

What is the Correct Translation of Acts 20:28?

Does it call Christ “God”?

by

Dr Trevor R Allin

www.livingwater-spain.com

What is the Correct Translation of Acts 20:28?

© Trevor R Allin 2025

First published: 27th October 2020

Minor revision: 23rd November 2025

- NIV: “Holy Bible, New International Version ® NIV ®” Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by the International Bible Society
- NIB: “Holy Bible, New International Version (Anglicised edition) ® NIV ®” Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica (formerly International Bible Society)
Note that in this article the letters “NIB” are used to designate the British-English edition of the NIV text.
- NWT: “New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures”, Copyright © 1961, 1984 by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania
- NWT Revised edition: “New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures”, Copyright © 2013 Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A.: WATCHTOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC., 2013
- LXX: Rahlfs-Hanhart “Septuaginta”, © Stuttgart, 2006: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft
- NA28: Nestle-Aland “Novum Testamentum Graece, 28th Revised Edition Copyright © 2012 Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2nd corrected printing 2013
- UBS5: United Bible Societies’ “The Greek New Testament”, 5th edition, 2013

The quotation from the Codex Alexandrinus manuscript of the Psalms is taken from the facsimile “PSALTERIUM GRÆCUM E CODICE MS ALEXANDRINO”, published by the British Museum in 1812.

The Alexandrinus LSU™ DK Greek font used to transcribe text from Codex Alexandrinus is used in accordance with permission from the publisher of this font, Linguist’s Software, Inc., www.linguistsoftware.com

CONTENTS

Introduction	5
1. The Text	5
2. What the Experts in the Greek text say	5
3. What about “with the blood of his own Son”?	6
4. Two Different Structures in the Greek Manuscripts	7
5. How do changes in Greek Manuscripts arise?	8
6. The Grammatical Structures	8
7. Other Examples of these Same Structures	9
8. Further Examples, in Different Grammatical Cases	10
9. Different Structures	11
10. The Jehovah’s Witness Technique	11
Conclusion	12

Transliterations and Translations

Transliterations into English letters give an approximation of how the words are pronounced. In the transliterations, the symbol ē indicates a Greek “long e” and the symbol ō indicates a “long o”. Translations are frequently by the author, with the aim of producing an English text that is as close to the Greek as possible, without regard to stylistic considerations. Quotations are sometimes also given from well-known and respected published translations.

– The author

Acknowledgements

My thanks to J.G., whose questions and research have contributed to making this article easier to understand and more comprehensive.

About the Author

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

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

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

¹ Viladecavalls (Barcelona): Editorial CLIE, 2019

² Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005

Introduction

In most translations of the Bible, Acts 20:28 refers to Christ as “God”. But not in the version produced by the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Which one is right? In order to answer this question, we have to look at the grammatical structure of some phrases in Greek, and what these phrases mean. I appreciate that in this article we need to go into a degree of grammatical detail that will be beyond the requirements of some readers. However, such detail is necessary in order to demonstrate that the conclusions reached are accurate. I request the forbearance of readers with this.

1. The Text

In the New International Version of the Bible, Acts 20:28b reads as follows:

“Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28 NIB)

Let us look at the Greek text:

Greek	ποιμαίνειν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἣν περιεποιήσατο
Pronunciation	[poimainein tēn ekklēsiān tou theou, hēn periepoiēsato
Literal translation	shepherd the church of-the God, which he obtained
Greek	διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου.
Pronunciation	dia tou haimatos tou idiou]
Literal translation	by/through the blood the his-own

The subject of “obtained” is “he”, which unambiguously refers to the preceding noun, “God”. So God obtained the church “through” or “because of” blood. The question is “whose blood?” Obviously it is the blood of Christ on the cross. This passage says that God obtained the church through his own blood. The passage therefore refers to Christ as God. Naturally, those who reject the deity of Christ object to this verse and change its meaning. Is the change that they make justifiable? What is the exact meaning of this verse?

The key phrase is διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου [dia tou haimatos tou idiou], “through the blood the his-own”. The most obvious and normal meaning of this phrase is “with his own blood”, and as the New Testament repeatedly refers to the blood of Christ and to Christ ransoming humanity by his blood shed on the cross, this is in agreement with New Testament teaching and must be the default meaning, that is to say, the most probable meaning. Any departure from this meaning would need compelling justification in terms of the Greek itself.

