

## **Naked Bible Podcast Transcript**

**Episode 457**

**1 Samuel 12**

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### **Episode Summary**

1 Samuel 12 is ostensibly Samuel's farewell address as he yields power to Saul, Israel's first king. The content of his address in the chapter is both more subtle and confrontational, though, to have it be a simply farewell. The text makes it clear that God will evaluate the new king (and every king) on the basis of their covenant loyalty, and that will in turn be made clear as to how the king takes heed to Samuel's advice on being loyal to Yahweh. In the end, the chapter has a sense of foreboding as the monarchy is launched. God promises to remain faithful to Israel and its king but also warns the people through Samuel that straying off into idolatry will again yield divine abandonment.

### **Transcript**

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 457: 1 Samuel 12. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how you doing?

**MH:** Not too bad, not too bad. I've been better and I've been worse. It's kind of a middle day.

**TS:** Yeah, same here since I lost the Fantasy playoffs. I'm out, so I don't know what to do with myself.

**MH:** Yeah, I know what you mean.

**TS:** I can't believe it's the new year, Mike!

**MH:** I know, it doesn't seem like it.

**TS:** Happy New Year!

**MH:** Yep, Happy New Year! I'll be happy to see this one go—this 2022.

**TS:** No doubt. Actually, the last three years since 2020, it's been not as much fun. Do have anything exciting for 2023?

**MH:** No, just to get out of 2022! [laughs] That would sort of be enough.

**TS:** I hear that.

**MH:** I'll take it.

**TS:** Well, I'm ready for chapter 12 if you are.

**MH:** Okay, let's just jump in here. We are going to cover chapter 12 today on this episode. Next time I'm not quite sure yet how much we'll bite off, but today just one chapter. I'm going to read the chapter again. It's still short enough that we can begin the episode this way so you'll all have chapter 12 in your heads as you listen. So first Samuel 12 (reading from the ESV) goes like this:

**And Samuel said to all Israel, "Behold, I have obeyed your voice in all that you have said to me and have made a king over you. <sup>2</sup> And now, behold, the king walks before you, and I am old and gray; and behold, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my youth until this day. <sup>3</sup> Here I am; testify against me before the LORD and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Or whose donkey have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it to you." <sup>4</sup> They said, "You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man's hand." <sup>5</sup> And he said to them, "The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand." And they said, "He is witness."**

**<sup>6</sup> And Samuel said to the people, "The LORD is witness, who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. <sup>7</sup> Now therefore stand still that I may plead with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous deeds of the LORD that he performed for you and for your fathers. <sup>8</sup> When Jacob went into Egypt, and the Egyptians oppressed them, then your fathers cried out to the LORD and the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your fathers out of Egypt and made them dwell in this place. <sup>9</sup> But they forgot the LORD their God. And he sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of**

the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab. And they fought against them. <sup>10</sup> And they cried out to the LORD and said, 'We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. But now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, that we may serve you.' <sup>11</sup> And the LORD sent Jerubbaal and Barak and Jephthah and Samuel and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you lived in safety. <sup>12</sup> And when you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' when the LORD your God was your king. <sup>13</sup> And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the LORD has set a king over you. <sup>14</sup> If you will fear the LORD and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well. <sup>15</sup> But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king. <sup>16</sup> Now therefore stand still and see this great thing that the LORD will do before your eyes. <sup>17</sup> Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call upon the LORD, that he may send thunder and rain. And you shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking for yourselves a king." <sup>18</sup> So Samuel called upon the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day, and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.

5:00

<sup>19</sup> And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king." <sup>20</sup> And Samuel said to the people, "Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. <sup>21</sup> And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty. <sup>22</sup> For the LORD will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you a people for himself. <sup>23</sup> Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way. <sup>24</sup> Only fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. <sup>25</sup> But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."

That's 1 Samuel 12. So we have to ask ourselves up front, as we are wont to do in this series, what the passage is about. Technically, it's Samuel's farewell address. You'll see it referred to a lot by those terms. So it's a farewell address of sorts. It's not the last time we're going to see Samuel, obviously in the book. He's old and he knows his time is limited over the people and so he takes the opportunity to address them. It's also Samuel's confrontational reminder to Israel that the sort of kingship they were envisioning and now had would have a cost. Samuel still casts the kingship in a negative light. Some of the wording reinforces what we've learned earlier about the nature of the kingship God desired versus what the people envisioned.

