

Another Ebenezer

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Date: 03 January 2021

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[0 : 00] Take your Bibles and turn to 1 Samuel chapter 7. 1 Samuel chapter 7. We're going to read the entire chapter.

1 Samuel chapter 7. So the men of Kiriath-Jerom came and took up the ark of the Lord. They took it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the ark of the Lord. It was a long time, 20 years in all, that the ark remained at Kiriath-Jerom, and all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the Lord.

And Samuel said to the whole house of Israel, If you are returning to the Lord with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only.

And he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths and served the Lord only. Then Samuel said, Assemble all men at Mizpah, and I will intercede with the Lord for you.

[1 : 15] When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord. On that day they fasted, and there they confessed, We have sinned against the Lord.

And Samuel was leader of Israel at Mizpah. When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them.

And when the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. They said to Samuel, Do not stop crying out to the Lord our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines.

And then Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. He cried out to the Lord on Israel's behalf, and the Lord answered him. When Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle.

But that day the Lord thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth-kar.

[2 : 25] Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shin. He named it Ebenezer, saying, Thus far has the Lord helped us.

So the Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israelite territory again. Throughout Samuel's lifetime, the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines.

The towns from Ekron to Gath that the Philistines had captured from Israel were restored to her.

And Israel delivered the neighboring territory from the power of the Philistines.

And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. Samuel continued as judge over Israel all the days of his life. From year to year, he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel and all those places.

But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was. And there he also judged Israel, and he built an altar there to the Lord. How many of you were confused the first time you got into a rowboat, and you sit at the oars, and you're facing backwards?

[3 : 49] You're looking out at where you've already been, and you have to crane your net to see where you're going as you row. Well, I thought I would fix that and turn around.

But I've learned that the oars are not placed in a place for me to turn around. And it's much easier to pull at the oars than it is to push at the oars.

So when I gave up fighting against the design of the rowboat, we got along just fine, like this. Now, we have been, we've entered our third day moving into the uncharted waters of 2021.

And as we move into 2021, I would like to propose that we enter with the rowboat perspective of looking backwards. That we move into 2021 with a backward look.

And I believe I have biblical evidence that this is something that God would encourage us to do. We've just seen it there in 1 Samuel chapter 7. Israel had been in the promised land for 300 years. [4 : 58] And just as Moses had warned and told them, they had become unfaithful to the Lord. They had forsaken His commandments and they were worshiping and serving other gods, the gods of Canaan.

You know that conformity to the world has ever been a danger to the people of God. Letting it squeeze us into its mold of thinking and choosing and prioritizing rather than us being poured into the mold and likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ and challenging the world with Him and His ways. Friendship with the world is enmity against God. And so God had punished them using the Philistines as the rod of His anger.

And after suffering an initial defeat to the Philistines with 4,000 casualties, the Israelite elders said, bring the Ark of the Covenant so it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies. Now this was no repentance at all. This was just using the gold-covered box of God's presence as if it were a good luck charm to bring them victory.

[6 : 14] As if God could be manipulated to give them what they wanted. Bring the Ark of the Covenant. That's why we lost. If we've got the box of His presence, we'll win.

And for it they suffered a far greater defeat, a great slaughter, this time of 30,000 soldiers. And also the Ark of God in which they had trusted was taken away by the Philistines into the temple of their God, Dagon, who was worshipped and praised for having defeated the God of Israel, Jehovah. Well, you remember that story, how the Ark of the Covenant brought curses upon the Philistines and upon their God, Dagon. And so they finally said, we've had enough of it, and they sent it back to Israel.

And then 20 more years passed under the heel of the Philistines. And all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the Lord.

But Israel had often merely pretended to repent. So Samuel told them, if you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then get rid of your foreign gods and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve Him only, and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.

[7 : 31] So they got rid of their baals and ashtoreths and served the Lord only. Real repentance always involves getting rid of that which is offensive to God.

Those things that we have substituted for Him and made our trust, our help, our joy, and our delight, they must go if we would seek the Lord with all our hearts.

