

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 469

1 Samuel 20

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### Episode Summary

David, fearing for his life after Saul has tried to kill him twice, goes to Jonathan, Saul's son, to ask for help. Jonathan promises to help David and to warn him if Saul plans to harm him. Jonathan and David make a covenant of friendship and loyalty. David then leaves and goes into hiding. In this episode, Dr. Brown gives us some Semitic insights on a Hebrew word that could be translated differently, and takes on how the cultural wars misinterpret passages like 1 Samuel 20.

### Transcript

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 469: 1 Samuel 20. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Brown. Dr. Brown, I thank you so much for filling in for the late Dr. Heiser. I really appreciate it.

**MB:** You know, it was amazing having him on the air and talking. We got to spend some personal time together, actually later in life, which was special. We had so much in common as people with PhDs in Near Eastern languages and literatures and who had studied with scholars who had differing viewpoints than us, and both as believers. So, of course his family misses him intensely, but we all miss him. We're glad, at least, on some level we can keep his legacy going here.

**TS:** Yeah, absolutely. We appreciate it again. Well, I noticed you had a recent trip to Israel and Wales. Was that for vacation, pleasure, work? What was that about?

**MB:** Yeah, so I led a tour group to Israel. I've been to Israel about 16 or 17 times, but this was only about the fourth time that I brought a tour group. We had about 85 people there, and it's amazing how life-impacting it is. People are telling me, "trip of a lifetime." They said, "We had super-high expectations, but the trip was even more." Something just happens when you're there. I mean, you're standing on the Mount of Olives and talking about when Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives. Or you're looking on Mount Carmel somewhere near where Elijah called down fire and the sacrifices killed the false prophets in 1 Kings 18. There are just different things that become so real. And then spiritual moments when you talk about what God did then and his reality working today... So I was there with a

tour group and then flew over to Wales just for one day. There was a famous man of prayer (especially known during the time of WWII and thereafter)—Rees Howells—in Wales. He has a famous Bible school there. A Singaporean friend of mine now owns that and really has made it a base for prayer for revival and renewal. So I was there for a "Bless Wales" conference—one intensive day—and it was a beautiful time.

**TS:** I can testify about what an impact a trip to Israel is. I was blessed to have gone with Dr. Heiser.

**MB:** Wow.

**TS:** It was a true blessing, the trip of a lifetime. The number one bucket list was to go to Jerusalem, so I achieved that. I love, love Israel.

**MB:** Excellent.

**TS:** I also wanted to ask you about your recent book that just came out, entitled *Why So Many Christians Have Left the Faith: Responding to the Deconstructionist Movement with Unshakeable Timeless Truth*. What is that book about?

**MB:** There are prominent leaders that have now said, "We don't believe anymore." Pastors, worship leaders, different ones... even professors, those involved in apologetics. It has shaken a lot of people. Many young people have dropped out of church. It has shaken people. Why are they falling away, and what's going on? And why is it that there seems to be an increase even in atheism in Gen Z? So this book is not to condemn people or to judge them, it's rather to open up the various things—how the arguments of the atheists and agnostics have just swept out into the larger culture. We talk about the scandals in the church and how that has hurt people—well-known leaders falling into sin and how that has damaged people's faith. The societal shift—the celebration of everything gay... "If gay is good, Christianity is bad." There is often a lack of knowledge about scripture. The questions about the goodness of God in light of suffering, in light of the teaching of hell... We open up all the different reasons why people have fallen away. But in each chapter, we give solid answers. As I said, Dr. Heiser and I studied in circles where the people that we studied with didn't see things the way we did in many cases—they didn't believe the Bible the way we did. So we're used to asking the hard questions and saying, "It's okay to ask the questions because there are solid answers." And the more we study with an open and humble heart, rather than drawing us away from God, we'll be drawn to the Lord.

5:00

**TS:** Absolutely. Well, that book is out now, and I take it anywhere you can get a book... Amazon or... It's available as we speak?

**MB:** Absolutely. And, of course, on our website are all of our resources (including thousands of hours of free resources)—askdrbrown.org.

**TS:** Perfect. Well, Dr. Brown, I'm super-excited to get into chapter 20. I can't thank you enough for filling in. So here's chapter 20!