However, some people claim that the phrase means “with the blood of his own” and in the context of the New Testament, “his own” could only mean “Jesus Christ”. By doing this, they prevent the reference to the blood from applying to God. According to this version, God obtained the church, but he did this by using the blood of Christ. It is claimed that this passage means that Christ shed his blood and died, but that he is not God. Translating the phrase as “with the blood of his own” is possible, so we need to examine if it is likely here.

2. What the Experts in the Greek text say

The most obvious and honest translation would put “with his own blood” in the main text, possibly adding a footnote indicating that “with the blood of his own” is possible. Possible but not probable. This evaluation is supported by Parsons and Culy³, who write “the former [“his own blood”] appears to be more natural.”

³ Parsons, Mikeal C & Culy, Martin M., “Acts: A Handbook on the Greek Text”, Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2003, p. 396

In the “Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament”⁴, Metzger states that the “usual sense” of the phrase διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου [dia tou haimatos tou idiou] is “with his own blood.”

In his “Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament”⁵, Zerwick states: “τοῦ ἰδίου *his own* ; for doctrinal reasons, some would transl. *of one who was his own*.” Zerwick thus makes it clear that this is not the obvious meaning of the original text. It also involves adding numerous words that are not in the Greek text, and would only be supported for doctrinal reasons, even although it is not the most obvious meaning of the text.

In his commentary on the Greek text of the book of Acts⁶, Fitzmyer states that, with a few exceptions, “all the important MSS (P⁴¹, P⁷⁴, Ⳑ, A, B, C, D, E, Ψ, 33, 36, 945, 1175, 1739, 1891) read *dia tou haimatos tou idiou* [dia tou haimatos tou idiou] or (in the Koiné text tradition) *dia tou idiou haimatos* [dia tou idiou haimatos] “with his own blood”. He therefore translates this phrase with the words “which he has acquired with his own blood” and explains, “The mention of “blood” must refer to the vicarious shedding of the blood of Jesus, the Son.”

Fitzmyer also comments, “some commentators ... have preferred to understand this phrase to mean, “with the blood of his Own,” i.e., his own Son. Such an absolute use of *ho idios* is found in Greek papyri ... Perhaps, then, it might be used here for Jesus ... That, however, is a last-ditch solution for this text-critical problem.” It is thus clear that Fitzmyer does not find this argument convincing. Those who propose this meaning cannot find support for their idea in the Bible, but only in a few manuscripts on other subjects. It doesn’t sound like a strong basis for a translation that ignores the obvious meaning of the text.

Not only is “with the blood of his own” not probable; it is unlikely, and none of the experts in the Greek text of the New Testament that I have consulted support such a version.

3. What about “with the blood of his own Son”?

As regards those translations which put “with the blood of his own Son”, the word “son” is nowhere present in the Greek, so it has been added by the translators and represents their interpretation, rather than a straightforward translation of what the text actually says.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ “New World Translation” of 1961⁷ has “shepherd the congregation of God, which he purchased with the blood of his own [Son].” As regards the meaning of the square brackets, on page 6 of this edition they explain as follows:

“[] Brackets enclose words inserted to complete or clarify the sense in the English text.”

This means, “without the word or words inserted, readers might not get the sense that we intend them to have.” Words are indeed frequently added throughout the NWT, and they often change the clear meaning of the Greek text. As an example of this, we would refer to their addition of the word “other”

⁴ Metzger, Bruce M. on behalf of and in cooperation with the Editorial Committee of the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994, 9th reprinting 2012, p, 426

⁵ Zerwick, Max & Grosvenor, Mary, “A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament”, Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico 2007, p. 423, emphasis added

⁶ Fitzmyer, Joseph A., “The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary”, New Haven and London: Yale University Press: The Anchor Yale Bible, 1998, p. 680, emphasis added.

⁷ “The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures”, Copyright © 1961, 1984 by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania

four times in Colossians 1:16-17, and our commentary on this in our review on this website of BeDuhn's book.⁸

In 2013 the Jehovah's Witnesses published a major revision of their version of the Bible.⁹ For Acts 20:28, the words are the same as in their 1961 edition, but they have removed the brackets that were round the inserted word "Son". They thus now hide the fact that here they have added a word that totally changes the meaning of the sentence. This is misleading.