We must serve Him alone. And so Samuel called them to Mizpah where the nation fasted and confessed their sins to the Lord.

And the Philistine spies saw this going on and saw them gathering and thought, well, they're gathering for war. They're going to try to fight us again.

And so they came up to attack Israel. And when Israel heard of it, they were terrified. They knew they could not stand before their enemy. And so in desperation, they pleaded with Samuel, do not stop crying out to the Lord, our God, for us, that He may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines.

[8 : 44] You see, no more trust in some box of His presence as if they could, no, they had gotten rid of their other gods and now they were throwing themselves upon God for help and God alone.

So Samuel offered a burnt offering to the Lord. He cried out to the Lord on Israel's behalf and the Lord answered him. And he answered in such a way that no one could miss that the victory was his doing.

He often does that, you know. Let's the situation get so bad that you are desperate, absolutely desperate and have no way of solving the problem yourself and you cry to the Lord and He answers in a way that shows His fingerprints on your deliverance that He might have all the praise.

Well, what did He do here? Well, He sent such loud thunderclaps that threw these hardened Philistine warriors into a panic and sent them running for their lives and making them easy prey as their backs were then exposed to the Israelite soldiers who were pursuing them and slaughtered them all along the way without a fight.

Clearly, it was the Lord who had helped them so that none of their enemies could stand before them just as He had promised them in that covenant if they would be faithful to Him and serve Him only that He would cause their enemies to flee before them.

[10 : 13] And then it was that Samuel set up a stone and named the stone. Now, what's happening here? We usually name our babies and our pets but we don't name our stones.

Or do we? Don't we have gravestones that mark the burial spots of our loved ones who have died and whose names are there on the stones?

A monument, a memorial stone reminding us of someone. Well, that's something similar to this stone that Samuel set up and named.

He named it Ebenezer because Ebenezer means stone of help and then he said, thus far has the Lord helped us. It was a monument set up and appropriately named then to acknowledge the Lord's help in their desperate plight.

so that in future years if their children should ask, Daddy, why is this stone standing up here? Well, let me tell you, son, a Philistine army came against us and we were helpless but we cried to the Lord and if the Lord had not been on our side, if the Lord had not been on our side, they would have swallowed us alive.

[11 : 37] If he had not helped us, we would have been goners, but he did help us and this stone called Ebenezer is here to remind us of how God was our help right here in this spot years ago.

You see, they paused after this great deliverance and before rushing on with their lives they erected a monument to remind them of God's help.

Now in the Old Testament we find not only memorial stones, we also find memorial songs, don't we? We think of Exodus chapter 15, the song of Moses that they sang on the far side of the Red Sea, celebrating the Lord's help and opening a way for them to pass through and then drowning their enemies so that they sank like lead to the bottom.

I will sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously, the horse and rider thrown into the sea. And we still sing it today, remembering that great deliverance of God's people when there was no help to be found.

Is Egyptian chariots pinning them in from behind and the Red Sea expanse in front of them. There were other songs, songs of Moses, Deuteronomy 32, Psalm 90.

[13 : 01] Indeed, many of the psalms are memorial songs. Some of David, most of David, some of Asaph, some referring to personal deliverances. This man cried and the Lord helped him and delivered him out of all his troubles, Psalm 34.

That's a song of memorial that David is acknowledging, I was in big trouble and the Lord helped me. Other songs were national remembrances of how Israel, the whole Psalm 105, 106, 107, 114, and others, God helped us when we as a nation sought him in our desperation.

So there were memorial stones, there were memorial songs, and there were memorial feasts, weren't there? We think of the Passover. And why was the Passover feast initiated?

It was to remind him of that night, that midnight in Egypt when the angel of God's wrath was coming to destroy the firstborn, and when the Israelites spread the blood of the innocent lamb above the doorposts, the angel of destruction passed over them as it hit every home of the Egyptians who did not have the blood covering them.