So basically, Samuel in this chapter yields leadership. He isn't going to get in the way of the Lord accomplishing his will in the situation through this king. In other words, we'll see what God's going to do here. He still warns them. Again, they acknowledge the warning, at least at this point in their history. The bigger picture is that Samuel takes the opportunity to contrast how he judged Israel with demands that a king will place on the people. In other words, Samuel had earlier told the people what the cost would be to having a king—the impositions a king would make on their lives and families. That was 1 Samuel 8:10-18, when he says something to the effect of, "The king that's going to reign over you is going to take your sons and appoint them to his chariots. He's going to make them be his horsemen and run before his chariots. He's going to draft them into an army, essentially. He'll appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties. He's going to take your resources." He's going to take what the people would have thought belonged to them. But all that's over when you have a king.

So he warns them again that this is how life is going to be, and he contrasts that with how he ruled them as a judge. And his point is that, "Look, we didn't really need a king. [laughs] We were doing just fine. The Lord was our king and he was exercising deliverance." Because he actually did, after all, use Samuel earlier to deliver them once from the Philistines. So, "God was perfectly capable of doing that, but you asked for a king and God has relented and given you Saul and we'll see how it goes." There's been this sub-plot the whole way through, that God is giving them sort of what they're asking for, but not really. God knows how they're going to react in different situations. He knows who Saul is. He knows what Saul's propensities are. But Saul is the kind of king they want so "this is what you're going to get and we'll see how it works." The point is not that God was opposed to kingship throughout, because we looked earlier at the positive affirmations of the kingship that are in the Torah and in some other books before we hit 1 Samuel and even afterwards with the messianic profile. Kingship was

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not a necessarily negative thing, but this is really a type of kingship that was the issue. That has something to do with the timing of it, too.

10:00

So Samuel takes the opportunity here to remind them of all of this. He uses the occasion of the kingdom renewal to reiterate that their request wasn't needed and wasn't even desirable. Joyce Baldwin in her commentary puts it this way:

Now that all Israel has accepted Saul as king, Samuel has to withdraw as the theocratic leader, though he continues to exercise his prophetic ministry—albeit restricted to some extent, in so far as the monarch may choose to ignore his advice and instructions. But first he wants to set the record straight, and point out that under his leadership Israel had had just and effective administration, in keeping with the covenant, without any undue demands being made to restrict personal liberty.

It had a certain sort of tough-love mode to it. The point is that Samuel is trying to make it clear that the situation is going to change now. And they may not like it, but what's done is done.

So let's go through some of the parts of the passage where some of these points become clearer, or at least are presented by way of just nuggets in the text that we observe.

In 1 Samuel 12:1-6 (the first six verses), Samuel is claiming in advance that his ministry over the people as a judge was a just one. He was never guilty of the sorts of unjust things he believes will happen now that a king is present, and really that are inevitable. So the line in 12:1 ("I have set a king over you")... Chisholm writes as follows of that particular statement:

The Lord has instructed Samuel to "listen" to all that the people are demanding (8:7) and to "give" them the king they want (8:22). On the surface, one might think that Samuel is claiming here that he has done this ("set a king" in 12:1 and "give... a king" in 8:22 translate the same verb). However, in chapter 9 the Lord makes it clear he is not going to give them the kind of king they want, complete with an institutionalized state structure and standing army (vv. 16–17). On the contrary, the Lord makes the king subject to regulations designed to prevent him from being like foreign kings (10:25). In chapters 9–10 both the Lord and Samuel avoid using the verb *malak*, "to rule," or the noun *melek*, "king," in referring to this ruler (9:16–17; 10:1, 24), except when Samuel quotes the people (10:19). But here Samuel uses these terms, reflecting the perspective of the people (8:5, 19–

20; 10:24), just as the narrator does in 11:15.

So again, there's still, "This guy is your king, not mine" kind of rhetoric going on or kind of feel to the passage. In 1 Samuel 12:7-18 (the next 11 or 12 verses) is a short rehearsal of how Israel went astray earlier in its history from the mouth of Samuel. Each time Israel was oppressed and sought the Lord, he answered and delivered them. It was a transition commented on from the time of Moses and Joshua in verse 8 that takes us to the time of the judges, which is more contemporaneous to Samuel. Note the awkward editorial mention of Samuel in the mouth of Samuel in verse 11. Let's go back up there. It's kind of easy to read over, but this is the kind of thing you get to show that there was editorial activity going on in the book. So if you start in verse 6:

**<sup>6</sup> And Samuel said to the people, "The Lord is witness, who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt.**

So Samuel is speaking. "The Lord did this, the Lord did that; your fathers cried out, the Lord sent Moses and Aaron who brought your fathers out of Egypt." When they got into the current land (again, Canaan), the people of Israel forgot the Lord their God. This is Samuel rehearsing all this.

