

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript
Episode 246
SBL Conference Interviews, Part 1
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Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)
Guests: Dr. Bill Arnold (BA)
Dr. Dan Wallace (DW)
Dr. John Hilber (JH)
David Burnett (DB)

Episode Summary

In our first of two installments of interviews at the annual meeting of the SBL (Society of Biblical Literature) we talk to Dr. Bill Arnold about a new book on the History of Israel that he co-edited (with Rick Hess), Dr. Dan Wallace about his work at **CSNTM** (The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts), Dr. John Hilber about his work in biblical backgrounds, and David Burnett about his experience as a doctoral student at Marquette University.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 245: ETS Conference Interviews, Part 4. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. How are you doing?

MH: Good! We're at SBL now.

TS: Yeah, conference number two!

MH: Yeah, we've moved what, a mile or so? We changed hotels.

TS: Yeah, it's exciting! Today's been a good day. We've managed to get quite a few interviews. I like this schedule.

MH: Yeah, we're stacking scholars here. [laughter] That's kind of a grotesque metaphor.

TS: I sure hope our listeners enjoy them, because it's fun to do and a lot of work. So I hope they get a lot out of it.

MH: Yeah, we have with us today Bill Arnold. He spoke at the Naked Bible Conference so we wanted to catch up with him and talk about what seems to me an important new book on Old Testament history and historiography. And then we also talked to Dan Wallace. This is the first time we've been able to get Dan at this event. He's usually much in demand—quite busy. But we want to talk about his CSNTM ministry, where he digitizes Greek New Testament manuscripts around the world. So we caught up with him. We also talked to John Hilber. He also spoke at the Naked Bible Conference this last summer. We're catching up with John about some things that he's published that, again, to our audience are going to be sort of in the sweet spot. And lastly, David Burnett—very familiar to the podcast audience. We're sort of just catching up with him as a doctoral student at Marquette—what the experience has been like for him, stuff he's into, just sort of catching up with him.

MH: Welcome to our first day at the Society of Biblical Literature here in Denver. We have a series of interviews, and our first guest is going to be Dr. Bill Arnold. If you were at the Naked Bible Conference or you watched the video, Bill is going to be familiar to you. He's an Old Testament scholar. But I'm going to let him introduce himself a little more fully for those of you to whom he would be new.

BA: Okay, well thanks! I'm Bill Arnold. I teach Old Testament Interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary. I've been there since 1995.

MH: Wow.

BA: I've enjoyed all these years of teaching and watching young people get excited about the Old Testament and move on into ministry.

MH: Absolutely.

BA: That's what I do.

MH: You kind of veer, in terms of a sub-specialization, to Mesopotamia/Assyriology, correct?

BA: Right. Yeah, I like to... In my public profile, I like to say that I specialize in Mesopotamian Studies or ancient Near Eastern Studies and Old Testament Studies, individually or together. As you know, I'm interested in comparative research—comparing, for example, Babylonian law with Mosaic law. So I like to do them together, but I also love to study them individually in their own right.

MH: Good. Now, today we want to talk about a new book. I have the Amazon page up here, just so I get the title correct.

BA: Okay! [laughs]

MH: You and Rick Hess, I believe, are the co-editors?

BA: Right.

MH: The book is entitled *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*. So let's start with the subtitle. [laughter]

BA: Yeah, that's a good place to start!

MH: A lot of our listeners are going to come from the perspective of, "What issues?" The assumption is that the biblical history is sort of synonymous with Israelite history, but in the academy, that's not the case. So if you could unpack that a little bit...

BA: Yeah, that subtitle is very intentional. In fact, I was listening as you read it and I have to remind myself what we said there because... Maybe it would be helpful to the listeners for me to go back and talk about the project in general a little bit.

MH: Sure.

BA: So Rick Hess (a very good friend of mine from a long time ago) started talking about doing this project. I think you're talking to him later this week. I'm sorry we couldn't do this together with our crazy schedules. When he and Baker Academic Press started talking about this, I said, "Well, you can't write a history of Israel today. We can't produce a history of ancient Israel now!" And the reason is because the field of Old Testament studies is in such an absolute state of flux... that's not the right word. Everyone's doing what's right in their own eyes and there is no solid ground. You can't put your foot on *terra firma* and say, "We're going to establish a history of Israel on this basis." And so in discussions with Rick and the Press, I said, "This is really a great opportunity to say, 'We believe the issues and sources.'" You produce a book that says, "These are the issues and these are the sources that you can use to try to address that issue." We're not producing a definitive history of Israel.

MH: Right.

BA: We acknowledge that can't be done in today's world. Now, you're not asking this question, but I'd go back even further and talk a little bit about what's happened in the past 40 years in Old Testament Studies. I know you know this very well, Mike!

5:00

MH: This is something we need to get out.

BA: So it used to be in the old days when you and I were trained, we had certain hard facts (we would call them) that we could lean on to begin to write our history of Israel. So way back in the 1950's you had a history of Israel written by John Bright, who argued that you could use archaeology and the Biblical text to establish certain facts, and then you could flesh out less secure questions based on that skeleton, if you will.

MH: Yeah, there was a positive symbiosis between those two.

BA: Right. In fact, as a student of Albright, he thought archeology was bringing new things to light and there was a lot of confidence in the 1950's that you could write a history of Israel. Moving into the 70's and 80's—really at the beginning of what we might call postmodernism—it was clear to the scholarship that Bright and that school had overstated certain things (a little bit too much confidence in certain things).

MH: And so the next generation wants to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

BA: That's right! The pendulum swings, you know, from one extreme... I don't Albright and Bright extremes, but the pendulum swung all the way over now in the 70's and 80's to saying that we can't know anything with certainty about the ancient past about ancient Israel.

MH: Our listeners will know that's kind of common across the board in biblical studies. "Oh, there's this one thing that scholarship of the previous era overstated a little bit or maybe got wrong, and now we have to go in a different direction. And because we have to fix this, everything needs fixing."