And so it led to a great deliverance there from Egypt. We think of the Feast of Tabernacles where they would live in little makeshift booths to remind them, what, of those days and years that they spent in the desert and how God had been Jehovah Jireh to them and provided for them in the desert.

[14 : 34] Well, memorials, memorials. Why so many memorials? God is obviously into memorials. Why? Why so many memorials in the Bible?

Well, you say, because we're such good forgetters. And yes, that's true. The obvious purpose of these memorials is to remind us of God's help in the past.

But why? Well, certainly that we might give him the praise for his help. But there's more. And it's this, that God knows that remembering his help in the past will help us in situations where we're going to need his help in the future.

You can even hear it, can't you, in Samuel's words, thus far, the Lord has helped us. Now, thus far, that looks back, doesn't it?

But it also infers that there's further yet to go. Thus far, he's helped us. But there are more enemies, more Philistines to be fought.

[15 : 45] And should anyone in the future ever be up against a Philistine or a Philistine army, maybe a teenager someday, up against a Philistine giant, let them, let them remember this stone, this Ebenezer stone.

when Israel was in desperate need, they cried to the Lord and he, he slaughtered the Philistines.

He helped them. Even so, child of God, you have many more enemies to face in the coming year. Oh, you face down some enemies in this year.

You've got many more to face in 2021. There's more ground to be taken for the kingdom of Christ. Christ. There's more fruit of the spirit to bear in your heart and life.

There's more temptations to flee, more sins to kill and confess, more trials to face, more hardships and afflictions to endure.

[16:50] Who knows, but that 2021 might be worse than 2020. And for all those troubles, you are going to need supernatural help from above.

So we go forward into the new year with our rowboat perspective, looking back, looking back. Because God knows that the look backward to his help in the past will inspire faith and hope, courage and confidence in God's help in the future.

we go forward looking backward. Thus far, the Lord has helped us and in the future he will still be our help. You know, many of our hymns pick up on this biblical theme.

We're going to sing some, Lord willing, this evening. Our God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come. You see the biblical psychology behind that hymn?

[17:55] To build hope for the future, take a look at God's help in the past. Has our God been our help in the past? He will be our hope then to help us in the future, years to come.

In our closing hymn today, we'll sing, here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by thy help I'm come. Thus far, we've come by your help and I hope by thy good pleasure safely to arrive at home by the same helper helping me.

There's further to go and I'm counting on the same helper who got me through 2020 to get me through 2021 and all the way home.

John Newton's Amazing Grace we sing, through many dangers, trials, toils and snares I have already come. There they are.

Tis grace has brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home. Looking back I can see it's been God's grace his supernatural energy given on my behalf that's got me this far and that's the same way I'm going to make it home to glory.

[19:14] Now these hymn writers are simply picking up on a theme that's found in our Bibles. God's chain of salvation is unbreakable saints.

Romans 8 29 to 30 those he foreknew those he set his love upon he also predestined and those he predestined to be conformed to the likeness of Christ those he also called he called them and brought them to Jesus Christ and those he called he also justified he declared them righteous as righteous as Jesus is because it's Jesus righteousness that's credited to their account and those he justified he also glorified.

So here's this glorious golden chain of salvation beginning in the in ages eternity past where God sets his love upon a people and determines to save them all the way to glorification where we'll see Jesus will be home at last and be made like him and there's not a single fallout along the way those he foreknew he predestined those he predestined he called those he called he justified and those he justified he glorified it's so certain it's put in the past tense more happy but not more secure those glorified spirits in heaven they're happier than we are but they're not more secure than we are you see because this unbreakable chain cannot be thwarted God will save all those that he has set out to save so has God helped you in the past has he called you to Jesus Christ he's going to get you all the way home to glory you can count on it you see this was

Paul's confidence as he faced untold dangers in in his life and he says in 2nd timothy 4 16 to 18 at my first defense he's looking back no one came to my defense no one came to my support everyone deserted me oh but the Lord stood at my side and he gave me strength and I was delivered from the lion's mouth and the Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom you see the shift from past deliverance to future deliverance the one who has been my help will be my help a confidence not only for himself but for other believers that's why he's able to say the believers in Philippi Philippians 1 6 I can be confident of this that he who began a good work in you he who brought you to birth he who drew you to