**And he sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab.**

And this is the period of the book of Judges, when all these things start happening to Israel when they forsake the Lord. And it says that the Lord sent to deliver the people when they repented...

**...Jerubbaal [Gideon] and Barak and Jephthah and Samuel...**

So Samuel... As we read this passage, we're reading that Samuel said, "God sent Samuel to you." So again, you would think it should say, "And God sent me" or "God commanded me to deliver you." But it's not the first person. It's a third-person reference to Samuel out of Samuel's own mouth. So there's a bit of an awkward editorial feel to that in the passage.

15:00

In 1 Samuel 12:12, it appears that the threat of Nahash (the name of the king which means "serpent"; we talked about that at length a little bit earlier)... But here it appears that the threat of Nahash (the threat we heard about in 1 Samuel

11 and maybe something earlier)... It appears that that threat was the occasion for asking for a king. The text says right here in 1 Samuel 12:12:

**12 And when you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' when the Lord your God was your king.**

So Samuel is basically saying, "This situation was like all the other ones in the book of Judges. When you were being oppressed, you came to your senses and put away the Baals and the Ashteroth and the other gods you were worshipping. You repented and the Lord raised up a judge and sent that judge and delivered you from your oppressor." Samuel's point is that this would have been no different, but on this occasion "you asked for a king." So we get a little bit of insight there as to what specifically prompted the request for a king, even though in the telling of the story in 1 Samuel... The thing is a bit out of order because this is chapter 12 where we're learning this, as opposed to back earlier when they did request a king in chapter 8. But it just gives us some context for it.

Now, the implication of the wording in verse 12 here, when Samuel says "when the Lord your God was your king" is that a king at the current point in time wasn't needed. It wasn't needed in God's mind and it wasn't needed in Samuel's mind. The Lord would deliver the people from Nahash just like he delivered them in the other circumstances. But no, they wanted a king and that's what they asked for. So this is the broader point—that this wasn't really necessary at this point in time, but here we are. Samuel is basically telling them that the Lord would have fought for them had they trusted him to do so. And this gets into the kind of king they asked for and why it was evil. They're saying they don't want God to be their deliverer anymore. They don't want what God is doing through the judges, they want something permanent in the name of national security. It really wasn't necessary, but they keep asking for it so that they can have a king like the other nations. Well, having a king like the other nations... The other nations don't have Torah-followers for kings, and the other nations have kings that are going to conscript people and resources and take them away. "That's what you want, that's what you've got!" So they're going to have to learn the lesson the hard way. And this time, instead of trusting God to raise up a deliverer, the people want their king. And like I said, God relents and tells Samuel to give them what they want. So they get it, but again, it's not the kind of kingship that God desired or that he has in mind now. We're moving down the kingship road.

Chisholm writes of this section here in verse 12:

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The Lord assumed kingship over Israel at Sinai (Deut. 33:5). He led his people into the land of Canaan with the intention of ruling over them forever (Exod. 15:18). As their king, the Lord has proved his ability to deliver them from their enemies (1 Sam. 12:11). And as their history demonstrates, their national security depends solely on their allegiance to the Lord (v. 10).

So Chisholm makes this point. This is what national security had depended on (their allegiance to the Lord). Well, that was over because now they want a king. They want to be like the other nations. So this is the situation.

In verse 13, Samuel still wants the people to be about covenant loyalty. It's clear that he thinks they've sinned in their request, but he nevertheless tells them God will still bless them if they remain oriented to the covenant, despite now having a king. So 1 Samuel 12:13-15 reads as follows (let me just read it over again):

**<sup>13</sup> And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the LORD has set a king over you. <sup>14</sup> If you will fear the LORD and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well. <sup>15</sup> But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king.**

20:00

That's ESV, which does (if you have an ESV Study Bible or a set of notes with ESV) follow the Septuagint in certain places here. If you recall, there's a big difference in some cases between what the traditional Hebrew text has in Samuel and what the Dead Sea Scrolls have and what the Septuagint has. ESV follows the Septuagint here in a number of places. That's all we need to get into for that.