**MB:** 1 Samuel chapter 20. I'm going to go through some key elements in the chapter here and then bring in two areas of expertise that I have that will be relevant to the chapter. So rather than just going through the content and telling you what it says, what I want to do is dig in to a couple of controversies. One has to do with how these chapters (1 Samuel 20) are used in the culture wars—how this text is misinterpreted by gay theologians and gay activists. We'll talk about that. And then I want to dig deep into a specific Hebrew word and give you some Semitic insights on that as to why we could be translating it differently than many of our translations do. So I'm going to dig in on my areas of expertise—the latter with my studies like Dr. Heiser, our beloved brother, our missed brother (Semitic Studies in Near Eastern Languages and Literatures)—so digging into Hebrew and its Semitic background. And then the former issue, based on my calling to engage the culture wars for many years now.

So 1 Samuel 20... The crisis now between David and Saul has exploded. Saul is furious—literally at times out of his mind—demonized with rage against David. Thinking of Jonathan, who is supposed to be the heir to the throne, Jonathan's loyalty seems to be with David, not with his father. So David flees from Naioth to Ramah. He comes to Jonathan and says (I'm reading from the new JPS translation):

**“What have I done, what is my crime and my guilt against your father, that he seeks my life?”**

**<sup>2</sup>He replied, “Heaven forbid! You shall not die. My father does not do anything, great or small, without disclosing it to me; why should my father conceal this matter from me? It cannot be!”**

**<sup>3</sup>David swore further, “Your father knows well that you are fond of me and has decided: Jonathan must not learn of this or he will be grieved. But, as the LORD lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death.”**

**<sup>4</sup>Jonathan said to David, “Whatever you want, I will do it for you.”**

So David says, "Look, your dad is ready to kill me." And Jonathan is like, "NO! There's no way he would... I would know about it!" And he [David] says, "No, no, because your father knows how close we are so he's not going to want you to know about this."

**<sup>5</sup>David said to Jonathan, “Tomorrow is the new moon, and I am to sit with the king at the meal. Instead, let me go and I will hide in the countryside until the third evening.**

**<sup>6</sup>If your father notes my absence, you say, ‘David asked my permission to run down to his home town, Bethlehem, for the whole family has its annual sacrifice there.’**

**<sup>7</sup>If he says ‘Good,’ your servant is safe; but if his anger flares up, know that he is resolved to do [me] harm.**

**<sup>8</sup>Deal faithfully with your servant, since you have taken your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you. And if I am guilty, kill me yourself, but don’t make me go back to your father.”**

**<sup>9</sup>Jonathan replied, “Don’t talk like that! If I learn that my father has resolved to kill you, I will surely tell you about it.”**

**<sup>10</sup>David said to Jonathan, “Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?”**

**<sup>11</sup>Jonathan said to David, “Let us go into the open”; and they both went out into the open.**

So now they're going to hatch a plan that Jonathan can get a message to David if he's in trouble.

**<sup>12</sup>Then Jonathan said to David, “By the LORD, the God of Israel! I will sound out my father at this time tomorrow, [or] on the third day; and if [his response] is favorable for David, I will send a message to you at once and disclose it to you.**

**<sup>13</sup>But if my father intends to do you harm, may the LORD do thus to Jonathan and more if I do [not] disclose it to you and send you off to escape unharmed. May the LORD be with you, as He used to be with my father.**

**<sup>14</sup>Nor shall you fail to show me the LORD’s faithfulness, while I am alive; nor, when I am dead,**

**<sup>15</sup>shall you ever discontinue your faithfulness to my house—not even after the LORD has wiped out every one of David’s enemies from the face of the earth.**

**<sup>16</sup>Thus has Jonathan covenanted with the house of David; and may the LORD requite the enemies of David!”**

So there's a deep reality in these texts that Jonathan realizes: "The Lord is not with my father anymore. He raised up my father, Saul, but he is not with him." *Sha-ul* — he is not with him anymore. "But if he is with you, David..." Jonathan understands this and he has made a covenant with David. And he knows that David is ultimately going to be the king of Israel.