Jesus and put faith and repentance into your soul to trust in him he who began a good work in you will continue it and carry it on until the day of Jesus Christ he didn't begin the good work in us and then give it up and walk away as a more contemporary song says he didn't teach us to swim to let us drown he didn't build his home in us to move away he didn't lift us up to let us down the look back you see is meant to prepare us for the future 2020 considered remedies readies you for 2021

now in the new covenant we have a memorial meal don't we we call it communion or the [23 : 06] Lord's supper Jesus says do this in remembrance of me it's again it's like the Ebenezer stone it's a call to remember Jesus Christ look back look back to what he's done when once for all time he gave his life blood and his body up for our salvation and though the memorial reminds us of the past it also holds in its arms a promise for the future doesn't it notice Romans 8 32 how Paul reasons from Christ's death in the past to help in the future he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all past 2000 years ago on Calvary's cross how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things what he did there is the guarantee of what he will do for us in the future when we needed a savior and no one else could do he didn't even spare his own son but gave him up for us and if he gave him up for us what will he not give to get us home to heaven everything that we need we we we got we have we if he gave his son will he not give us his angels who are ministering spirits sent to help those who are to inherit salvation

Having sent his son, will he withhold any good thing from us? Will he not send mercy and grace to help us in our time of need? All the help we need to get us through every trial and temptation between here and heaven.

It's based on what Jesus did for us on the cross. What the father did in sending him and delivering him up to the cross for us. That past help holds in its arm the promise of future help.

I have a prayer partner and he's like this Ebenezer Stone. Whenever I'm facing a new trouble, a new trial of faith and ask for prayer, he says to me what the Ebenezer Stone says.

Thus far, the Lord has helped you, John. And he uses that as an argument in prayer. A reason why God should help me now.

[25 : 55] Now, he pleads that, Lord, just as you have been a help to John. And you have always been faithful to him. Now, be helpful to him.

Give him the help he needs for this new trial. And without fail, I find my faith strengthened. My heart encouraged and the help that I need received.

So, believer, what do you need? What do you need? To face whatever you may face in this coming year. Because God gave his son for you, you can believe for sure that help is on the way.

The look back to God's help in the past is meant to strengthen our faith for the future. So, three applications and we're done. The first is before rushing too far into 2021, let's pause and remember God's help in 2020.

It was not an easy year for many reasons. How did you experience God's help in 2020? Before rushing on, stop, pause.

[27 : 08] Even write down the help that God gave you in 2020. There were threats to your health. And God has saved us.

We've all survived the COVID pandemic. Some of you having recovered from the virus. Others having been kept from getting it. Many around us died.

But we're still in the land of the living. Because diseases and plagues obey his will. And he's been gracious to us. And so, we pause to acknowledge.

Thus far, the Lord has helped us. There were threats to your financial security. Due to layoffs, surgery, tottering economy.

Maybe as you looked forward, you had no idea how God was going to meet your needs. Where help would come from. And you cried to the Lord.

[28 : 08] You found him to be that faithful Jehovah Jireh. The Lord, your provider. And he met in such ways that you couldn't miss his fingerprints.

He was acting for the help of my financial situation. You too can raise your Ebenezer. Hither by thy help I'm come.

Some of you had your hopes dashed in different ways in 2020. Some of you were walking in darkness, confused, not knowing what you should do.

But you cried for help. And enough light was given to take the next step. And so you went. Day by day, more light. And you found that even in darkness, light dawns for the righteous.

And now looking back, you can see how he's led you all the way. Even though at the time you didn't know what you should do. Some of you were up to your chins in trouble. At your wit's end.

[29 : 08] Your strength spent. Almost too tired to go on. And even almost too tired to even care. Tempted to despair in your unending trial. But in your helplessness, you cried to the Lord.

