

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 470

1 Samuel 21

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Episode Summary

David fled from Saul, who was seeking to kill him. He went to the city of Nob, where he lied to the priest Ahimelech, saying that he was on a mission from Saul. Ahimelech gave David food and the sword of Goliath. David then went to Gath, where he pretended to be insane in order to avoid being recognized by King Achish. David's deception of Ahimelech was a sin, but his feigned insanity saved his life.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 470: 1 Samuel 21. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin and he's [stumbles a bit]... he's the scholar, Dr. Ronn Johnson. Hey, Ronn! [laughing] How are you? I'm not used to...

RJ: "I'm the layman..."

TS: I'm used to saying "Mike," and so um... you know. I'm still getting used to it.

RJ: Well, I'm a layman, too. I work at Wells Fargo eight hours a day, so I'm a layman in that sense.

TS: I appreciate you so much filling in for Mike. I know you're honored to do this. And again, thank you, thank you for filling in and doing chapter 21 to help us finish 1 Samuel. But before we get into that, do you just want to briefly... You've known Mike probably longer than any of us here, so do you want to just real quickly introduce yourself to our audience that may be listening for the first time?

RJ: Sounds good, sure. Mike and I met my sophomore year of college. He was a freshman and I was a sophomore, and we hit it off immediately as guys that love to talk about baseball or the Bible—that sort of thing. Like I say, I can't tell you how many times we found ourselves talking deep into the night. I miss his laugh. And by the way, that was in '81. So what does that make it? Forty-two years ago. I miss his laugh; I miss his mind. He had one of the most powerful minds I've ever met, as you would know. I miss our discussions. When we talked together... Oh, a quick story: I became the chairman of a little Bible college (Pillsbury Baptist Bible College up in Minnesota) in '91, then in '92 we had an opening in the Bible

department. So the academic dean came to me and said, "We need to fill in a Bible department member. Do you have any ideas?" And I said, "Ideas? Are you kidding me? There's a guy I want to get!" So I called Mike. I don't know if he prayed about it or not, but he and Drenna came and that's where their first child was born—up in Owatonna, Minnesota. The reason I bring it up is one of our Bible department meetings... It was just him and I for a year. We could have our meetings anywhere we wanted, of course. And one time we had it in the hot tub of a neighbor's house. So sitting in the hot tub and talking about the Bible or Bible department material was one of those memories that we carried with us. So yeah, I miss him a lot and this is all done to honor his legacy and to keep moving forward what he wished to see, and that is people opening their Bibles and being confident that they can do this. Because we're not trying to do anything outside of what the original writer wanted us to do, right? So I'm glad to do it.

TS: That's awesome. And you bonded over baseball, is that correct?

RJ: Well, we were on the same team. He was a 70's baseball statistician *par excellence*, so we used to do our 70's baseball trivia deep into the night when we worked together, as well. We also worked the same overnight shift at a parts manufacturer in Owatonna. More often we talked baseball than theology at that point.

TS: I pray that I was a distraction for him, too, when we talked sports. [laughing] You've gotta think about and talk about something other than theology, right? I mean, that takes a lot of brain power. So to be an excuse to get away from it... I'll take it.

RJ: I never forgave him for being a Packers fan, though.

TS: [laughs] Ah, okay!

RJ: I'm a Vikings fan, so I don't know how in the world he turned. He went to the Dark Side on me there.

TS: [laughing] Yeah, I hear you on that one.

RJ: Was that from living in Madison? Is that why he became a Packer fan? I never thought why.

TS: Probably. He said he was a Cowboys fan for a little bit when he was in Dallas Seminary.

RJ: Right. When he was in Dallas with me, he was a Cowboy fan.

TS: Yeah, I think it was just because he went up there and... He's probably a bandwagon fan. He would get mad at me if I called him that, but... Going up there and them winning with Brett Favre and whatnot... It's probably hard to not get swept up in Packer mania if you're up there in the country.

RJ: True.

TS: I don't blame him. The Packers are a good team, although I'm with you—it's the Dark Side. But that's okay. Well, we were talking before the show, and you mentioned to me that you're going to submit a paper at ETS honoring Mike! Can you tell a little bit about that?