BA: [laughs] Right. That's exactly right! Overstatement. Ideally, you'll come to a point where the pendulum spends more time in the middle. So ideally, you'd like to find, maybe not a compromise, but you find that pendulum swinging and you maybe find something in the middle that wins the day. And that's not really what's happened. I think there was a convergence in the 80's that led on into the 90's in postmodernism to an extreme opposite of positivism, in a sense, so that the scholarship began to question everything—the historicity of David all the way down to "there was no Northern Kingdom of Israel in the tenth century at all, or even in the eighth century."

MH: It's a total hermeneutic of suspicion.

BA: Exactly. Now fast-forward to the present. Scholarship has sort of inherited this idea that anything that we might be able to know is from the Persian period, or even after Alexander the Great into the Greek period, where you had a few

Jews living around Jerusalem who had to create a past for themselves. So all of this is fictive or fictional, even—explaining how Israel came to be. So Rick and I and the Press thought what we need... Because, of course, as confessional scholar's we've never bought into that and we believe that there is a place for archeology to confirm certain things. So in the 1990's, the Tel Dan inscription was found that mentions the House of David, which made it very, very hard to be so skeptical about the historicity of David.

MH: There are some people that tried really hard! [laughter]

BA: Yeah, they would explain it away: "It's not really talking about David," or whatever. Or it's forged, some people thought. They argued that it was a forgery, which is nonsense. So there are limits to the skepticism, as William Howell said years ago. There are certain limits to the skepticism. And Rick and believe that if you really emphasize sources—ancient Near Eastern sources, archeology sources—that puts certain limitations around the skepticism. Now, the other thing that's distinctive about this book that we tried to do in the definition of the book is to say, "We believe the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible/Hebrew Scriptures (whatever you want to call them—the books of the Old Testament) are sources."

MH: And that sounds crazy to anybody watching these.

BA: It does sound crazy, doesn't it?

MH: But that is where a lot of scholarship is at. Because God is such a big character in this source, this doesn't really count. It's not detached or whatever—it's not objective. Which is really (as you know) inconsistent. Because if we threw out all the ancient Near Eastern material where you have divine characters, we're pretty much left with... nothing. [laughter]

10:00 **BA:** Nothing! A few king lists now and then, but occasionally even they will refer to... So part of that extreme skepticism, let's just say, because the Old Testament is religious and because it has a theological argument to make, it has to be discounted. And some of these scholars in the 90's and the early 2000's said, "Let's write a history of Israel without the Old Testament, relying just on archeology, just on comparative ancient Near Eastern texts." And their conclusion was essentially, "What ancient Israel?" [laughter] There was no ancient Israel.

MH: It's sort of like a self-fulfilling prophecy.

BA: That's exactly right. There was no ancient Israel! So Rick and I and the contributors to this volume... The volume does not take a strong confessional... Not everybody in the volume... is a Christian, but every contributor has what I would call a "moderate methodological approach" and admits that the Old Testament sources are sources.

MH: It's a fair hermeneutic.

BA: Exactly. And I think in that sense it does make a contribution. So we try to let the Old Testament be what it is. Sure, it's a theological treatise in some cases. It's not writing a positivistic history.

MH: Like all the other ones.

BA: Right, like all the other ones! That's right. [laughter] Rick wrote a wonderful chapter at the beginning that introduces all these topics. It talks about this history and why the need for this volume. And then I wrote one... The first chapter is on Genesis, which of course, there's an awful lot about... If you're trying to write a history, there's a lot you can't say. But, for example, I made the point in there (trying to rely on some of our training in philosophy) on the use of logic to say that there's a spectrum of thought here—of proving something. You can say something is possible or it's plausible or probable or proven. And on that spectrum of thought, you can say it's possible that a rational human being somewhere could believe this to be true. That's possible. Or it's plausible. Well, rational human people could say there are a lot of reasons why you might think that would be true. Or if it's probable, it seems that most of the evidence is pointing in that direction and we conclude that it's true. And then for some things, we would conclude they are proven. Now, I think as a base minimum of what we wanted to do on certain things like Genesis is to say that a lot of these things really are possible and maybe even plausible. So in the Joseph story, for example (Genesis 37-50), much of the scholarship says there was no history of Israel in Egypt, the ancestors never lived there, Jacob's family was never there. And so partly this was written to say, "No, you had Semites living in Egypt. You have the Hyksos, you have Ahmose (the first king of the New Kingdom Dynasty) who may very well have been the king who did not know Joseph. This is all very plausible. So there are certain plausible circumstances that have archaeological support and biblical support that make all of this story plausible.

MH: So my underlying assumption, having looked at the book and listened to this, is that each essay is going to do some of that. In other words, that's an orienting point—this rank of probability/plausibility kind of thing.

BA: Right. That's good, yes. They don't all use that terminology, necessarily.

MH: But they're going to land somewhere on that spectrum.

BA: Right. And there's a wonderful chapter by Samuel Greengus where he looks at all the ancient Near Eastern treaties and looks at Deuteronomy, for example, and says, "You know, they were aware of these other treaties and covenants of the ancient world. This all fits in. It makes plausible sense." If you're just objective and allow these sources to speak for themselves, then we don't have to be so skeptical about the history of Israel.

MH: I once said in a doctoral seminar that I thought every graduate student in Biblical Studies should take a class in logic.

BA: Yep. Oh yeah, I'd agree with that!

MH: I didn't really win many hearts and minds. [laughter]

BA: Well, I'm with you on it. I think that's exactly right!

15:00 **MH:** It's about framing a question and then doing exactly what you just laid out: what's possible, probable, plausible... that sort of thing. That's a reasoned way to approach a problem, as opposed to this all-or-nothing sort of thing that's been going on. I think this book is going to be really helpful. A lot of our audience is obviously interested in the Old Testament. If you want to get a book that introduces you to the reality that in the academy, the Bible is not the only source for the history of Israel and then you have this debate about whether it even is a source, this is the book to get. It will help you navigate that terrain and then drill down into specific eras and topics within the Old Testament story. So thanks for...

BA: Thank you, and thank you for saying that. That means a lot to me. I'm glad you like it.