4. Two Different Structures in the Greek Manuscripts

We also note that, as commented by Fitzmyer (see above), some other significant manuscripts have a slight variation of the text. Instead of διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου [dia tou haimatos tou idiou], as in UBS5/NA28, these other manuscripts have διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος [dia tou idiou haimatos]. This is in fact the standard text in the Byzantine tradition.¹⁰ This variant can only be translated "through his own blood". With this word order, the version "through the blood of his own" is not possible.

A brief explanation of this detail of Greek grammar may help.

When a noun is described by an adjective (a "descriptive word") in Greek, there are two common ways of doing this: the adjective can go before the noun or after it. If the article (the word "the") is present, the structure of the phrase depends on whether the adjective is before or after the noun.¹¹

If the adjective is before the noun, the structure is:

article + adjective + noun

If the adjective is after the noun, the article has to be repeated in the same form before the adjective¹² and the word order is:

article + noun + article + adjective

We give examples of both of these structures below.

Regardless which of the two structures is used, there is no difference in the meaning, and the phrase will be translated in conformity with the grammatical rules of the target language, which may require a different word order and/or the suppression of one or more occurrences of the article, in those cases when it was present twice in the Greek. Such changes do not change the meaning of the original phrase. It is inherent in the translation process from any one language to any other that the word order and the structure must conform to the grammatical rules of the target language, while conveying unchanged the meaning of the phrase in the source language.

⁸ See here: <https://livingwater-spain.com/beduhn.pdf>, Chapter 14, pages 60-62 in the edition current on 25.10.20.

⁹ "New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures – Revised 2013" Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A.: WATCHTOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC., 2013

¹⁰ The New Testament in the Original Greek Byzantine Text Form, 2005 Compiled and arranged by Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont. Southborough, Massachusetts Copyright © 2005, Chilton Book Publishing Company

¹¹ There are of course some noun phrases where the article is not present in Greek, for instance, the phrase ὕδωρ ζῶν [hudōr zōn] (John 4:10), literally "water living", which would be translated "living water" (i.e., without using the article "the").

¹² This will be explained in any book on Koiné Greek grammar. See, for instance, Duff, J. "The Elements of New Testament Greek", Third Edition, Cambridge (U.K.) & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 4th Printing 2008, pp. 61-62.

5. How do changes in the Greek Manuscripts arise?

For centuries this has been a subject of research by experts in the text of the Bible, who have concluded that changes are almost always caused by slip-ups by the copyists. The conspiracy theory that claims that changes were deliberately made in order to change Christian doctrine has been demonstrated to be totally unsubstantiated.

The most common variants are changes in vowels, which reflect variations in pronunciation in various of the vast number of countries in which Greek was spoken, and the centuries during which it was used, especially in the church and in the copying of Biblical manuscripts. These vowel changes do not change the words or make them unintelligible, so such variants are insignificant and untranslatable.

However, copyists also sometimes missed a line of text, especially if the exemplar from which they were working had two lines one after the other beginning or ending with the same word. Given the thousands of manuscripts that exist, such errors are easy to spot and so they do not lead to difficulties in knowing what the original text was.

Sometimes tired copyists copied out the same line twice, or unintentionally replaced a word or phrase with another one that had the same meaning – for instance, writing “he will cry out to me” [the Lord] instead of “he will call out to me.”¹³ The key thing to note here is that the copyist has retained the meaning and reproduced it in the copy, but with a synonym of one of the words in the text. *It would appear that this is precisely what has happened with the two variants in Acts 20:28:* The Greek “with the blood the his-own” has become “with the his-own blood”, both of which mean “with his own blood”. *The very fact that the second variant arose is an indication that “with his own blood” was the meaning that was understood by the copyists.* If they had thought that it might mean “by the blood of his son”, somewhere one of them might have accidentally included the word “son” in their copy – but of all the thousands of manuscripts so far studied, none have the word “son” in the text.

Both of the above structures are common in the New Testament, and elsewhere there is no difference in meaning between them, so here we are talking of differences that are insignificant and untranslatable.

