

# Episode 144 Formatting the Word of God

## **Dan Wallace**

My name is Dan Wallace. I am the CEO, and executive director of the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts in Plano, Texas.

## **David Capes**

Dr. Dan Wallace, great to see you back here at the Lanier Theological Library. Welcome, Dan.

## **Dan Wallace**

Dr. David Capes, it's good to be here.

## **David Capes**

You're going to be doing a lecture here. It's going to be wonderful, I'm sure because I've heard you lecture before. The lecture is entitled "Formatting the Word of God." And we're going to talk a little bit about that, in this episode. For those who can't be here tomorrow night, or for those who would like to get an epitome of what you're going to be talking about, give us a brief summary.

## **Dan Wallace**

The Bible, from the very beginning, has had certain formatting to it. It has to. Actually, every literary product has to. For example, how wide should the margins be for a text? How wide should the text be? Is it going to be on a three-foot papyrus roll? So, there's some formatting. And even that formatting helps us with interpretation. It's a pre-interpretive thing. So let me just take that as an example. It can be on a papyrus roll or a codex, which is our modern book form bound on one side, and you have cut pages. The codex is something that those who are under 30 years old may not recognize, because they always scroll on their computer. So, they go retro, you know!

So, when you think in terms of a codex, and you may think of how wide the text is on a page? We don't just have one column necessarily. We even have books, especially Bibles that are in two columns, especially larger Bibles.

## **David Capes**

Why is that?

## **Dan Wallace**

Because it makes it easier to read in public, without losing your place. That goes all the way back to ancient times. And so, we have manuscripts or New Testament books that were selections of readings. They were called lectionaries, and they were typically in two columns. And they were sung in these services. It was amazing how this was done. But a large format, single column text is more likely going to be something that is read in private. And so even the way they format how many columns they have on the page, tells us how it was used. The formatting goes in a number of other directions, too. For example, there are words that are abbreviated in the manuscripts. And they are called *Nomina Sacra*,

or Sacred Names, Holy Names. Now, these included names for God. But they also included a number of others like Jerusalem and David. And David, in fact, is abbreviated, where you have the letters delta, alpha, delta in the genealogy of Matthew. When you read that in Greek, it says *Dad*.

### **Dan Wallace**

But they would read it as David. So, there were fifteen, of these *Nomina Sacra*, that were standardized several centuries into the Christian era. But at the beginning, there were four. And these could be called *Nomina Divina*, divine names. And when I say from the beginning, our very earliest manuscripts from the second century have these *Nomina Divina* in them. And almost always they have them. They are the words Christ, Lord, Jesus, and God. Now, what does that tell you about these early scribes even in the second century, about what they thought of Jesus? Jesus Christ is Lord and God. It's remarkable.

I'll show some pictures of manuscripts, some purple codices that are sumptuous, deluxe manuscripts. And how they put these words in gold letters, these abbreviations, and why they use abbreviations instead of the full words, and what was the implication of that? One implication for sure, that we all recognize is that the early church, the ancient church believed that Jesus was God incarnate. And for anybody to say they didn't think so, is just not dealing with any material evidence.

### **David Capes**

You've got that strong material evidence right there in front of you, that the name Jesus is being handled in the same way that the word God is handled. The way the word Lord is handled. And these are clearly divine names. So, these interpretations have already been going on by the second century.

### **Dan Wallace**

Right. And so that's an interpretation where the scribes got it right. And the columns are telling you if it's public or private. Now, there's always some exceptions. But these are the basic trends that we've seen. And the larger format is going to be public. In a number of manuscripts, they have musical notes, to show you how you should read this in public. I met a musicologist who worked with medieval Greek manuscripts at the National Library of Greece several years ago. And we were photographing all of the New Testament manuscripts. All three hundred of them. And it was fascinating. I've met a number of Greek musicologists that deal with these manuscripts and the musical notes. I don't know how they can read them. But they still do the same kind of thing in the monasteries today, in the Orthodox churches. It's really beautiful to see how they do this.

So, let's take the codex again, as an issue. The New Testament books were originally written on scrolls or rolls. The codex form was invented, as far as we can tell in the first century, late first century. By the second century Christians adopted it. They adopted it wholesale. Every single New Testament manuscript we have except for I think, four of them, are written on a codex. And of those four, I think at least three were written on the back of a roll. So, if it's written on the backside of a roll, it's got something like *Homer* on the front side. And so, it's a reused roll that Christians just scribbled out text on the backside. For the first five centuries of the Christian era, ninety percent of all Christian manuscripts were written on a codex. And we could say, for those first five centuries, that virtually one hundred percent of all New Testament manuscripts were written on a codex, except for the ones that

are the back of a roll. Meanwhile, for the rest of the world, less than fifteen percent of the manuscripts are written on a codex, the manuscript form was still the roll.