MH: Oh yeah—absolutely. So thanks for being with us.

BA: And I hope when you interview Rick he doesn't say anything that contradicts what I just said!

MH: If he does, I'll point that out! [laughter]

BA: Yeah, send him to me. I'll be listening, Rick! [laughter]

MH: You bet! Thanks.

BA: All right, thank you.

MH: Welcome back to the Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting. We have with us Dr. Dan Wallace. I'm sure his name will be familiar to a lot of people in our audience. But again, some people might not have heard of Dr. Wallace. So I want you to introduce yourself a little bit first, Dan, and then we'll get into what we want to talk about.

DW: Oh, okay. Thank you for letting me be on the show, Mike I appreciate that.

MH: Sure, absolutely.

DW: I am a research professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Seminary. I also have my own organization, the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts, which has as an initial goal to digitize every single Greek New Testament manuscript in the world. That's just the initial goal.

MH: That's ambitious. [laughing] The initial goal is ambitious!

DW: It's great job security for me.

MH: There you go.

DW: In 16 years, we have already photographed half a million pages—20%, one-fifth of all the manuscripts.

MH: Wow. What's your background academically to prepare you for that kind of work?

DW: I went to Biola University, where I studied under Harry Sturz for textual criticism and Greek grammar. I got several years of Greek under him. He was one of E.C. Colwell's students. Colwell was the president of Clairmont and one of the most respected New Testament textual critics of the twentieth century. After Biola, I went to Dallas Seminary and got a Master's degree with a triple major—double in New Testament and single Old Testament. I studied under Zane Hodges for textual criticism. I did not agree with his viewpoint, but it was still interesting to get the full-on Majority Text view. Then I got my doctorate at Dallas, also, and worked especially in Greek grammar. I actually wanted to go to Princeton Seminary and study under Metzger in '82, and he told me that he was at retirement age and was being forced out and was not allowed to take any more students. That, ironically, dictated the direction of my studies. If I was going to go to Princeton, I'd work in textual criticism. If I was going to work in Greek grammar, it would have to be Dallas Seminary because of Buist Fanning. But now I've gotten back into textual criticism and am still working in Greek grammar. [laughs]

MH: Wow. Now, you did some post-doctoral work, as well, right?

DW: Yeah, I've had post-doc studies at Cambridge University, Tubingen University, and several institutes throughout the world. I spent three months at the National Library of Greece. That was just in 2015, but I've probably spent altogether about ten months at the National Library of Greece in Athens. And other institutes throughout the whole world.

MH: Were your post-doctoral pursuits oriented to textual criticism?

DW: Yes. All of it was. The first Cambridge time was kind of a combination of textual criticism and Greek grammar, but the other times were primarily textual criticism.

MH: That background... It shouldn't surprise anybody listening that Dan is sort of a preeminent name in both of these areas—both Greek grammar and New Testament textual criticism. We could spend lots of time on your books and all that sort of thing.

DW: I've spent a lot of time on those books!

MH: I know, I know. [laughter] But, like, anecdotes and... I'll just throw one in here. I was a student at Dallas for a year and I got to see... I believe it was a debate. I believe Pickering was there, or it was a review of Wilbur Pickering's book.

DW: It was Pickering. You were there?

MH: Yes, I was there for that. It just left such an impression on me because I thought, "Okay, here we have the Majority Text view and somebody who's really invested a lot of time in this." I'm not trying to say this harshly, but you basically demolished him. [laughs] You were quoting references like page numbers and line numbers from reference books and things like that, and I thought, "Okay..." [laughs]

DW: It was a three-day debate, and it was the first debate I was ever in.

MH: Oh wow, I didn't know that.

DW: I've been in seven—three of them with Bart Ehrman, one with Pickering, and three others. I'm not a debater. That's not my forte.

20:00 **MH:** I'm not a big fan of them, either, but that one... I've only probably seen two or three, and that one really left a distinct impression on me, as far as the data. Let's focus, though, on your nonprofit work—digitizing manuscripts. How did this begin? Where did the idea come from?

DW: Let me mention a way for people to remember the organization's name. This might be helpful because we have a website. It's www.csntm.org. That's a mouthful. But if you know who C.S. Lewis is, you've got the first two initials. If you've ever watched Wizard of Oz, you know who Auntie Em is. CSNTM—you won't forget it! It's silly, but you won't forget it.

MH: No, it's embedded now in my head! [laughing]

DW: Hopefully it's not a terrible picture.

MH: So how did this start? When did you get the inkling to do this?

DW: It was in the late '90's when I started to notice two things. Two things were beginning to develop. One was digital photography, which was still very much in its infancy. But also the use of optical character recognition [OCR] that had been developed since the '60's for taking printed text and converting it into Braille. OCR was used that way. But then in the late '90s you got things like the Palm Pilot and the Apple Newton, where you could hand-write on the screen. You can still do that on certain devices. And it would convert it to printed text. When I saw that, I thought, "We could do this with Greek manuscripts." Any alphabetic text should theoretically be able to use OCR. So the combination of the digital images with OCR is what got me to just start thinking about this. The OCR still has a long way to go before it could do this properly, but the reason this is so important is because we need to get a complete database of all the Greek New Testament manuscripts. One book has been completely done that way, and that was the book of Revelation. Herman Hoskier examined every single manuscript that he could locate, which was like 80% of them, so there were still quite a few more. He went throughout the world back in 1899 to 1929 and did all this work. He published a two-volume work that gives every single textual variant in every single Greek manuscript—30 years of work for the book of the New Testament that has fewer manuscripts attesting it than any other book. There have been others that have been done. Jude was done by Tommy Wasserman. He did it on all continuous text manuscripts just for Jude, and that took him six years. So as I'm wrestling with all this, I'm thinking, "If we can combine digital images with OCR and have this basically be machine-readable and get a very high percentage of accuracy, we could save about 400 man-hours of work. So with 20% of the manuscripts already digitized, it's not even possible... If you took ten humans, it's not possible to go through those in a lifetime.