5:00 **RJ:** That's my intention. In fact, I brought this up with him on an email text maybe two months [before he passed]. Because I wanted to clear this with him. "Would you mind if I wrote a paper on the Divine Council Worldview?" I think a lot of evangelical academics and scholars know about this and they've been interviewed by Mike and things like that. But I want to really challenge the evangelical world of academics that, "Hey guys, we've got to take this seriously. We can't keep continuing to write our commentaries without presuming that the gods of the first commandment are real." And I still see it in a lot of the things I'm hearing and reading. So anyway, I ran it by him. He was kind of hesitant. You know, Mike's not one to promote himself at all. But with his passing and looking forward to the future, what I'm going to do is submit a paper topic called (I've been working on the title), "What is a Divine Council Worldview?: A Tribute to Michael S. Heiser." I hope they choose... They have to cull the number of papers. They get hundreds, if not thousands, of submissions so who knows if I'll get it in, but pray that I do. It would become... I told my wife this, so in a sense I'm going public with you. Mike and I had talked about this possibility that what we need done is in the list of books to be written, we need a systematic theology that would comprehensively take the divine council idea (or more specifically, in my opinion, the plural *elohim* concept) and run it through the entire gamut of theological studies. Obviously, that's a huge task, but if there's anything I would like to do with the last (what do I have?) twenty or thirty years of my life, God-willing, that would be what I'd do. Mike and I had talked about that. I had never said "yes" to it, but now that he is no longer with us... Like I say, I told my wife so maybe by telling you guys this now, too, it will put a burr in my saddle and get me to write it.

TS: Well, Ronn, you also mentioned some other sad news, that Dr. Carl Sanders, who has been on some of my favorite episodes... When you, Carl, and Mike would sit down at ETS and we interviewed you on those conference interviews that we did on the Naked Bible Podcast... Those were some of my favorite episodes. And just being able to sit and watch you three talk and hash stuff out was such a thrill. I loved being a fly on the wall. But you informed me that, unfortunately, Carl doesn't have much longer to live.

RJ: Yes, in the Providence of God, this has just been a horrific storyline. But God's will is being played out in this way—that Carl was diagnosed with cancer about a year and a half ago as well. So he's been going through an uphill battle. I just sat with him last weekend. I flew out and sat at his bedside at his home. He's my brother-in-law (my sister's husband), and so we have been close for forty years. When it comes to three guys chewing the fat and talking Bible, Carl, me, and Mike... that's as good as it gets for me personally because of their comprehensive knowledge and heart for the Lord. I mean, these guys are dedicated believers. To see men like Carl and Mike talk through their theology, as it were, because of their love of God... That's been a thrill of mine. But yeah, Carl is not doing well. So pray for him. [Transcript note: Dr. Sanders passed away March 6, 2023.]

TS: Yeah, absolutely. And again, I encourage everybody to go back and listen to episode 245 and 188, and I think 128 (and maybe 77, I'm not quite sure if y'all are on there three or four times). But man, go back and listen to those conversations of y'all three. I'm certainly going to do that because those were some of my favorite interviews during the conferences, and I know Mike is going to be missed for sure, but now Carl. He's going to be missed as well. So I'm so sorry for you for that loss and honestly, for all of us because they were great scholars.

RJ: Yeah, thank you.

TS: Ronn, well we appreciate you being here today to take us through 1 Samuel 21. So I'm going to turn it over to you and you can do your thing!

RJ: Sounds good.

10:00

All right, so thanks. When you come to 21... Since chapter 18, we've had David running from Saul. Even though David has been appointed the head of Saul's military since killing Goliath, David has been running. Psalm 11, by the way, I put into this story of David running. You remember from Psalm 11 how he runs from his enemies. He is considering Saul to be his enemy, which is a pretty clear way of calling Saul "unrighteous." So when I get to 23 and we do the podcast on chapter 23, I'm going to be arguing that Saul was a non-Yahwist—that there is no evidence that he actually worshipped Yahweh. So that in 1 Chronicles 10:13-14, when it says that God killed him because he went to a witch, that is a very clear way in my mind of him saying he was not a loyalist to Yahweh at all.