The New Testament was originally written on a roll. And this may explain a number of things for us, for example, the ending of Mark. There are some who say that the ending of Mark, the real ending of Mark is lost. And we have it at Mark 16:8 in our oldest manuscripts. And in almost all the rest of manuscripts, you have verses nine through twenty. But a number of scholars have said, Bruce Metzger included, that the real ending of Mark is lost. We don't know how Mark ended it. Because Mark 16:8 is not a fitting ending. The angel tells the women to go tell the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee. And they did nothing for they were afraid. Period, Amen. It's a real downer, unless it's meant to be something where the individual reader steps into the sandals of the disciples and makes the gospel known under persecution times.

But here's the point about all this. If Mark's gospel was originally written on a roll, that end of the gospel would be the most secure part. It would not have been lost. And only if it were originally on a codex, could you say the end of Mark was lost? So just even the formatting of this is significant. The book of Revelation 5:1 talks about the seven sealed book, the seven sealed scroll. And then in 5:3, John weeps because no one can open the seven seals. If you have a codex with seven wax seals on it, you could slice open that last wax seal without even reading the first parts. You find out who done it! But on a roll, you can't. As you roll through it, you've got this long line of wax that's keeping the next section closed. You have to read a section before you can get to the next section. That tells us even Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, was written on a roll.

And I think it gives us a clue about the authorship of Hebrews, because we see ancient papyrus where the addressee and the address are on the inside of the roll. But we also see them on the outside of the roll. And I'll show some pictures where if it's written on the outside, that very frequently gets rubbed off and so that in later centuries, we can't see who it is. I take it that the author of Hebrews had this name on the outside of the roll. It could have been as a fixed label, but by the time the courier gets to where he or she is going, that label is gone. It has been rubbed off and that's why we don't know who sent it.

The ink on papyrus is carbon based and it's more permanent ink than what's used on parchment. Parchment ink was iron-gall based. Parchment which starts out close to white or off-white becomes brown as time goes on. And the ink, which starts off close to black, because it's made of iron in part, it rusts, and it turns brown. So, you've got a dark brown on top of light brown. But the papyri actually, except for the wearing of the fibers, the ink is pretty strong.

### **David Capes**

So let's transition, and talk about modern Bibles, and the way we format them today. You work with the NIV committee, and there's a lot of formatting and a lot of interpretation that gives us the modern Bible today. That is like, as you said earlier, a pre-interpretation. So, we see it's entering into a long tradition that began in the early centuries. It's not as if modern editors invented this process. They're picking up on what happened before.

### **Dan Wallace**

Exactly. Let me take one example here, and that's verse numbers. When Paul is writing to the Romans, he doesn't start chapter one, verse one. He doesn't have verse numbers. He doesn't have chapter numbers. Chapters for the New Testament came about by a man who became the Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton in the 13th century. Verse numbers for the New Testament were not added until 1551. In a printed Greek New Testament by Robert Estienne, or Stefan (*Stephanus*) as he was known, which is his Latin name. And I'll explain tomorrow night, why verse numbers were introduced. But here's the thing that's relevant. Those verse numbers were written in the margin, so that each new verse was indented, like it was its own paragraph. Now, this was in 1551. The first translation that was based on Stefanus's 1551, Greek New Testament was the Geneva New Testament. And then 1560, was the whole Geneva Bible. They also indented each verse as though it was its own paragraph. The King James followed suit in 1611. And so, when you read the King James Bible, you have each new verse indented, instead of having a paragraph as a unit. It makes it much, easier to proof text, where you wrench a verse out of its context, and quote it without having any sense of what it means in its context. There have been some modern translations that follow that same tradition without understanding how that tradition came about. And I'll talk about that.

### **David Capes**

I remember the New American Standard Version did the same thing. And while it's a good translation, in many ways, the very fact that every verse is a paragraph means it's difficult to read

### **Dan Wallace**

They intentionally follow the tradition of even the formatting of the King James Bible. They are in the stream of revisions of the King James. They also use italics for words that are not there. In the King James Bible, they had this Gothic script in that large King James versions of 1611. And for words that were not there, they put them in smaller script, in italics. But italics today doesn't indicate a word that's not there. It means a word that is emphasized. So, it means exactly the opposite of what it meant in 1611. And yet, the New American Standard Bible perpetuates this. It's a great translation. And I think in later editions they have given two different formats so you can have the verses in a paragraph. The J.B. Phillips, New Testament, actually has no verse numbers. It just has the paragraphs and the chapter numbers. But most translations don't follow the King James. They do it so you can read a verse in its context, which is what we always must do. So that's where the formatting can lead to misinterpretation. Not intentionally, but it's what ends up happening.

### **David Capes**

Because as you said, over time, the purpose of the italics changes. It's no longer to be de-emphasized. Now we're going to emphasize that. Pay attention to this because these letters look different.