MH: Is OCR at the place yet where it can reproduced minuscule cursive? You put your signature on things and it'll reproduce that. Does that work well, or...?

DW: It actually is working, I think about as accurately as English in the cursive. The difference is that you've got hands that change over a hundred-year period from the New Testament to the time it gets to the printing press, and every century there's going to be some minor differences. So what we're going to want to do down the line is plug in, "Okay, this is 12th century minuscule. Read the text." Because there's ligatures (combinations of letters)...

MH: Right. You could create typologies, then, like Cross did with the Dead Sea Scrolls when he did all that by hand. That would be really interesting.

DW: I've gotten negative feedback on this, saying, "You can't do it because OCR is only 95% accurate, and the Byzantine manuscripts all agree about 95% of the time." Okay, let's assume that's true (and it's very close to the truth). At an

individual verse, it's not that way. At an individual verse, you might have three more words or three fewer words or three different words. That's a whole lot different from 95% agreement. And so most verses there's not going to be much difference—maybe a few spelling differences. But the ones that do make a difference, this is where OCR is going to really shine and it's going to help us. We're working on it right now behind the scenes to try to get some decent work done. But in the meantime, we are producing these digital images that even the Institute for New Testament Textual Research in Münster, Germany, is using to produce their Nestle-Aland 28 and the rest of their work. So the standard-critical Greek text is now reliant on our images.

25:00 **MH:** How commensurate is their work in Münster with their collation efforts? "Up to date" is not the right word, but how much of the manuscript data have they accounted for, or do you just keep running into things that nobody knows about?

DW: In terms of what's cataloged, what scholars know about?

MH: Yeah.

DW: We have discovered approximately 95 manuscripts so far since we started.

MH: That's not accounted for in those...

DW: They're up to speed with 74 of them. There's some that they dispute, some that they don't even know about yet, some that they're wrestling with right now. So there may be a dispute, for example, if you have a strip... A manuscript can be the size of a postage stamp, as you well know working with Old Testament manuscripts. But if you have something that's a binding strip to hold two leaves together in a codex and it's cannibalized in old majuscule and they glue it in there... It might be just two letters across, but it might be twenty lines down, and we can figure out what that text is. We can usually date it, too, on that basis. So some of those they count and some of those Münster doesn't count—especially those that we found in Münster in the manuscripts they have. We won't talk about that...

MH: No, we can cut that. [laughs] So how much time of your year do you spend digitizing? Do you have a team? How do people get on that team?

DW: We have now seven full-time staff members, one part-time staff member. We're growing. CSNTM used to be in my living room, in my garage, in my closet. Starting in 2002, all we would do is go on a three-week expedition someplace—typically in Europe—and photograph manuscripts. We had a budget of about \$35,000. It was pretty amateurish. Since that time, we have developed... We're now in our seventh protocol. We have what's called the Graz Traveller's Conservation Copy Stand, which holds the manuscripts in place. It was developed by a professor at Graz University in Austria. If you want to photograph

codices (our modern book form that all New Testament manuscripts are written on, starting in the second half of the first century, AD), you have to get a Graz Traveller's Conservation Copy Stand. On the website, they list the institutes that have at least one of these, like the Vatican and the British Library and the Smithsonian and places like that. And CSNTM has four. Gottengen University also has four. Nothing else comes close. So we use that, we use state-of-the-art 50-megapixel cameras, and the staff are all trained. They've all earned their degrees. They've had multiple years of Greek. We've got now four people with their PhDs or finishing their PhDs on the staff. They're working in [?] and they've earned them at various schools. In order to go on an expedition, someone needs to come to Dallas and be trained on how to photograph these manuscripts. The reason is that it takes weeks, maybe a month, to train somebody on how to photograph these manuscripts properly. Speed is of the essence. I should say efficiency is of the essence, because if you slow us down it's going to take more time and much more money. So we train teams of two people to photograph 400 pages in an 8-hour day, and we allow only 1% of mistakes and four pages of mistakes. By "mistake" we mean that you cut off the edge.

MH: You've gotta do it over, yeah.

DW: Or even the ratios of top-to-bottom (because we shoot against a black background) are not right, or there was a hole in the manuscript and you didn't put a white sheet behind it. There are all sorts of little deals here that we're looking for because we want these to be aesthetically as perfect as possible but capture all of the details of the images. We shoot our images now where we have the inside of the margin of the open codex... We shoot one page at a time, but we bring that over to the edge so that when you visually reunite the two pages, it looks like an open book—same size. We're doing everything exactly the same... It takes a good month to learn how to do that. One guy said, "You really can't learn this until you've photographed about 10,000 pages." That's when you're really getting comfortable with it.

MH: You mentioned the cost, so I'm sure the expense is astronomical. So how can people donate?

30:00

DW: The good news is that CSNTM is a 501(c)(3), and that means it's tax-deductible. We have donations coming through individuals (even outside the U.S.) and foundations. We're even getting secular funding because CSNTM is non-confessional. We don't have any theological commitment whatsoever, and this allows us to get federal grant money. We take no political stance anywhere in the world. We run into people that are communists or anarchists (in Greece you have plenty of those), and we just say, "Hey, look, we're just here to do a job." And we are. So that opens up a lot of doors. But people can donate to us by going to the website (www.csntm.org) and there's a donate page. We really especially need monthly donations—people who will commit at least \$25 a month. That's what keeps us really stable going for a long time. I should say that to photograph a single, unique page of a Greek New Testament costs \$11, and

that's because of all the travel and hotels and things like that. But starting in 2019, those who have paid for the digitization of a complete Greek New Testament (which is essentially \$5,000, because they're about 450—or a little bit larger—pages), we give them a certificate for what they've done, in terms of preserving scripture.

MH: Wow. Well, I'm glad we could have you today to just sort of unpack the project. Again, people in our audience may have heard of it, but we appreciate the detail. I would encourage everyone to go to the website and make a donation, even if you can only do a one-time. This is a really worthwhile project. There are a lot of things you could give your money to out there that are (let's be blunt) not very worthwhile or not as worthwhile as this. So Dan, thanks for being with us.