6. The Grammatical Structures

Let us look at the structures of these two phrases, which I am here calling “Structure A” and “Structure B”:

	Structure A	Structure B
Greek	διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου	διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος
Pronunciation	[dia tou haimatos tou idiou]	[dia tou idiou haimatos]
Literal translation	through the blood the his-own	through the his-own blood
Structure	preposition article noun article adjective	preposition article adjective noun

¹³ This occurs, for instance, in the Greek translation of the Psalms (the Septuagint) in Codex Alexandrinus: Psalm 90:15a (LXX numbering, = Psalm 91:15a Masoretic Text numbering), where the verb is different from the one found in the LXX text completed by Rahlfs in 1935, reprinted in 2006. Based on studies of large numbers of manuscripts, Rahlfs has ἐπικαλέσεται με, which NETS translates as [God says of humanity] “he will call to me”, while Alexandrinus has, ΚΑΙΚΡΑΣΕΤΑΙ ΠΡΟΣ ΜΕ, including a vowel change in the first syllable to ΑΙ instead of Ε, compared with the standard spelling, which would be ΚΕΚΡΑΣΕΤΑΙ ΠΡΟΣ ΜΕ (in a modern font: κεκραζεται προς με), with the consequent addition of the preposition προς [pros], which is required with this verb. The phrase translates as “he will cry out to me”.

What is the Correct Translation of Acts 20:28?

In “Structure A” the adjective is after the noun, which seems strange to speakers of English, although it is common in many other languages, such as French or Spanish. In this structure the article (“the”) comes before the noun, and is repeated in the same form before the adjective. This is a typically Greek structure.

“Structure B” has a word order that is closer to English.¹⁴ It only has the article once. In either structure, in this particular phrase, the article is not required in the English. The meaning is the same in either case. The English translation is therefore “through/with his own blood”.

7. Other Examples of these Same Structures

Let us look at other examples of these same structures in the New Testament, which occur with various nouns and adjectives, and in various grammatical cases. Above, we included the preposition with which the phrase started. In the next examples, we miss out words before the phrase that we are quoting, as we are referring to many different verses and the preceding words vary, depending on the context and the meaning. The structure is, however, the same. In this instance we are not talking of differences between manuscripts, but merely illustrating that, even in the same manuscript, different structures occur in different places. These are different ways of saying the same thing. Just as in any language, there are frequently various ways of expressing the same idea.

	Structure A	Structure B
Greek	τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου	τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος
Pronunciation	[tou pneumatos tou hagiou]	[tou hagiou pneumatos]
Literal translation	the Spirit the holy	the holy Spirit
Structure	article noun article adjective.	article adjective noun
Sample verses	Matthew 12:32, Luke 2:26, Acts 13:4, Hebrews 9:8	Matthew 28:19, Acts 1:8, 2:33, 2:38, 9:31, 10:45, 16:6, 2 Cor 13:13/14 ¹⁵

Both structures have an identical translation: “the Holy Spirit”.¹⁶ Because of the grammatical context, all of these examples are in the genitive case, the same as the phrase “with his own blood” in Acts 20:28 and they have been chosen here for that reason, but the same phrase “the Holy Spirit” even occurs in the very verse that we are studying, Acts 20:28, this time in the nominative case:

τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον
 [to pneuma to hagion]
 the Spirit the holy
 article noun article adjective.¹⁷

We thus see that the same structure and word order occurs twice in Acts 20:28, once about the Holy Spirit and once about the blood of Christ. The first time, the Jehovah’s Witnesses accept the structure and even include the word “the”, although they do of course refuse to use capital letters for the words “Holy” and “Spirit”.

¹⁴ This form of the phrase is also found elsewhere in the New Testament, for instance in Hebrews 9:12 and 13:12.

¹⁵ Verse divisions in 2 Corinthians 13 vary, so this is verse 13 in some texts and translations and verse 14 in others.