So we have David, the consummate righteous man in the Old Testament running from (shall we call it) the consummate unrighteous man, or non-Yahwist, in the story. So let me just jump in with 21 and talk about how Mike read a text. This is, to me, one of the kinds of things that would jump off the page to him. It jumps off the page to me as well. 1 Samuel 21:1 (NKJV):

Now David came to Nob...

Nob is a little city just north of Jerusalem.

...and Ahimelech was afraid when he met David, and said to him, "Why are you alone, and no one is with you?"

² So David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has ordered me on some business..."

Let's back up. That issue of Nob... The tabernacle is not in Nob from what we know. Since chapter 7 verse 2 all the way through 2 Samuel 6:3, we're going to have the tabernacle (which is a portable sanctuary) situated at Kiriath Jearim, which is a hillside. By the way, it's just over the edge of another hill that is today called Yad Hashmona. It's an Air B&B basically [laughs] (if you want to call it that) of Christians. So if you want to go live in Israel in an Air B&B, think of Yad Hashmona. It's right next to Kiriath Jearim, so you can wake up every morning and stare at that hill. But the point is, that's where the tabernacle is; it's not at Nob. So why in the world do we have a story like this, where David asks (and we'll read it coming up)... Actually let's do it here:

³ Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found."

⁴ And the priest answered David and said, "There is no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women."

So they have holy bread here. So the conversation among the commentators is, "What's going on here if there's not a tabernacle?" Things like this are said. It's a Yahwistic worship center, or it's the most sacred shrine in Saul's kingdom. Or another commentator calls it "an official state sanctuary." My theory... Let's develop this quickly because this is important for the stage of 1 Samuel that we're in. My theory is that due to the non-Yahwistic tendencies of Saul (and again, we'll go over that in chapter 23), there is no reason to think that Israel was functioning strictly by Levitical standards at this point. So I wouldn't doubt for a minute, based on that kind of concept (which we'll develop later), that we have a sanctuary here with a priest with holy bread. David knew that and it's outside the tabernacle. So that's quite a bold idea that confronts us right off the bat. Which, then, makes us stop and ask, "Well, are we following Levitical law in this book broadly?" The reason we have to ask that is because a lot of the thinking that we do... Remember when Saul did that sacrifice back in 13 and Samuel complained about it? (Again, we'll deal with this when we get to the question of whether Saul was a Yahwist.) We have to ask ourselves, "Were they following Levitical law,

and if not, what kind of laws were they following? In the ancient Near East, by the way (and this is the kind of stuff you'll read in John Walton's books—the *Lost World* series and things like this)... His view (and my view as well) is that the law of Torah... A lot of the laws, let's say, within Leviticus were not... And this is hard to say in English because they didn't think, of course in English. The laws were not stated as what we think of in American or British parlance as a law. They thought of their laws in the ancient world as "what we stand for." It's what our god stands for. It's what our king stands for. It's kind of like a political platform of a public figure like a presidential candidate. He'll stand on the podium and he'll say, "When I'm president, I will (blank, blank, blank)." Notice that does not mean they're going to do it. It just means that "if you elect me, you're getting a person who stands for such and such."

So when you get to 1 Samuel 21 and you notice that they have a sanctuary outside of the tabernacle, which is in Kiriath Jearim, which is 12-15 mile from here, it tells us they're doing things their own way. They have made structures or are devising a religion (shall we say) that is not necessarily going by Levitical standards. Here are some other examples, by the way. I've got a long list in my own Bible that I've kind of created over time of things like this. But like in Leviticus 12:3, it says:

15:00

³ And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

It's the introduction of the command to circumcise—a very well-known (if not THE most prominent) law within Judaism of this time period. The strange thing is (and we all know this, but let's just remind ourselves), you get to Joshua 5:5... Joshua is bringing the people to cross the Jordan and it says:

⁵ For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness, on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been circumcised.