DW: Thank you, Mike! I appreciate it very much being on your show.

MH: Absolutely.

MH: Welcome back to our interview series at the Society of Biblical Literature meetings in Denver. We have John Hilber with us. Again, if you went to the Naked Bible Conference or you listened to it or you watched it, he will be a familiar face. But many of you, of course, did not do that and you're new to the podcast, so I want to ask John to introduce himself briefly and then we'll get into some things that he has produced that you'll want to know about.

JH: Thanks, Mike. I'm John Hilber. I did my Th.M. work at Dallas Seminary. After a stint of a Bachelors in Geology, I went the theological route.

MH: I didn't know you did geology! Wow!

JH: Yeah, I did. I did my undergrad at the University of Washington in Geology. So I had a change of direction there. I wanted to go into pastoral ministry, so I did my Th.M. in Old Testament at Dallas and pastored for 15 years. Then I had a mid-life crisis and instead of getting a sports car or convertible, we sold everything and went to Cambridge University for a doctorate to prepare for academics.

MH: That's a good trade-off there. [laughing]

JH: You know, Corvette/Cambridge doctorate... they cost about the same. [laughter] So it's all a balance, isn't it? At any rate, after graduation, Dallas asked me to come and teach there, so I was there for eight years. And then in 2012 I

went up to Grand Rapids Theological Seminary and I've been teaching Old Testament studies at Grand Rapids.

MH: It seems like you're enjoying yourself there.

JH: Oh I am; it's been great. We love the community. We love the northern... We're more northern in terms of the temperatures.

MH: See, I don't miss the Mid-Western winters at all.

JH: Oh, we love it.

MH: If you're used to that, yeah.

JH: This morning my wife sent me some pictures on text of the snow coming down.

MH: How many inches?

JH: We probably only had three last night, so it wasn't too bad. Three or four.

MH: Wow. Well, I'm looking at what I originally telegraphed to you about, because I noticed in the book catalogues that you had something new, specifically a book entitled *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament*. So if you could give the viewers/listeners an overview of what you're trying to accomplish... I know you have a couple of other editors. What are you trying to accomplish with that book? And you kind of know our audience now and what the sweet spot is, so just describe that a little bit. Just having looked through, I know it's going to be something that a lot of people in this audience are going to want to get.

JH: One of the emphases of our school on the grammatical-historical hermeneutics end of things... We take the historical side very seriously. And my colleague, Jonathan Greer (who is one of the co-editors of this volume) teaches the courses that are more backgrounds-oriented. He was frustrated that there wasn't a textbook, so he says, "I just need to create this thing." And so Jonathan Greer gave birth to this idea and he built it around the rubric of the Old Testament and a drama. So *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament* alludes to the idea that there's a script, that either the texts in the ancient world... And there are scenes (events in history). And so it's a bit like a drama. So that's the rubric that was used to hang on it 66 essays that address pretty much every area of relevance to Old Testament backgrounds—everything from geography, all of the archaeological periods, all the major historical periods... There are essays that focus in on particularly really important events—certain battles that made the difference in historical change of things, or things like in Egypt, Akhenaton's "monotheism" (I don't think it's monotheism in the Mosaic sense). So some essays focus on particularly important topics that are meaningful historically or

35:00

thematically. So we have a section on religion, we have a section on daily life kinds of issues. I deal with even things of kinship, tribal structures.

MH: When you say "backgrounds," a lot of people will think of John Walton's *Ancient Near Eastern Conceptions* (that book), but this is a lot wider.

JH: Much wider.

MH: This casts a much wider net.

JH: We do have a whole section on scripts, which talks about ancient Near Eastern texts that relate to the Old Testament which would be more like what John Walton's book focuses on, but this hits about... As we look back at the essay topics, we don't have anything on maritime culture—meaning, how did they do seamanship and how did they do war at sea and how did they do commerce? In spite of the fact that there's a picture of a Phoenician vessel on the front of the cover, we realized we missed something. So there's some things in there, but 66 essays is pretty comprehensive. The nice thing about them is that we put a word limit at 3,500 words, which means we got about 4,000 words, which translates to five pages of reading. So you get condensed from... I should also say that the essays were all written by sub-specialists, not just somebody who kind of specializes in this area. Somebody whose current major research is done in the particular area that we are interested in. So somebody who does Iron Age I archaeology wrote the essay on Iron Age I Archeology. So these essays were all done by people who are on the top of the field. They know the current material and they're giving you in five pages the best, most salient, issues that are related to that.

MH: Who's your target audience? Is it for an undergrad or a seminary class? I would imagine that for anybody who's interested in backgrounding, this is going to be sort of ideal.

JH: The target audience was initially upper-division undergrad or introductory seminary level. Some of the essays turned out being a bit more technical that we had envisioned at the beginning. Some of the archaeology ones get into statistical methods and things that can get technical, but for the most part, most all of the essay would be understandable by your audience. We don't use Greek and Hebrew stuff that we throw around all the time.

MH: Right, it's in transliteration and all that stuff—yeah.

JH: John Walton, who is one of the other editors, has got a lot of experience in addressing wide ranges of audiences, and so we were careful to make sure that we pitched it at a level that most people in your audience who are serious-thinking readers of the Bible could access.

MH: This sounds really ideal, because when I think of... If I were doing a course on backgrounds, what would I use? My default has become Walton's book, but again, that's incomplete. It's good but it's incomplete. And then it's like, "Go to the library for, like, Sasson's reference work (*Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*)."

JH: Yeah, but that's two volumes...

MH: Yeah, you can't just buy that because it's expensive, and I don't know if it's out of print now or what they've done with it. But this does actually fill a gap. You would think (and maybe a lot of people listening to this would think), "Good grief, everybody talks about this. I'm sure there's like twenty books on it." No, there really isn't.

JH: Well, there are twenty books on a lot of different things. [laughs]

MH: Right, but there's nothing that pulls it all together.

JH: Exactly.

MH: I mean, this is a good sort of gateway volume that you can get started in any one of these sort of drill-down subjects and then go from there. There was nothing like that.