The word in here suggests that Samuel had his doubts about both the people and the young king, Saul. By using this phrase "your king," Samuel distances himself from the choice. In other words, "Saul isn't our king, he's your king." Again, "This is the situation we're in and we're going to see what happens." So what has changed in Israel's relationship now that Samuel has acquiesced and Israel has a king? E. Theodore Mullen writes as follows:



Israel's future relationship with Yahweh would now be determined not only by Israel's faithfulness to Yahweh, but also by the faithfulness of the king who would rule over and represent the people.

So God is going to judge them according to how the king behaves—what the king does or doesn't do. That's going to change. It's no longer directly relational with the people. Now we have this intermediate person (the king), and God is going to respond accordingly, as we'll see throughout 1 Samuel and throughout the books of the kings. This becomes the pattern now. Chisholm writes of verse 13 here:

When Samuel earlier presented Saul to the people, he described him as the one whom the Lord had chosen (10:24), echoing the language of Deuteronomy 17:15. But here the language echoes Samuel's earlier statement, when he spoke of the "king" whom the people chose (8:18). There is something foreboding about this. While the Lord intended to place limitations on kingship (10:25; cf. Deut. 17:14–20), in Saul he gives them the impressive-looking king who fits their criteria. Furthermore, despite the Lord's restraints, kingship will eventually evolve into something much like Samuel's [negative] description in 8:11–18.

So Samuel has his doubts. In 1 Samuel 12:17-18, we get this comment about the wheat harvest. Samuel says:

**<sup>17</sup> Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call upon the LORD, that he may send thunder and rain. And you shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking for yourselves a king."**  
**<sup>18</sup> So Samuel called upon the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day, and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.**

Now the reference to the wheat harvest is important here. As Hoffner notes:

Rain never came in Israel during the wheat harvest (mid-April to mid-June). The fact that it would come now shows that it is Yahweh's warning.

So when Samuel says, "Isn't it wheat harvest? Today I'm going to call on the Lord and he's going to send thunder and rain," that was a big deal because that normally didn't happen. It wasn't the season for rain or thunderstorms. But Samuel is going to call on the Lord to send one as validation/proof of all these warnings that he's given them that God is serious about it. He's going to have his eye on the king. He's given them what they wanted; they have what they want

now, and God is going to judge them according to what the king does. So he sends this sign to validate what's going on here.

In 1 Samuel 12:19-25 (this is actually the rest of chapter 12), Samuel encourages the people to follow the Lord. Though they had done evil in asking for a king, God will still bless them if they remain faithful. He wants to be clear that God isn't standing over them waiting to hammer them. He's not. In verse 19... [audio breaks up] ...as the nation's intercessor. By using the words "your God," the people acknowledge Samuel's close relationship to God, and they express their sense of alienation from the Lord. So again, we get this language of "your God," "your king," so on and so forth. There's this little bit of foreboding, a little bit of what to watch for in the future that we're sensing in the chapter.

25:00

In verse 21, Samuel warns them, "Do not turn aside after empty things." The Hebrew word translated "empty things" here is *tohu*, which is the same as in Genesis 1:2 where it's translated something like "formless" ("formless and empty"—*tohu va bohu*). As Chisholm notes:

[*Tohu*] is used elsewhere of an empty wasteland or desert. It refers to that which is nonfunctional and nonproductive; as such it is an appropriate term to describe idols.

So, "Don't turn aside after empty things," Samuel is warning them. "Don't go into idolatry. It's going to cost you big time because God is going to judge you by what the king does, what the king doesn't do, what the king allows," and so on and so forth. The chapter closes with Samuel's promise. He says:

**<sup>23</sup> Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way. <sup>24</sup> Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. <sup>25</sup> But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."**

As far as a theological summary of chapter 12 (and really chapters 8-12 because this is the whole kingship section—1 Samuel 7-12 is typically regarded as the section where they ask for a king)... So to wrap that up theologically, Chisholm writes as follows:

The kingship crisis is resolved—the Lord gives the people a king, but not like the kings of the other nations. They do not really need a king in order to be secure,

for the Lord has demonstrated his ability to deliver them from their enemies throughout their history, including the most recent threat [MH: Nahash] The people have violated their covenant with the Lord at the most fundamental level by not believing in him in the radical, countercultural manner he expects.

Chisholm's point here is that up until this point, God is functioning as Israel's warrior king. This is God's job. When they get into trouble, they cry out to God, they repent, and God does, in fact deliver them. He sends a deliverer. So this is the arrangement that the people are objecting to. They want a king like the other nations—something that's permanent, something that's different than what they've had. And what they've had before is God as their warrior king. They're rejecting that. So like the Lord had said a few chapters earlier, "Don't be upset, Samuel. They haven't rejected you, they rejected me." So in the giving of Saul, they're going to get what they asked for, but it's still not going to be completely like other nations. It's going to be militarily like other nations because of all the bad things that are going to happen in terms of what the king can do to them.