¹⁶ We recognise that the Jehovah’s Witnesses usually miss out the word “the” in their version of the Bible, and write “Holy” and “Spirit” with lower case letters in English, as they claim that the Holy Spirit is “an abstract force, like electricity”. We look at this in our article on the Holy Spirit, here: <https://livingwater-spain.com/jwhs.pdf>

¹⁷ The whole verse is προσέχετε ἑαυτοῖς καὶ παντὶ τῷ ποιμνίῳ, ἐν ᾧ ὑμᾶς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἔθετο ἐπισκόπους ποιμαίνειν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἣν περιποιήσατο διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου. NIV: “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28 NIB)

What is the Correct Translation of Acts 20:28?

However, even when this phrase is in the genitive case, as in the other examples quoted above, the Jehovah’s Witnesses also translate it “the holy spirit”. If they did with this phrase what they do with the phrase “with his own blood”, making that say “with the blood of his own [son]”, here they would have to write “the spirit of the holy [one]”, which they never do, in every one of the verses listed above on the Holy Spirit.

The second time that this structure occurs *in the same verse, Acts 20:28* (obviously with a different adjective and noun, this time meaning “with his own blood”), they reject the meaning. This shows a lack of consistency in their translation of this structure.

8. Further Examples, in Different Grammatical Cases

Numerous other examples could be given from the New Testament. For instance, John 5:43 has the phrase ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τῷ ἰδίῳ, which we will look at in diagrammatic form:

Greek	ἐν	τῷ	ὀνόματι	τῷ	ἰδίῳ
Pronunciation	[en	tō	onomati	tō	idiō]
Literal translation	in	the	name	the	his-own
Structure	preposition	article	noun	article	adjective

This is another example of what we have in this article called “Structure A”, the same structure that we find in Acts 20:28.¹⁸ The preposition “en” turns the following phrase into the dative case, so the forms of the words are slightly different, but the structure is the same.¹⁹ The noun “name” has the neuter gender in Greek. The meaning is “in his own name”, and even the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ version of the Bible has “in his own name”. Significantly, they *don’t* have “in the name of/belonging to his own [one]”, which would correspond to what they insist on in Acts 20:28.

John 7:18 has

Greek	τὴν	δόξαν	τὴν	ἰδίαν
Pronunciation	[tēn	doxan	tēn	idian]
Literal translation	the	glory	the	his-own
Structure	article	noun	article	adjective

This means “his own glory”, and indeed the NWT also has “his own glory”. Here the words are in the feminine accusative singular. If we were to follow here the translation that the Jehovah’s Witnesses use in Acts 20:28, we would have to translate this as “the glory to his own [one]” (“her own [one]”?), which is not a possible translation.

John 1:41 has

Greek	εὕρισκει	οὗτος	πρῶτον	τὸν	ἀδελφὸν	τὸν	ἴδιον	Σίμωνα
Pronunciation	[heuriskei	houtos	prōton	ton	adelfon	ton	idion	Simona]
Literal translation	he-finds	this-one	first	the	brother	the	his-own	Simon
Structure	verb	subject	pronoun	adverb	article	noun	article	adjective proper noun

The translation is “He first found his own brother, Simon.” Here the words are in the masculine accusative singular. If we followed the translation that the Jehovah’s Witnesses employ in Acts 20:28,

¹⁸ There are also of course in the New Testament further examples of what I have above called “Structure B”.

¹⁹ The same structure, also using the word for “his-own”, occurs in the accusative case in John 1:41. See below. This structure does of course also occur elsewhere in the New Testament, with other adjectives and nouns.

What is the Correct Translation of Acts 20:28?

we would have to put, “This one first finds the brother [to?] the own [one] Simon”, which is of course meaningless. The NWT has, “First this one found his own brother, Simon”, again showing that they do not use here the translation approach that they insist on for Acts 20:28.

So we see that the structure is common in the New Testament and translating it is easy. Applying the Jehovah’s Witness interpretation, even when the phrase is in the genitive, as in Acts 20:28, results in meaningless sentences that not even the Jehovah’s Witnesses insist upon. Except in Acts 20:28.

9. Different Structures

For the sake of completeness and to avoid misunderstandings, the above structures, where there is a *single* phrase in which the article occurs twice, *in the same form*, *within the phrase* because of the presence of an *adjective* that is after the noun, are not to be confused with *series of phrases*, one after the other, each referring to *a different noun*. An example of the latter can be seen in Revelation 7:15:

Greek	εἰσιν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ
Pronunciation	[eisin enōpion tou thronou tou theou]
Literal translation	they are in front of the throne of-the God
Structure	verb preposition article noun article noun
Translation	“they are in front of the throne of God.”