### **Dan Wallace**

If they still had it in Gothic script for the New American Standard and italic were used for missing words, we'd say it's the Gothic stuff that's important, but they don't.

### **David Capes**

Exactly. So, your lecture tomorrow night is going to be available on our website, on our YouTube channel and we want to encourage all people to see that? It's going to be great. It's going to be visually

interesting. And I love the work that you're doing with manuscripts. You're working with them through the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts. You've developed that program and you are the CEO. What's the mission of your organization?

### **Dan Wallace**

CSNTM was started in 2002. So, we've been going for 21 years. And our initial goal is to make sure that every single Greek New Testament manuscript on the planet is digitized and made available, free for scholars, free for anybody, free for all time. By digitally preserving these manuscripts, we freeze them at a point in time, since all manuscripts are made on degradable material. It's all organic, it's animal or plant based, all of it. It's not going to stay the same over time. And even some of these early papyri that we're photographing now, that got photographed 90 years ago, and have been kept in glass plates, there's some material that has gone missing, which is startling. So, we have those other plates, but our photographs are so much better. But sometimes it doesn't have all the same text there.

So that's our initial goal, which helps scholars to try to recover the wording of the original, which is our ultimate primary goal. It's to help scholars in this endeavor to recover exactly the original text. Now, I don't want hearers to think that what we have is so far removed from the original. Actually, almost all scholars are very convinced that what we have is very, very close to the original text, just not exactly what the original text said. So, a secondary goal after that primary one is to trace the transmission of the text through time. And we're photographing certain ancient versions. Coptic in particular is one that we really like to photograph. It's an early, ancient translation.

And even for the printed text, we're photographing them. Last March, a year ago, we were at Lambeth Palace in London, which is the Archbishop of Canterbury's residence when he's in London, which is most of the time. And they are the keepers of all things Church of England. We photographed the Greek New Testament manuscripts. But they also had a handwritten, a partially handwritten item. It was an interleaved Bishop Bible, which was one of the predecessors to the King James Bible. King James said, you have to base this authorized version on the Bishop's Bible. What we saw were handwritten notes of the Bishop's Bible on one side, and the notes about how we're going to change this on the new authorized version. This must have been done sometime about 1604, This is when King James authorized the new translation. So we're actually seeing the King James translators in process moving towards that King James Version. It really is interesting.

### **David Capes**

Fascinating! Now you think that there are more manuscripts yet to be discovered? We've got 5500, almost 6000 manuscripts out there just in Greek. But you think there are more Greek manuscripts out there that we haven't found?

### **Dan Wallace**

Yes, I'm sure there's plenty more based on estimates, of what we've been able to do. On almost every expedition, we go on for CSNTM to digitize manuscripts it happens. We're working strictly in libraries, museums, universities, and private collections. But we're not digging around in Egypt. Of all the manuscripts that we're photographing in a certain location, about ten to fifteen percent of them are manuscripts that we're discovering while we're there. Now that's incredible!

I need to qualify that it can mean one of two things. The official cataloger is in Munster, Germany in an institute that has since 1959 been in charge of numbering our Greek New Testament manuscripts. They tell us where they are in the world. It's the bible for Bible hunters is what it is. If they don't know about it, then we considered it a discovery. The library, university, or museum may well know about the manuscript, but it hasn't been reported to Munster. And that's about half of our discoveries. The other possibility accounts for the other half of the manuscripts. And that is, that this institute did not know that they had what we discovered. It could be a manuscript that's inside another manuscript. I'll talk about two copies of Hebrews tomorrow night, which will be really fun to deal with. In one place in northern Greece, we found a manuscript. It was actually a printed book, and its dust jacket was an old parchment leaf from John, chapter eight. And I'm thinking, the dust jacket is worth far more than this printed book. We should slice the book open and get to see the backside, but they wouldn't let us do that.

**David Capes**

Well, if people are interested in the work of The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts, where do they need to go?

**Dan Wallace**

csntm.org is our site.

**David Capes**

And you're probably looking for donations as well.

**Dan Wallace**

Oh please! Yes, we are. We've got lots of expeditions in the works.

**David Capes**

And it takes a lot of expensive equipment to be able to photograph these because you're photographing, not just under normal light. You're photographing sometimes in a different spectrum of light, so that you can see below a text or inside of a text. The equipment is very expensive to do this.

**Dan Wallace**

Yes, we use state of the art equipment for digitization. 150-megapixel images that each equal one gigabyte. One gigabyte for one image. And we use multispectral imaging, which is, as the name implies, various spectra to find text that has been scraped off, or is water damaged. And you can't see it with normal means even under ultraviolet light. We're really on the cusp of a new renaissance, more discoveries of things that are in plain sight, but we just can't see them with the naked eye.

**David Capes**

They are hidden in plain sight. Dr. Dan Wallace, thanks for being with us today on The Stone Chapel.

**Dan Wallace**

Yes, thank you, David.

