb, and a “subjective complement” or predicate nominative] stands as a model of descriptive analysis for New Testament Greek studies.” (For more details, read the book, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus

Christ, and the Gospel of John, by Robert M. Bowman, Jr.)

Now, let us study John 1:1 in the light of the foregoing rules. In that verse, there are three small sentences or clauses:

a) *Εν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος*
In beginning was the Word

b) *καὶ ὁ Λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν*
and the Word was with the God

c) *καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ Λόγος*
and God was the Word

Now, let us examine clauses **b)** and **c)**:

Clause (b):

καὶ ὁ Λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν
and the Word was with the God

The word-order here follows the usual sentence construction. The subject “ὁ Λόγος” (the Word) holds the first position, followed by the linking verb “ἦν” (was), which is followed by the predicate “πρὸς τὸν Θεόν” (with the God). Therefore, the predicate noun “Θεόν” (God) has retained its article “τὸν” (the).

Clause (c):

καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ Λόγος
and God was the Word

In this clause, the subject is again “ὁ Λόγος” (the Word), the linking verb is the word “ἦν” (was), and the predicate is the noun “Θεός” (God). What we notice here is that the predicate noun “Θεός” (God) is placed **before** the linking verb “ἦν” (was) **and therefore, it does not retain its article.**

To add the article “a” in front of the predicate noun “Θεός” (God) is incorrect. To translate clause (c) as “*and the Word was a god*”, as the Witnesses have done, **is misleading, is an error, and constitutes a heresy.**

If John had wanted to state that the Word was “*a god*”, another god, as the Witnesses teach, **he would have written clause (c) as follows:**

και Θεός τις* ἦν ὁ Λόγος
and God a was the Word

But this is not the case. John did not write it that way. Instead, he wrote:

και Θεός ἦν ὁ Λόγος
and God was the Word

The above must be translated into English as:

“and the Word was God”.

* “τις” = “a”, “certain”, etc. (Strong’s Hebrew Greek Dictionaries, word # G5100. Check Matthew 21:33; Mark 14:47,51; Luke 1:5)

This sentence does not mean that the Word was *"the God"* (the Father) with whom the Word was from the beginning as stated in John 1:1,2. Clause (c) states one thing only: that the Word, the pre-human Jesus, was God by nature! To put it another way, it means that the essence of the "Word" is exactly the same as the Father's.

The absence of the article "the" from before a predicate noun (whether that noun is qualitative, adjectival, definite or indefinite) does not change or weaken the basic meaning of that noun. Thus, the Jehovah's Witnesses do not have any valid grammatical rule on which to base their decision to add the article "a" in front of the word "**God**" -- **none at all!** If their only excuse for adding the article "a" is **the absence** of the Greek article "ὁ" (the) before the word "Θεός" (God), then I challenge them to be consistent and do the same in the following verses where the article "ὁ" (the) is not found before the word "**God**" in the original Greek text: Matthew 5:9; 6:24; Luke 1:35; 2:40; John 1:6; Philippians 1:11. Then, according to their NWT, these scriptures would read:

Matthew 5:9 *"Happy are the peaceable, for they will be called 'Sons of a god'."*

Luke 1:35 *"In answer the angel said to her: "Holy spirit will come upon you, and power of the Most High will overshadow you. For that reason also, what is born will be called holy, a god's Son."*

Luke 2:40 *"And the young child continued growing and getting strong, being filled with wisdom, and a god's favor continued upon him."*

John 1:6 *“There arose a man that was sent forth as a representative of **a god**; his name was John.”*

Philippians 1:11 *“and may be filled with righteous fruit, which is through Jesus Christ, to **a god’s glory and praise.**”*

Such statements would be very misleading.

PS. For a complete study on the Deity of Jesus read my book, **“Jesus God by Nature”**. It is **FREE**. You can find it on my website: www.thebiblestudy.ca