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10:00

**<sup>17</sup>Jonathan, out of his love for David, adjured him again, for he loved him as himself.**

**<sup>18</sup>Jonathan said to him, "Tomorrow will be the new moon; and you will be missed when your seat remains vacant.**

**<sup>19</sup>So the day after tomorrow, go down all the way to the place where you hid the other time, and stay close to the Ezel stone.**

**<sup>20</sup>Now I will shoot three arrows to one side of it, as though I were shooting at a mark,**

**<sup>21</sup>and I will order the boy to go and find the arrows. If I call to the boy, 'Hey! the arrows are on this side of you,' be reassured and come, for you are safe and there is no danger—as the LORD lives!**

**<sup>22</sup>But if, instead, I call to the lad, 'Hey! the arrows are beyond you,' then leave, for the LORD has sent you away.**

**<sup>23</sup>As for the promise we made to each other, may the LORD be [witness] between you and me forever."**

Now, reading from the New JPS, the text says, "HEY, I will order the boy to go and find the arrows. If I call to the boy, 'HEY, the arrow is on this side of you,' be reassured... If instead I say to the lad, 'HEY, the arrows are beyond you...' I'm actually going to get into the Semitics thing first. So stay with me on this. It's going to get a little detailed in the Hebrew.

If you look at other translations in 1 Samuel 20, instead of "hey," what you'll find is, "Are not the arrows beyond you?" "HEY!" Now which is... Forget Hebrew. Let's say you don't know any Hebrew at all. You're just reading in English. And I'm saying, "Okay, listen. If I shoot the arrows and they're further than the boy is expecting, I'll say 'HEY, the arrows are down there!'" Or will I say, "Are not the arrows beyond you?" Is that a logical way to say it? Or would you say, "HEY, they're beyond you?" "Hey" seems more natural. Well, the Hebrew is *ha-lo* (הֲלוֹ). So that consists of two words made one or a Hebrew letter attached to another word as one. So the first *ha* is an interrogative negative. It means what is following it is negative. Or excuse me, it is asking a question. *Ha?* *Ha-lo* is "is it not?" *Lo* is "not" and *ha* is "is it?" It's an interrogative. So *ha-lo* is an interrogative negative. So *ha* is the interrogative part and *lo* is the negative. *Ha-lo* — "is it not?" Think of reading... You're reading Chronicles or Kings and it says, "As for the rest of this, are they not written in this book..." "Are they not written...?" So we're used to seeing *ha-lo*, but "is it not" or "are they not" can also have the nuance of "yes, indeed!" In other words, it's rhetorical. When you say, "Aren't they written?" Yeah, they're written there! "Aren't the arrows beyond you?" Yeah, they're beyond you! So that's how it's normally been understood. So in other words, when it says *ha-lo* ("is it not" or "are they not"), it's really just another way of saying, "look, they're really there" or "hey" or "think about it," "look at it."

Alright, so that's the way it's normally been understood. You have the same thing in Arabic with *ah* as an interrogative and then *la* as the negative. *Ah-la* ("is it not"), which can also mean like, "behold." Okay, so that's how we always learned it and that's how we always understood it.

So I'm in grad school and I'm doing an independent study with one other student and we are reading what are called the El Amarna Tablets. This was correspondence between a Canaanite leader and an Egyptian Pharaoh. So it's correspondence in what was called Akkadian—the language of the Babylonians and Assyrians. And it's, say, 1200 or 1300 years before the time of Jesus. So back close to the time of Moses—that far back, all right? And the reason it's in Akkadian is because that was what was called the *lingua franca* of the day. That was... If you're doing international correspondence in the Middle East, that's what you would use. So North Africa into the Middle East, Mesopotamia, etc.... That's what you would use. Later it became Aramaic. Just like the *lingua franca* (the most common language used around the world today) is English. Right? If there's one language you can expect people to speak in various countries, English... Well, in that part of the world, it was Akkadian. So the correspondence is in Akkadian.

15:00

And we're reading the Akkadian text and there was a German translation and commentary that we were then using (another student and myself along the way in our Masters/Ph.D. studies). And I see this word *ah-loo*. They're trying to figure out what it means and what it's related to. And some said it's related to the Hebrew *ha-lo*. It's a similar thing and it's an interrogative-negative meaning, "is it not?" which can then mean "behold." Right? So "is it not?" "Isn't that true?" "Behold!" "It's true, right?" The problem is, it did not work in Akkadian. You had no such thing as an *ah* that was an interrogative, then the *loo* would be the negative. It just didn't work. And then it had other possibilities, and then I thought, "No!" And then when I looked at things it was parallel to, it's like, "Wait, this just means 'behold!'" *Ah-loo* just means "behold."