40:00

JH: Then I was saying that the essays are short enough for bedtime reading—30 minutes of reading each night before bed and before you know it, you're done.

MH: And then you're having dreams about it! [laughter] Well, you have another thing that's forthcoming that is going to really appeal to our audience, especially people who heard your lecture at the Naked Bible Conference. So tell us about that.

JH: Thanks for the chance to sort of pitch this!

MH: But it's coming... it's in the pipeline.

JH: At the Naked Bible Conference, you asked me to address the question of literary reading or literal reading of the text. As you know, I'm a big advocate of reading the text the way we talk with each other on a normal basis. That is never assuming literalness of every word you say.

MH: Out of the gate you don't assume that.

JH: You don't assume that, but in fact, we have our minds open to whatever figures you're going to use and we process all that information simultaneously, and we compute at the speed of light what's a figure and what's literal. We need to read the Bible the same way. So what I had done at your conference was to

address that one slice of the pie from a communication model called Relevance Theory. The whole monograph (the book that I wrote) is using the same communication model to ask the question about creation and, in particular, the subject of divine accommodation. So God speaks at the level of the people that he's communicating to—how does that work so that it doesn't lead us to say that there are all of these mistakes in the Bible, because it's been accommodated to a Late Bronze/Iron Age culture?

MH: Or we really should be card-carrying members of the Flat Earth Society!
[laughs]

JH: Exactly.

MH: By the way, they had a meeting this week in Denver.

JH: Oh, no. I missed it!

MH: You mean, you weren't a speaker? [laughs]

JH: I should have flown in a week early to have taken that in! So the monograph is *Old Testament Cosmology and Divine Accommodation: A Relevance Theory Approach*.

MH: That's going to be excellent. Can't wait to see it.

JH: Cascade Books is going to do that. So it will be a relatively inexpensive paperback. The Baker volume is going to be \$50 retail, but on Amazon you'd get it for \$30.

MH: Well, I have a feeling that the second book is going to be my go-to resource when I get those kinds of questions. That's just my hunch, because there really isn't anything specific that would appeal to a general readership—people who have some Bible under their belt and they're good thinkers. They can read academic material. There really isn't anything sort of like that.

JH: There is one other volume that came out this fall.

MH: Who did that?

JH: Is it okay to pitch your friend's book? C. John Collins—Jack Collins—who has done a number of books already on creation texts. He's got a book just published by Zondervan called *Reading Genesis Well*. He goes all the way through from chapters 1-11. His commentary just did 1-4. It's a broader treatment of the same question. My book will really tunnel in on one particular communication theory, and it does get technical in the fifth chapter (so buyer beware, warning). The first three chapters, people will be able to track with. By the time you get to chapter 5,

you need to make sure you've had your coffee beforehand. Jack's book is more broadly addressing the issue of how to read a text in the literary sort of way. He tackles the problems like the Flood and the Tower of Babel kinds of things. I deal with Genesis 1, in particular, as my model text.

MH: Wow, that's good to know that, as well. Do you have anything else, other than the two books that we've talked about?

JH: I'm glad you asked! I have another book, as well.

MH: If the answer is yes, I'm always glad I asked.

JH: These things... There was this weird convergence of three books in one year, but they've been in process for years. I just finished and sent up to Cascade Books a commentary—*Ezekiel: A Focused Commentary for Preaching and Teaching*. It was initially...

MH: It sounds a little too practical. [laughs] Why would we want people to preach the text?

JH: I jumped out of the window of the ivory tower, but it didn't go "splat." But thanks for asking about that. I hope it...

MH: When we talk about the *Ezekiel for Preaching* book, what do you do, either formatically or pedagogically (I don't know what the right word is here)... But how do you... Other than saying, "Hey, it's in the Bible; it's in the Old Testament prophets, don't be scared, preach it!" How do you get across exactly how to use the book or how to communicate the book?

45:00

JH: The driving value behind this is that each section of text has a main idea. Too often, preachers don't catch that big idea. And there are a lot of other things that can take you astray. Nobody wants to be taken out of context, and the prophets didn't, either. So we want to focus on what's the main point that the prophet wanted to get across. What would Ezekiel say if he were living today? The authorial intent is not just the theology or the message of the text, but it also has to do with application. There are some applications that Ezekiel would scratch his head and say, "That wasn't on my radar screen." So I'm trying to narrow in on what was the main point of each section of Ezekiel and what would that look like projected into our world today.

MH: That's important because typically what happens is the Old Testament is avoided. Even if you get into the Old Testament, it's typically Genesis. If it's wider than that, it's the first five books. To do the prophets, usually people will just pull a verse or two out of a book like Ezekiel and that becomes a sermon. So if you're actually going through the work systematically and isolating preachable chunks... in other words, small portions or making summaries that are useful that

somebody can take that summary and construct a sermon out of that, that sounds really helpful.

JH: And I've preached enough years that I have a sense of what is practical and realistic, both in terms of the extent of the comments and also the level of technicality. There are times when I get into why the ESV differs from the NIV... A lot of commentaries either jump into the technicalities of textual criticism, but I'm trying at a lay level to explain why these translations differed at this point, so that anybody can understand it and not feel like their confidence in their Bible is to be undermined. So that's another unique feature of this commentary.

MH: And it's legit, because people could be sitting there with study Bible's and they're going to have those notes, so why not explain them?

JH: Exactly.

MH: So again, lots to look forward too—good stuff. We're glad that you could spend a few minutes with us!

JH: Well, thank you for having me in.

MH: Yeah, absolutely.

MH: Welcome back to Denver for the annual interviews that we do at the SBL meetings. We are accompanied by David Burnett. Dave is going to be quite familiar to a lot of people who follow the podcast, but the podcast keeps growing so he's going to be new to some. So I'm going to ask Dave to introduce himself and then we want to catch up with him. Dave, tell the listeners who you are.

DB: Well, I'm David Burnett.

MH: That's a good start. [laughter]

DB: That is my name. I am brand-new to the podcast.

MH: No, you're not.

DB: Just kidding. No, me and Mike go way back... what is it, 14 years now?