In other words, they're getting what they asked for, but they're kind of not as well. The Lord is essentially playing off both sides of this. They have rejected him from being their king. God had been their warrior king all the way up to this time. So the point is, "We don't really need [you to be our] king." And the Lord says, "Okay!" And so he relents and gives them what they're asking for. Even that is still not really a king like all the other nations because this king is going to be accountable to the Lord. This king is going to be judged by whether he is a Torah-follower or not. So God is still going to have his way with how he wants kingship to go. This is what God is angling for. And as soon as Saul steps out of line, as soon as there's a real problem, God is going to feel free to use the institution of kingship (because the institution has now started) to get a better king—to get the kind of king that the Lord wants them to have (the king after God's own heart, which is going to be David, Saul's successor).

So again, there are a lot of mixed signals in what's going on in chapter 12 here with what the Lord expects and what the reality is with boots on the ground. Let's go back to Chisholm here.

[God's] prophetic agent, Samuel, challenges the nation to obey the Lord and warns the people of the consequences of disobedience. The Lord even gives them a vivid sign to validate Samuel's accusation against them, prompting them to confess their sin in asking for a king. They appeal to Samuel as the nation's

30:00

intercessor, and he promises to pray for them and to instruct them in the ways of the Lord. The narrator further enhances Samuel's credentials as the Lord's representative and makes it clear that the people and their king remain subject to Samuel's authority, which is derived from the Lord. This sets a pattern for the future: Israel's kings are to be subject to the Lord's prophetic revelation.

So they have a king sort of like the other kings of the nations, but not quite because this one is going to be judged by how they relate to the Lord. And how they relate to the Lord is going to be how they respond to Samuel. And this is all set-up. We know because we're approaching chapters 13, 14, and 15, when Saul is going to be rejected as king because of some of the interaction with Samuel. This is going to happen pretty promptly. So chapter 12 here is sort of setting up what's going to happen later when Saul is rejected as king.

One last note: the exiles—the people who are living much later.... Because that's when this would have been written. It would not necessarily have been written in the days of Samuel but in the whole Deuteronomistic History thing, but Deuteronomy perhaps included it... We don't need to fall back into discussing that again. But as the Deuteronomistic History is typically understood, Deuteronomy through 2 Kings is one whole chunk by one authorial hand or one editorial hand. People who are reading this much later after the exilic situation develops are going to get something else out of it. For the exiles, this account that we've just read through here in chapter 12 is important. Their forefathers, like ancient Israel in the time of Samuel, have rejected God and broken the Mosaic covenant. They have experienced the fulfillment of Samuel's prophetic warning. Both they and their king have been swept away into exile. But this account demonstrates God's unswerving covenantal commitment to his people. God is not only foretelling that these hardships are going to come and they are going to be judged, but he's also saying that he's not going to forsake them, either, when it happens.

But this account demonstrates God's unswerving covenantal commitment to his people. In combination with prophetic messages such as Isaiah 40–55, it encourages them by reminding them of the Lord's faithfulness. As a nation that is subject to foreign rule and no longer has a human king sitting on David's throne in Jerusalem, they can still find encouragement, because this account reminds them that the Lord, not a human ruler, is the one who provides security for his people.

Again, that last bit was also by Chisholm. So again, just theologically, this is where we sit. We are now prepared for chapters 13, 14, and 15 and the rejection of Saul. And, of course, the story of David is going to pick up on the heels of the rejection of Saul as king. But next time we'll get into chapters 13 and 14 (I think we'll cover two chapters, but we'll see). As the story unfolds, the kingship of Saul isn't going to last long, and we've sort of been prepped for that right here.

**TS:** All right, Mike, looking forward to chapter 13 in the new year. I can't believe it. Congratulations, it's been a full eight years next month! An entire eight years. Four hundred-plus podcasts is pretty good.

**MH:** Glad you're keeping track of this, Trey. That's just hard to believe.

**TS:** [laughs] It's been almost a decade. I can't believe it, either. We started off as young men and now we're... old men. That's what it feels like.

**MH:** [laughing] Now we're like Samuel, we're old and gray, yeah!

**TS:** Absolutely. Well, Mike, we appreciate it. We look forward to the next chapter next week. And with that, I want to wish everybody a happy new year and I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.