And you found strength for one more day. And so it went day after day after day. Strength equal to your day. Though it wasn't easy, his grace was sufficient for you.

You raised your Ebenezer. Acknowledging his help. Some have struggled with loneliness, grief, and sorrow. The Lord has heard your sighs and counted your tears.

And you found him to be a friend that sticks closer than a brother. And you found his sympathy and fellowship to be the help that you needed. Some found the battle with sin and its consequences to be too much for you.

But you found your captain ready to forgive. And ready to help. Mighty to save. And even your falls have been used for your good. To humble you.

[30 : 18] To teach you greater watchfulness and greater dependence upon the Lord. In the future. You found that even your worst things. Last year have been recycled for your good.

To draw you nearer to God. The chief good. To sanctify you. To wean you from this world. To turn your eyes upon Jesus. To love and delight in him more.

How many times in our need did we cry to him for help? And he heard and he answered us. Some of you cried for the Lord to save you.

And he heard and answered you in this last year. As we look back you see. Over 2020. Can we not raise another Ebenezer?

Thus far the Lord has helped us. Thankfully acknowledging God's grace and goodness. That's followed us all the days of 2020. He didn't treat us.

[31 : 23] Or our families. As we deserved. He didn't treat our church or our nation. As our sins deserve. He's been so patient.

Long-suffering and kind. He's great in grace and help. And as we look back. We are meant. To have our faith strengthened. For the help we will need.

In the new year. A lot of things are changing in our world. And will continue to change in 2021. Our government and nation is changing. Our economy and freedoms may change.

Our health and health care may change. Even the virus is changing. They tell us. Into new strains. But not Jesus Christ. He remains the same yesterday.

Today and forever. What you found him to be in 2020. You'll find him to be in 2021. Some people's love is fickle. Jesus' love is faithful.

[32 : 20] And if it wasn't for his faithful love. Then looking backwards would be no help for me. Okay. So he helped me last year. What good does that do me for next year?

Unless I know that his love is faithful. Unfailing love. Oh yes it is. That's what we meet with in the scriptures. A God whose love is unfailing love.

That when he sets his love upon you to save you. He'll love you to the end. And even if that love brings out a paddle of discipline along the way. He's going to love you all the way to heaven.

And that's comfort. And that's joy. And that's faith building. Confidence boosting. As we move into uncharted waters ahead.

Now in the sport of rowing. There's only one person in the boat. Who's facing the front. And usually sits back in the stern of the ship. So here's all the rowers.

[33 : 19] I'm thinking of an eight team rowing team. And all the rowers facing the back. And there's that one cock swaying he's called. And he's facing the front.

And he's there to direct and steer the boat. To shout encouragement and corrections and direction. To guide them hopefully to victory.

You see. Child of God. Jesus. Is in the boat with you. And you can't see the future.

But he can. And he speaks. In his word. And he sends his spirit. To encourage and to help. And to direct and steer and correct. And rebuke and train you.

That you might make it all the way to the end. You can trust him. For the new year. Application number two. Before we get too far into 2021. Let me encourage you all.

[34 : 21] To begin some sort of Bible reading plan. If you haven't already. You can catch up real quick. You're just two days. Three days behind. We've considered memorial stones this morning.

Memorial songs. Memorial meals. Did you know this is a memorial book. Calling to mind God's faithful love and help.

To all who sought him in the past. I mean that's just. We've just seen his faithfulness to Samuel in Israel. And for Samuel chapter seven. That chapter is there.

And it's there for us. Did you know that? That's what. That's what Paul says. In Romans 15. Four. For everything written in the past. Was written to teach us.

So that through endurance. And encouragement of the scriptures. We might have hope. Would you have your hope. For 2021 and beyond.

[35 : 17] Strengthen. Well. Then soak. The roots of your faith. In this stuff. This is faith building stuff. This is where you see the faithfulness. Of God's help. The faithfulness of Christ's love.