MH: Something like that. It's quite a bit.

DB: He was my outside reader for my Master's thesis. I am at Marquette University. I am a PhD student in Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity, which is basically Bible-and-then-some. It's a PhD in religious studies, not theology—a historical/critical approach. I'm coming towards the middle of my second year, so I have one more semester of coursework and then I'll finish coursework. It has been eating my lunch.

MH: Oh sure, yeah.

DB: I'm also a teaching assistant and research assistant in the theology department, so I'm doing both.

MH: What do you have to do? What does that entail?

DB: Well... [sighs] I'll give you an example. [MH laughs] This semester I'm taking three doctoral seminars, which has more reading than is humanly possible.

MH: Of course.

DB: For my teaching assistanceship, I'm working with Dr. Julian Hills, who is in our New Testament department. He does Classical Greek, New Testament, and Early Christian Apocrypha. He specializes in Gospels and early Christian apocryphal gospels and such. He was also on the Jesus Seminar. So I'm his TA this semester. So he's teaching two Intro to Theology honors courses and a New Testament overview course. As his TA, I'll do a lot of grading and I'll teach. So I've taught about six to eight times, something like that so far.

MH: Do you do full classes, or do you just sort of explain what they just heard in class? A little bit of both?

50:00 **DB:** Well, if I'm teaching, I'll have the whole class.

MH: Okay. Some schools have these... I don't even know what they call them anymore—recitation sections or something like that, where the class meets twice a week and then the third time it's supposed to meet it's a TA and he takes the questions and all that kind of stuff and goes back over material.

DB: I did something like that this past summer. Marquette University has what's called the Educational Opportunities Program (EOP). It's for low-income students who are first-generation college students. We have a scholarship program for them coming in. They'll take one or two intro classes in the summer before they start their first year to get them prepped. They'll have EOP seminars, so I was a seminar leader for that, which is sort of like what you were just saying—supplemental to an intro class. I help go over the material with them, help solidify it, help them develop good study habits—how to study for exams, how to write good papers, yada, yada, yada. So I did that this summer and it was really rewarding. I did two classes. I don't know if I can do that again, just because I

took German at the beginning of the summer and then had a week off. I went down to Texas and said, "Hi, hi, hi, hi, hi" to everyone and jumped back on a plane and started teaching that next Monday morning. The semester started as soon as that was over. I physically cannot do it. It's just overwhelming. I'm doing French this coming summer. I want to dedicate this coming summer to the languages. In my program we have four language exams to pass (translation exams). One is in ancient (classical) Greek, then one in biblical Hebrew, then the two modern research languages (German and French). So I finished German with an A and then I'll do French this coming summer.

MH: Everybody has to go do the same drill and jump through the same hoops and all that. I did not like my French class, but you know... [laughs]

DB: I really liked my German class.

MH: I had that in high school, but with French it's like, "Why don't you pronounce most of the letters in your words?" [laughter] How does that work? But anyway, you've gotta do it. So give us an example of some of the courses that you've taken.

DB: Yeah, okay. Let's see, I've done Advanced Hebrew. We basically did exegesis of the Psalms and some text criticism and stuff like that. I took Apocalyptic Literature. We just did a survey of intermediary figures and the different etiologies of evil within the pseudepigrapha, which was really interesting with Orlov. (My Advanced Hebrew was with Dempsey.) I took... um... goodness, my mind is fried. I'm running on fumes right now, man. [laughs] So I've taken Advanced Hellenistic Greek.

MH: I was going to say, you had to have Greek classes.

DB: We did Advanced Hellenistic Greek, so it's like classical Greek. So we did Dio Chrysostom and Strabo and all this stuff. We also had a 1 Corinthians seminar attached to that. That was fun, with Michael Cover.

MH: Did you feel like you were adequately prepared?

DB: Not for classical, no. It was my first time taking classical Greek. I hadn't had Attic in college or grad school; I just did Koine Greek. I had about two and a half years, including Septuagintal reading class and stuff like that, but I didn't have any sort of Attic so I was just thrown into the deep and end and you just had to kinda catch up.

MH: So Orlov is your advisor?

DB: Yeah, Orlov is my advisor.

MH: So who would be the head of your committee?

DB: That's still in discussion yet. We're not really sure nailing that down, because tentatively I may end up getting Michael Cover and Andre Orlav as co-chairs. There are a couple of my friends who have done the same thing who are sort of in a similar vein of research as I'm doing and it's worked well for them, I think. We'll cross that bridge when we come to it.

MH: When do you have to turn in or submit your topic?

DB: Proposal?

MH: Yeah.

55:00 **DB:** That'll be the first thing I do after I finish what we call DQE's, which is our comps.

MH: We called them "prelims."

DB: Dissertation Qualifying Exams. So we have five of those, on top of all my language exams. Three of them are in our area and then two of them are in supplemental areas. So in my area (Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity), three of them... Basically, the way we do it is we arrange it with the professors we're working with, so topics that will obviously pertain to my dissertation.

MH: That's nice.

DB: So that's really great. But then we're an interdisciplinary program in the graduate school at Marquette, sort of preparing us to teach wider theology courses and religion courses. So, for example, in my coursework I'll have six core classes in Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity and then two Systematic Theology and two Historical Theology. DQE's are very similar. So we'll do three in my area (JCA) and then one in Systematics and one in Historical. So I have to finish those before I can do the proposal. But I pretty much have an outline of my project already done [laughing].

MH: Yeah. So you got drafted to read a paper this year at SBL. Somebody dropped out. What are you reading?

DB: Yeah, someone dropped out. I wasn't drafted, per say. I volunteered and they said yes. [laughter] I was initially turned down because...

MH: It sounds a little like inviting yourself.

DB: Well, no. I've presented with DePaul within Judaism folks before.

MH: Right. You're not somebody they don't know.

DB: I'm not a stranger to them. But when I had submitted my paper proposal this year, it was about 30 or 40 minutes late because I wasn't paying attention to the Eastern time and thought I still had time. And coursework... all I was seeing was coursework. I had to come up and... "Oh yeah! I've got to submit for SBL!" And so I thought I made the cut with plenty of time.