Well, then we went over to a sister language called Ugaritic. I started thinking about this. So this is north Canaanite basically—Assyria. I started looking at that and I was thinking, "Wait, they also have *h-l* and *ha-loo* (something like that), which means 'behold' or 'indeed.'" And I thought, "Wait, wait, *ah-loo* in Akkadian means 'behold.' It's not 'is it not,' it just means 'behold!'" And the same thing with Ugaritic. It just means "behold!" And then I went back to the Hebrew Bible, and I thought, "Wait a second... *ha-lo* in certain places probably was originally *ha-loo*, not meaning 'is it not,' but 'indeed.'" And then in Aramaic you have *ha-loo* or *ah-loo*, meaning "indeed." So this is not "are not the arrows beyond you?" No, it's "Hey! (*Ha-loo!*) The arrows are beyond you! And then I found other passages in the Hebrew Bible where the only possible way to interpret and understand it was saying, "indeed, behold, look, hey..." That's the only way that it could make sense.

So that actually became an article that was published, I think, back in 1987 in the Semitics journal, *Maarav*, called "'Is It Not?' or 'Indeed!': *HL* in Northwest Semitic."

So I wrote a whole article, and then that made its way into various Hebrew dictionaries and Ugaritic dictionaries as an authoritative study. So you say, "I didn't need to hear all that." Well, come on! I'm trying to bring something insightful and useful and helpful to you. Overall, there's not a massive difference in meaning between "aren't the arrows beyond you" and "hey, the arrows are beyond you." But it makes much more sense! And you say, "Oh, so did the New JPS translators understand this whole thing about *ha-loo* and *ah-loo* and all of this?" No, no! They didn't! They just intuitively understood that it really is more like an exclamation, like "Oh! Hey!" They just kind of grasped the meaning of it and rightly translated it without having that insight that I had that added to it. And then some other scholars took what I wrote and said, "Hey, let's subject this to a syntactical analysis. Let's subject this to a grammatical analysis so we can tell the difference between *ha-lo...*" Because *ha-lo* definitely does exist as an interrogative negative. But "let's see if we can tell the difference between that and where *ha-loo* is 'indeed' or 'hey'—an exclamatory particle." And articles were written on that. So it's just been very interesting to watch this unfold. And it came in an unexpected way. Studying ancient Akkadian texts, I ended up with this linguistic insight into the Hebrew. Where else are you going to get this but on the Naked Bible Podcast, right?

Okay, so back to the text.

**<sup>24</sup>David hid in the field. The new moon came, and the king sat down to partake of the meal.**

**<sup>25</sup>When the king took his usual place on the seat by the wall, Jonathan rose and Abner sat down at Saul's side; but David's place remained vacant.**

**<sup>26</sup>That day, however, Saul said nothing. "It's accidental," he thought. "He must be unclean and not yet cleansed."**

**<sup>27</sup>But on the day after the new moon, the second day, David's place was vacant again. So Saul said to his son Jonathan, "Why didn't the son of Jesse come to the meal yesterday or today?"**

Referring to him as "the son of Jesse..." That's already derogatory.

**"Why didn't the son of Jesse come to the meal yesterday or today?"**

**<sup>28</sup>Jonathan answered Saul, "David begged leave of me to go to Bethlehem.**

**<sup>29</sup>He said, 'Please let me go, for we are going to have a family feast in our town and my brother has summoned me to it. Do me a favor, let me slip away to see my kinsmen.' That is why he has not come to the king's table."**



**<sup>30</sup>Saul flew into a rage against Jonathan.**

He knew Jonathan was lying.

**“You son of a perverse, rebellious woman!” he shouted.**

So now Jonathan himself is no good and his mother is no good.