That makes us stop and say, if Moses wrote Leviticus 12:3 ("circumcise every male") and then you get to Joshua 5 and you find out for forty years Moses himself had not been doing it... It makes you wonder, how do you overlook this? This is just one example and, like I said, I've got a list in my Bible. This is [jotted in] at the end of Deuteronomy:

- Not circumcising
- Not keeping sabbath
- Not keeping sabbath years
- Not keeping Passover

- Worshiping other gods
- Keeping the ark outside of the tabernacle (1 Sam 4)
- Not collecting offerings prescribed by Moses

My point is, there's a laundry list of things that Israel is doing in the narrative of 1 Samuel that don't accord with Leviticus. Now we have to ask, is God okay with that? Here again, I'll give you my view. This is where Mike and I... [laughs] We had so many conversations like this. What I loved about Mike is he would never give me an odd look. But he would laugh at me and he'd say, "You've got that weird view of this, that, and the other!" And we'd play off each other. In other words, we were giving each other the latitude to disagree on some of the specifics here, and this would be one of those specifics that I'm convinced of myself. So let me just throw it out there.

When it came to not living by Levitical law... The idea that God was allowing his people to mature over time is part of the reason, I think, that they weren't following Levitical law. Here's my argument: In the book of Leviticus (you know that great standard that we think of when it comes to the laws of Israel), words that do not occur in the entire book include: faith, faithful, love, righteous, righteousness, grace, or mercy. That's in Hebrew: *amman* for faith, *ahav* for love, *tsedi* for righteous. Those words don't occur in the entire book. Why? Because the book of Leviticus is not about the big stuff, it's about the little stuff. And by "little," I mean the... How many of us have really read the Constitution of the United States? It deals with the little stuff. When it comes to the big stuff... And here's where 1 Samuel is going to... Jesus is going to run to 1 Samuel (and you'll see this in a moment) when trying to tell the supposedly righteous men of his own era what God has always wanted. He is going to run to 1 Samuel and tell this story again. And he's not going to quote Levitical law, he's going to quote a story of David getting bread from a priest. So I would argue that what Leviticus is talking about is the kind of laws that would equal a political platform of a God who wanted his people to be different from the nations around them. Did he want them to do that? The evidence is they never really did. Is God upset about that? Well, we could say yes, but here's the interesting thing. And again, we don't know this, but let me throw it out there as an idea. When you get to Hosea, for example, at the end of the Old Testament, and we're reviewing what God was like... Hosea 6:6:

**⁶For I desire mercy and not sacrifice,
And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.**

20:00

I know that's specific to sacrifice there, but I think Hosea's point is, if you want to look at God's character and what he's like, don't look to Leviticus. That's not what he's going after. Like a parent. My wife was very strict with our kids when they were young about not crossing the street, in fact, not even going into the street. I remember one time one of our children put one foot on the street. They walked off the curb. And she didn't hurt them, but boy, did that kid get a severe warning [laughs] physically, in a good way, that "you don't do that." So when you hear Deuteronomy 17:3-5, that anyone who worships another god has to be put to death... Well, we know that didn't happen. We have many, many idolators in the Israelite nation. So if they didn't follow Deuteronomy 17:3-5... Even the kings of the Northern Kingdom didn't do this and half the kings of the Southern Kingdom! So my point is that God is looking for the big stuff and Jesus will talk about it as the "weightier matters of the law." Again, this is a subject to its own time, but we're going to see it here in 1 Samuel 21.

Of course, the famous passage is Micah 6:2:

**For the Lord has a complaint against His people,
And He will contend with Israel.**

What was it about? Verse 8:

**⁸He has shown you, O man, what is good;
And what does the Lord require of you
But to do justly,
To love mercy,
And to walk humbly with your God?**

He could have so easily repeated even the Ten Commandments. And I would say, "No, that is not the point of what a godly person of this time period was trying to understand." So the reason this is important is you come to Jesus' life and he will be struggling with people who want to follow, in essence, what we know today as the "613 Commandments" or "613 Laws." I don't take those as God's laws. I take those as man's interpretation of how to interpret a God who they thought was picky. And I don't sense God to be picky like that. Again, that would have to be another conversation. But we have to move on.