MH: That's what calendars are for.

DB: Yeah, well... you know. I'm somewhat organized.

MH: So what's it on?

DB: It's called "Sowing Celestial Seed." Some of the listeners who are more familiar with my stuff will know what I'm talking about. The full title is "Sowing Celestial Seed: Early Jewish Interpretation of the Abrahamic Promise and the Metaphor for the Nature of the Resurrection Body in 1 Corinthians 15:35-49."

MH: Do you mention the... If N.T. Wright is in the room, is there a little dig that you reserve? [laughs]

DB: Yeah. He won't like my paper.

MH: So what?

DB: I don't care. We already had that out, though, back in 2014—four years ago.

MH: I know, but I just thought, "Is that like an appeal to your flesh? Do you have a line that you're going to say if he's in the room?"

DB: [laughs] No! I literally have not thought about him in relation to this.

MH: Just wondering!

DB: I think he may have had a negative footnote in my term paper. I'm still kind of shaving it a bit before Sunday morning when I present (at the 9-11:30 session, or whatever it is). It was like a 20-something-page paper for Cover that I did in the Corinthian seminar. He helped me edit it. Working with Michael Cover has been a dream, man. He has been so awesome.

MH: Good.

DB: I've just learned a ton. I mean, the guy has forgotten more Greek than I'll ever learn. I did the paper for him and he saw some good ideas in it and his editorial comments were really great. In our seminar, we actually did seminar-style presentations of our papers and we actually critiqued each other.

MH: It's nice if that actually produces something helpful.

DB: Yeah! It was really great. All of us... The guys at Marquette... Shout-out to Peter Battalia and Daniel Mueller and all the rest of the crew over there at Marquette. It was a great class because the feedback was great from the students, too. We have some really sharp grad students. I was very thankful for their voices, too. They have a part in this paper! [laughs]

MH: Honestly, that's the way it should be. It's not the way a lot of grad programs are, but that's the way it should be.

DB: I'm telling you, Marquette has been amazing. It's everything that we used to talk about it being. It is. It has lived up to the hype.

1:00:00 **MH:** How about life in Wisconsin? Texas boy...

DB: Oh, man. [laughter] So I've told this story that you told me years ago.

MH: Oh, about the nickel on the sidewalk?

DB: Yeah, about the nickel on the sidewalk! [laughing] I've told it multiple times—about you going out to the coin machine and dropping it and you can't even pick it off the concrete because it's so cold!

MH: Next time it's 30-below, go out and try that.

DB: It hasn't ever gotten that low in the past year and a half that I've been there.

MH: You're lucky.

DB: I think the lowest it got last year was like -14 or something.

MH: That's adequate.

DB: It wasn't bad.

MH: That orients you. You don't need it to get any colder.

DB: I can't even believe I'm saying it, but I didn't even wear my parka once last year.

MH: Oh, you've got to be kidding!

DB: Yeah. Well, I wore layers...

MH: Three or four sweaters...

DB: And like a thick pea-coat thing and a scarf and beanie and gloves, and I was good.

MH: You did better than I did.

DB: But I have the big old monster parka. I'm ready for Eskimo weather, man. Nothing can touch me. I've got the Sorel boots and everything. I'm good to go.

MH: You're adequately prepared.

DB: Oh yeah, Wisconsin's got... I'm ready. But I love... Milwaukee is amazing, on the river and the lake. The lake is gorgeous. The breweries there are incredible.... really good brew.

MH: I imagine Marquette has a real... It would have to have a superior library.

DB: It has a really good library. It's not Yale or Princeton or something.

MH: Madison's was quite good. There wasn't much... It had a good Second Temple collection. They don't have a program in that, but Marquette more or less has programs in all this stuff.

DB: Yeah, I'm pretty happy with our section. But our ILL is really great there, too. It's real fast. Books that we haven't had, I've gotten relatively quickly. The librarians are very good. Our research library for the theology department has been incredibly helpful to me. Honestly, I haven't used it too much because I have a pretty big digital library. But I have had to put in for certain monographs I haven't been able to get ahold of or something. But overall the library is pretty good.

MH: Well, it sounds to me like it's been a good experience—everything we hoped it would be.

DB: Oh, man. Yeah, it was. It really was. I mean, it is. I love the faculty there. They're very supportive. The administration is wonderful in our department. Shout-out to Josh Burns, our DGS (Director of Graduate Studies). They've just been incredible—so helpful. They helped orient and move around some classes for us—for me and two other guys in my cohort that are JCA that needed a Gospels course. They rearranged classes for us and Dr. Hills is doing History of the Synoptic Tradition next semester, which we're really pumped about. So they'll do stuff like that to help us out with what we need. I'm telling you, it's not a hiccup.

MH: I'm sorry, but I can't relate to that.

DB: Well, seriously, I'm counting my blessings. I try not to take it for granted. I'm very thankful for Marquette. It's a stellar program. One of my Baylor buddies... This is not me saying this (I'm biased), but one of my Baylor buddies was talking to me last year at the conference and was like, "Yeah, we were telling some of our guys that if they want to do Second Temple they should go up to Marquette." And I'm like, "Yeah, come do it!"

MH: Well, thanks for getting us caught up. A lot of people who track with the podcast know who you are and they're interested in what's happening to you—your career. So thanks for spending some time with us.

DB: My pleasure always.

TS: All right, Mike. Another great set of interviews. I enjoyed all of those. It's always good to catch up. We talked to Bill and John about the Naked Bible Conference and we got a lot of good feedback from them, so that's exciting.

MH: Yep. I could tell they were just sort of... It was kind of like shock and awe—just the atmosphere. I think I commented on the blog or a podcast or something, but they felt like rock stars for a day. So they all really had a good time.

TS: Can you imagine if Naked Bible becomes popular with the scholars, as well as the laypeople? [MH laughs] That's going to blow my mind if you walk through here and...

MH: Yeah, really.

TS: No, but great interviews. All right, guys. We appreciate you listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.