**“I know that you side with the son of Jesse—to your shame, and to the shame of your mother’s nakedness!**

20:00

Now, does this mean that David was having sexual relations with Jonathan? That Jonathan had chosen David over women? No, that's not what it's saying. It's not what the idiom means. Some will try to argue that. But “the shame of your mother's nakedness” is the embarrassment that this brings her. So “rather than you showing loyalty to your father's household and to your mother's household to be the next king of Israel, you show loyalty to this guy who is a dangerous underminer and a threat, and that's a shameful thing that you've done.”

**<sup>31</sup>For as long as the son of Jesse lives on earth, neither you nor your kingship will be secure. Now then, have him brought to me, for he is marked for death.”**

**<sup>32</sup>But Jonathan spoke up and said to his father, “Why should he be put to death? What has he done?”**

**<sup>33</sup>At that, Saul threw his spear at him to strike him down;**

He had already tried to strike David down; now he tries to kill his own son, Jonathan.

**...and Jonathan realized that his father was determined to do away with David.**

**<sup>34</sup>Jonathan rose from the table in a rage. He ate no food on the second day of the new moon, because he was grieved about David, and because his father had humiliated him.**

**<sup>35</sup>In the morning, Jonathan went out into the open for the meeting with David, accompanied by a young boy.**

**<sup>36</sup>He said to the boy, “Run ahead and find the arrows that I shoot.” And as the boy ran, he shot the arrows past him.**

**<sup>37</sup>When the boy came to the place where the arrows shot by Jonathan had fallen, Jonathan called out to the boy, “Hey...”**

So in our Hebrew text it's *ha-lo*, but I believe should be vocalized *ha-loo*.



**"Hey [*ha-loo*], the arrows are beyond you!"**

**<sup>38</sup>And Jonathan called after the boy, "Quick, hurry up. Don't stop!" So Jonathan's boy gathered the arrows and came back to his master.—**

**<sup>39</sup>The boy suspected nothing; only Jonathan and David knew the arrangement.—**

**<sup>40</sup>Jonathan handed the gear to his boy and told him, "Take these back to the town."**

**<sup>41</sup>When the boy got there, David emerged from his concealment at the Negeb. He flung himself face down on the ground and bowed low three times. They kissed each other and wept together; David wept the longer.**

**<sup>42</sup>Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace! For we two have sworn to each other in the name of the LORD: 'May the LORD be [witness] between you and me, and between your offspring and mine, forever!'"**

Oh! They kissed! Do you see? They kissed! This proves that there are gay lovers in the Bible and they kissed! And elsewhere, you know, they disrobe and exchange clothing and things like that. Okay. Number one, Jonathan gets married and has children. Number two, more importantly, David has multiple wives and almost destroys his whole kingship because of his lust for women—lusting after Bathsheba and committing adultery with her and having her husband killed. That brings judgment on him and on subsequent generations. So it's David's lust for women—David's insatiable desire for this beautiful woman—that almost completely destroys his kingship, if not for God's covenant promise and faithfulness and David's heart of repentance. So to make David into a gay man does not work. And also, when the overall testimony of the Hebrew Bible is so categorically against same-sex behavior, same-sex relationships would be the thing that it would emphasize... You're not just going to slip this account in and nobody happens to notice it. It's completely bogus. You say, "But it says they kissed!" Okay, in my book, *A Queer Thing Happened to America*, which came out in 2011 (700 pages, 1500 end notes), I have a footnote where I... let me read it to you. It's a lengthy footnote.

Texts cited to allege that Jonathan and David were gay lovers include 1 Samuel 18:3, 4 (Jonathan and David made a pact because Jonathan loved him as himself; Jonathan took off the cloak and tunic he was wearing, gave them to David, together with his sword, bow, and belt) and 1 Samuel 20:41, when David has to flee for his life from King Saul, Jonathan's father ("they kissed each other and wept together; David wept far longer").

So then I reference for a comprehensive refutation of a gay reading of these and other passages, see Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, where he demonstrates clearly how such a retelling of these texts is unthinkable from

an ancient Hebraic point of view and totally uncalled for in terms of what the biblical text actually says.