And it strengthens your faith. In him. To get you through whatever's. Ahead. And I ask you. Should not the God. Of such great faithfulness.

As we meet here. Should not that God. Have a people of great faith. We've been talking about. Looking back over 2020.

This book allows you to go back. Even further. Doesn't it? We can go back. Before we were here. We can go back 2000 years. When Jesus was on the earth. We can go back another 2000 years. When God made a covenant. With Abraham. And promised that he would bring. A seed to Abraham. Who would bless all the nations. Of the earth. And we can just follow that promise. We can go all the way back.

[36 : 15] To Genesis. Into the garden. And see that God promised. To raise up a seed of the woman. Who would crush the head of the serpent. And destroy the works of the devil. Redeem a people for himself.

And we can follow that all the way through. It's a book of remembrance. It's a stone set up. Look. Remember.

And have your faith strengthened then. For the new year. Whatever you do. So many ways to be reading the scriptures.

Methods. And I just caution you. Don't become a slave. To the method. If your method is that you must read.

Five chapters a day. And it just becomes nothing more. Than just reading. And checking it. And you can't remember what you read. Then find a different method.

[37 : 10] And some days. You just scrap the method. Because God has fastened you. To something he's saying to you. And that's more important. Than sticking to some method.

The living God. This faithful. Helping. Loving God. Meets with us. Here. And as he comes to give us kisses. In his word. And remind us.

Of his faithful love. Pause. And enjoy. And glory in it. And if you only get through one verse. That day. Bless God. It's strengthened your faith.

For whatever. You might face. The Bible's ever telling us. Remember Jesus Christ. Second Timothy 2. 8. Remember who he is. In his coming years.

You're reading. Make sure you're. You're. You're in the gospels. Yes. He's in. He's in all the scriptures. But. Make sure you're looking for Jesus. What. Who he is. What he's done.

[38 : 09] And what he's promised to do. And that will strengthen your faith. For the future. Application number three. Have you made it through another year.

Without. Being saved. Another year of rejecting Jesus. Of refusing. To come to him. That you might have. Eternal life.

Are you still among those. In Jeremiah 8. And verse 20. Who must confess. The harvest is past. The summer. Is. Ended.

And we are not saved. Another year is past. 2020 has ended. And I'm not saved. If you're honest. You must say that. Not saved.

Still lost. Not saved. Still guilty. Before a holy God. That you've offended. Not saved.

[39 : 13] One breath away. From eternal torments. You may die. Before this year ends. You don't. You have no. Promise of tomorrow. Why would you go into the unknown year.

Without the Savior. Why would you let another day go by. Without the Savior. Why would you not trust yourself to him. To have him save you. I tell you.

This is that Savior. That is faithful in his love. This is that father. Who is so faithful. That he did not spare his son. And gave him up.

That sinners might be safe. You're safe. Trust in your life. Into his hands. He's already proven. His love is so great. That he will sacrifice.

His own son. And put him in the place. That you should have been in forever. And he'll punish him. That you might be forgiven. Why can't you trust him. With your whole life.

[40 : 07] What will it profit a man. If he gained the whole world. And lose his own soul. That's to be losing forever. Why still lost.

When Jesus would save you today. And delight to do so. When he says come to me. And whoever comes to me. I will in no wise. Cast out. And you'll be able to say.

With the rest of us. As we enter another year. Thus far. The Lord has helped us. And he'll help us. All the way to the end. We're going to raise our Ebenezer. In the way of a song of remembrance. So I ask you to stand with me. As we. We look back upon. The past help of our God. And fix our hope. On him for his help in the future. For come thou fount. Of every blessing. To my heart. To sing. Thy grace.

[41 : 03] Let's sing it to his praise. Here's my heart.

I find it straying. Lord you seal it. For your courts above. And now to him. Who is able to keep you from falling. And to present you faultless.

Before his. Glorious presence. With great joy. To the only God our Savior. Be glory and majesty. Power and authority. Before all ages.

And forevermore. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[42 : 12] Amen.