We come to 1 Samuel 21:4, which we already read:

⁴ And the priest answered David and said, “*There is no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women.*”

⁵ Then David answered the priest, and said to him, “Truly, women *have been kept from us...*”

So they're going to talk about this issue of how long they have not had relations with women, as though that's important to the story, which, again, is not a Levitical issue right now. But that's what they're dealing with here. But look at verse 6:

⁶ So the priest gave him holy bread;

Boom! So there it is. So why does David ask for holy bread, thinking he can have it, and why does the priest give in? This would be really the question of the hour, and I think it just brings us to what Jesus will say... In fact, let's do it. Turn to Matthew 12. Actually, on the way there, let me finish the story of 1 Samuel 21. We'll kind of finish it up and then we'll wrap it up by going to Jesus' interpretation of what's going on in this story. In verse 10:

¹⁰ Then David arose and fled that day from before Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath.

Verse 12:

¹² Now David took these words to heart, and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. ¹³ So he changed his behavior before them, pretended madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate...

And so forth. What you have here is a deception. By the time you put together his whole story, David is quite the cunning military genius, but he's also very deceptive when he wants to be or (shall I say) needs to be. Can you deceive? Can you lie? It's been one of the common ethical questions of the Bible. "All is fair in love and war," someone once said. I think that sounds biblical in the sense that when you have a wartime mentality... Rahab will lie to the Jerichoites, the twelve spies entering Canaan will deceive people for 40 days as to where they came from... I remember saying this in a Bible college classroom once. One of the students said, "Well, God doesn't need our lies." And I said, "I agree, but notice how often in the stories we have people lying because they're in a wartime setting." So God doesn't need it, but at the same time, I would say when David feigns madness here, he pretends to do something for the sake of a military advantage. And of course, as the story goes through 22 (which I'm not going to read), he goes out and defeats Philistines when they thought he was defeating Judahites. So it's all done for a good purpose.

But anyway, back to verse 6:

⁶ So the priest gave him holy bread;

This is big because Jesus brings it up. When Jesus goes to the Old Testament purposely to make a point, I think that should grab our attention. So let's do it. In Matthew 12:1, they are going through a grain field.

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath.

On the most holy day of not just the week, it's the most holy day of the year. It's the greatest celebration on the Jewish calendar—Sabbath. And of course, we're supposed to say, "But there are 52 of them in the year!" And the Jew will smile and say, "That's the point. The most holy day of the year, we celebrate 52 times, and that is Sabbath."

And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.

They must have learned this from Jesus, by the way. [laughs] A good Jew would not have done this, but they must have heard it from Jesus.

² And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!"

25:00

Now again, you have to ask, "Lawful in whose mind?" This would come back to the days of the Maccabees and the intertestamental period, really coming out of Babylon—this discussion of how to follow Yahweh when we don't have a temple. That was the discussion of Ezra, Nehemiah, the rabbis, as it were, and the Talmud itself (which orally begins about this time and is put into written form well after Jesus). The laws of Israel come about from this question: "How do we follow Yahweh when we don't have sacred space to obey? We don't have a temple." And that's where they would get the 613.

Let's stop and think about this. The problem of why they came... I'm trying to think of an analogy. If you caught your teenage children talking about you and they didn't know you were listening to them, and one of them says in so many words, "What is Dad like? What makes him mad? How would we best honor Dad?" And you hear the other teenager say, "He's picky. 'You can't touch this.' 'You've got to be in by 10 p.m.—not 10:01, but 10:00.'" Wouldn't that hurt you? I mean, to me it would be a sad moment in my life if I overheard my kids in trying to extol my character explain to each other how picky I am. That's not me! Right? And thus, I thus my personal view is that if we do that to God, we misunderstand his character.

I think the best argument is Matthew 12. They're doing something the rabbis are against, and here's what happens. Jesus challenges them, and he says this in verse 3:

³ But He said to them, "Have you not read what [in 1 Samuel 21] David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: ⁴ how he entered the house of God..."