Here we have a verb that leads to the prepositional phrase “in front of the throne”, which is followed by a further phrase, “of God”. With a *series* of phrases, such as here, each containing a *different noun* after the corresponding article, the structure is quite different from phrases in which the *adjective* comes after the noun. In consequence, the meaning is quite clear, and this structure is not to be confused with noun phrases *containing an adjective* and this structure cannot affect the meaning of such phrases.

The quotation from Revelation 7:15 has been chosen here because in both phrases the article and the noun are in the genitive case, as in Acts 20:28. However, the contrast with the structure in Acts 20:28 is particularly clear when the gender (masculine, feminine or neuter) and/or the case (nominative, accusative, genitive, dative or vocative) of each of the nouns is different. These differences are seen in both the article and the noun. Common examples include sequences of phrases such as:

Greek	ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ	ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου	τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ
Pronunciation	[hē basileia tou theou]	[ho huios tou anthrōpou]	[ton logon tou theou]
Literal translation	the kingdom of-the God	the Son of-the Man	the word of-the God
Structure	Art noun Art noun f.nom.sg. m.gen.sg.	Art noun Art noun m.nom.sg. m.gen.sg.	Art noun Art noun m.acc.sg. m.gen.sg.
Reference quoted here:	Luke 10:19	Luke 11:30	Matthew 15:6
Translation	“the kingdom of God”	“the Son of Man”	“the word of God”

9. The Jehovah’s Witness Technique

Acts 20:28 refers to Christ (the one who “bought” the Church with the shedding of his own blood on the cross) as “God”. We are not surprised that the Jehovah’s Witnesses have not found this acceptable and so their version has “which he purchased with the blood of his own son”. *This is clearly not the “usual sense” (Metzger) or the “more natural” meaning of the text (Parsons and Culy), but a version motivated “for doctrinal reasons” (Zerwick) and “a last-ditch solution” (Fitzmyer) used by people who reject the normal and obvious meaning of the Greek text.*

In this, as elsewhere in their version of the Bible, the Jehovah’s Witnesses start with their doctrines and then work back from there to make their version of the Bible match their teachings, even if this involves improbable or impossible “translations”. This is the opposite of what the honest Bible translator should do: start with the Biblical text and translate its obvious meaning into the target language.

What is the Correct Translation of Acts 20:28?

If the resulting text clashes with the teaching of any group, the task is for that group to resolve the clashes, not for the translator to change the text. The obviously best way of dealing with such clashes is by changing the teachings of the group to match the teachings of the Bible, but there are other responses:

- Some groups, quite simply, ignore the Biblical text. They may even discourage their followers from studying the Bible, and so they hope that the conflicts will never be noticed.
- Some try to explain away problems by giving improbable interpretations.
- Some recognise what the Bible says, but openly reject its teachings, at least on some subjects.

The Jehovah's Witnesses have preferred a more radical approach than any of these:

they change the clear meaning of the original texts whenever the Organization's doctrines are in conflict with the text. They have done this by producing a version of the Bible that is not faithful to the meaning of the original languages. By this means they succeed in leading people astray. This is very sad, and those who perpetrate this deception bear a heavy responsibility, for which they will ultimately be held accountable.

Conclusion

The word order in the final phrase in Acts 20:28 is common in the Greek New Testament. For this sort of phrase, in which a noun is described by an adjective, there are two equivalent structures in Greek, and in other examples of these two structures in the New Testament, the meaning is the same, regardless which of these two structures is used.

Thus, in Acts 20:28 both the text itself and the experts in Greek indicate that the actual meaning of the Greek is “the church of God, which he bought with his own blood”. The word “he” refers back to the noun “God” and “his own blood” can only mean the blood of Christ. Thus, this passage refers to Christ as “God”.

When we look at the use of these structures and phrases in the Greek text, the arguments of those who seek to support the version in the Jehovah's Witness Bible fail to convince.

The natural and obvious meaning of Acts 20:28 is:

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood.” (NIV)