25:00

*Regarding the act of kissing, as distinguished from "making out" (a sexual kiss), note that kissing was a common way of saying hello or goodbye in the ancient Near East, as it is in many cultures to this day. Furthermore, if all the kisses that the Bible recorded were interpreted in sexual terms, then Isaac would have been erotically involved with his own son (Genesis 27:26: "Then his father, Isaac, said to him, 'Come here my son and kiss me.'") Laban would have been erotically involved with his nephew, Jacob (Genesis 29:13), Laban would have been erotically involved with his grandchildren and daughters (Genesis 31:55), Esau would have been erotically involved with his brother, Jacob (Genesis 33:4), Joseph would have been erotically involved with all of his brothers (Genesis 45:15), Jacob would have been erotically involved with his grandsons (Genesis 48:10), Joseph would have been erotically involved with his just-deceased father, Jacob (Genesis 50:1)...*

*And these are just samples from the first book of the Bible—Genesis. Obviously, all of this public kissing was not in the least bit sexual. In the next book of the Bible (Exodus), we see Moses kissing his brother Aaron and his father-in-law Jethro (Exodus 4:27; 18:7). For a few examples of non-relatives kissing, see Samuel the prophet kissing Saul (1 Samuel 10:1), David kissing Jonathan (1 Samuel 20:41), Absalom the prince kissing all who would approach him asking him to adjudicate in his behalf (2 Samuel 15:5), David the king kissing the old man, Barzillai (2 Samuel 19:39) and Joab kissing Amasa (2 Samuel 20:9).*

Kissing as a form of greeting was so customary in New Testament times that Paul urged his readers to do what? Greet one another with a holy kiss! (Romans 16:16 and other passages). On and on and on.

So this is the equivalent of a handshake. You can go to countries today... When I preach in Italy, it is very common in certain circles there that at the end of the service, people want to greet you, and men and women each kiss you on both cheeks. It's only the men that kiss the men and the women that kiss the women. Some women will kiss the men on both cheeks. That's all it is!

Now when the Bible wants to talk about a sensual kiss... Look at Song of Solomon, the first chapter and opening verses. When the Bible wants to talk about something sensual and sexual, it knows how to do it. Not a single sensual term is used anywhere in the Hebrew Bible in the relationship between David and Jonathan. Not a single one. When they exchange some garments in a covenantal sign of friendship and loyalty... Nothing sexual there. When they kiss before saying goodbye, not knowing if they're going to see each other again... I just gave you a list of everybody kissing everybody. That's all it is! Nothing sensual, nothing sexual, nothing romantic happened between them. When David

says in 2 Samuel 1, "Your love for me was better than the love of women," he's not talking about, "Man, sex with you was hotter than with any lady!" He's talking about how the covenant loyalty they had was deeper than anything he'd ever had with a woman. That's how deep the relationship was. And one thing the gay activism has done is it has stripped away the reality in many cases of deep, deep male-male and female-female friendships—friendships for life, covenants of friendships that are not romantic and are not sexual and they've existed through the ages. So don't let anyone throw that nonsense on you about Jonathan and David. It is absolutely contrary to the scriptural witness.

Last takeaway... Covenant loyalty transcends pragmatism. You do what's right because it's right. You hold to a friendship because it's right—not because it's going to benefit you, but because you recognize "this is right, this is good, this person is being unjustly treated, I'm going to stand with them regardless of what it means in my own life." And history smiles on that and God smiles on that. So be loyal, be a real friend. Don't just do what's in your best interest, but do what's right, do what's good, and God will bless that.

**TS:** All right, Dr. Brown. Well, I appreciate 1 Samuel 20. Again, the best place for people to get more of your content is [askdrbrown.org](http://askdrbrown.org). Is that correct?

**MB:** That's right. Or the Askdrbrown Ministries app. You'll find all the free resources right there.

**TS:** Perfect. Do you have anything new and exciting coming up for the rest of the year?

**MB:** Well, yeah. I mean, I'm always traveling and speaking, of course. We continue to put out videos responding to counter-missionary rabbis. And I've got a book coming out in the fall that will talk about how to sustain revival (when God is really moving in the church, how to sustain that). And then a book scheduled to come out after that talking about how to move from spiritual revival to cultural reformation. So never a dull moment here.

**TS:** Awesome. Well, I'm looking forward to that. Again, we want to thank Dr. Brown for coming on and helping us out with 1 Samuel. And I want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.