So it's the "house of God." That might be lingo for some kind of a sanctuary.

...and ate the showbread which was not lawful...

Leviticus 24:9 says you don't eat the holy bread, so Jesus is admitting that they broke Leviticus 24:9.

...not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?

So so far, so good, right? He's saying, "Guys, I agree. Let's go back to the scrolls, and Leviticus 24:9 says, 'Don't eat that bread.'"

⁵ Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?

Now that's more of a Midrashic spin on things, where you go into the Old Testament and you say, "Wait a second! When you think about it, the very people who do most of the work on the sabbath because of the rituals that are done on sabbath are priests." So it's kind of weird to say that the priest ends up breaking the sabbath more than the common man, but Jesus is admitting something that's just written into the law.

⁶ Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple.

I think what he's saying is, "My presence is more contagious than all the ritual uncleanness you'll ever devise." It's an amazing statement, right? That you can't compare... Think of this: "You can't compare Leviticus 24:9 and its condemnation of eating holy bread to me, Yahweh's son. One trumps the other. I have the trump card here, and it's me." And here he goes right back to the verse I read:

⁷ But if you had known what *this* means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' [Hosea 6:6] you would not have condemned the guiltless.

In my Bible, I drew a line from "not lawful" down to the word "guiltless." So Jesus is claiming in the same breath, as it were, "You can break Levitical law and be guiltless." How do you do that? Because of the next verse:

⁸ For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

He basically, with a wink, says, "Watch what I do! Watch who I am. Watch how I define who Yahweh is." One of the many reasons... Why did Jesus come to earth? In John 18:37 (one of my favorites), he even defines the moment in a way that you can't but help thinking he wants everyone to catch what he's saying.

³⁷ Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?"

Jesus answered, "You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world:

Well, there's a colon I want to read the rest of!

...that I should bear witness to the truth."

So one of the reasons (of the many) that Jesus came to earth was to tell the truth. What is Yahweh like? And again, since Babylon, I think a lot of the people of his own era had come to misunderstand who Yahweh was.

30:00

So putting it all together... With this, I'll draw my conclusion. When Jesus was trying to define who Yahweh was, an interesting story that he decided to go back to is 1 Samuel 21. So it's a small narrative, in one sense. Very incidental. David is hungry, he asks for holy bread, and he gets it. Jesus sees in this story a powerful truth: that number one, Christ is (as Romans 10:4 says) the "end of the law," meaning the *telos* or the purpose. Not the fulfillment in the sense of obeying. Here's another subject that I would love to talk about: did Jesus obey Levitical law? I would say "no," because of the reasons we talked about plus (and again this is another subject) there's enough reasons to pose this issue in a very clear way—that Jesus could have gone down the list and said, "We don't do this as a nation. We don't do this. We don't even have an ark!" Remember, Jesus is standing in a temple that has no ark. How in the world can we say we're obeying Levitical law when we don't even have that? So Jesus is the fulfillment of the law in the sense that he is the purpose of the law (Romans 10:4). He is showing how he can define... He is as authoritative as Torah, if not more, because he understands who Yahweh is. So it's the same authoritative voice that casts out demons that can also define what God wants out of the Old Testament. And here he goes to 1 Samuel 21 to do that, and it's a fascinating piece of... not the life of David as much as clarifying what Yahweh is like in a very quiet little story.

We'll pick this up... My part in these podcasts will be chapter 23 when we get there. And again, I'm going to get into the discussion of why God was silent to Saul. I will list out about 10-15 different reasons why I think Saul never did worship Yahweh. And that would be one of the symptoms—that God never talked to him.

TS: All right, Ronn. Great job! I love it. Fantastic. I like it when you bring up how you and Mike would talk about stuff and maybe disagree here and there, or hash it out, or talk. That stuff is gold, in my opinion. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Looking forward to chapter 23 when you come back. I appreciate it, sir, thank you!

RJ: Absolutely. Thank you, Trey!

TS: All right, well I just want to thank Dr. Ronn Johnson again for coming on and I want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.