



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

ISAIAH 1-39

Week 4

The Wrong Help

DAY 22

Isaiah 31

Have you ever found yourself disregarding spiritual truth because you had more faith in someone else's experience or advice? What made their help seem better than God's?

1. What did some in Judah want to rely on, that Egypt had (v. 1)?

2. In verse 2, Judah is reminded that God is both like and unlike Egypt. What are those two comparisons?

3. As a result of Judah choosing Egypt to save her from Assyria, what did God prophesy would happen (v. 3)?

4. In what way would Assyria be defeated (v. 8)?

1. When you are desperately concerned about a danger or problem, where or to whom do you go for help first? List your top three sources for help.

2. In your list of people or things you trust in most, would God call any of them your "Egypt"? Why?

3. What favorite scripture in the Bible reminds you of God's protection?

"Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help" (v. 1). This was a blatant violation of God's covenant with Israel in Deuteronomy 17:16. Although Judah was breaking their promise, God would not break his. He would have to allow Judah to suffer the consequences of their own behavior. Egypt would eventually be in as great a danger from Assyria as Judah herself.

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

Back to the Future

Isaiah 32

OPENING
up to the Word

What is it about our society and culture that discourages you the most?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Verses 1-4 speak of the kingdom of righteousness. What are the differences between people who are not citizens of that kingdom and people who are (Php 3:20)?

2. What are the six behaviors evident in a fool (v. 6)?

3. What imagery does God use as a symbol of sinning Judah (v. 9)?

4. How would the present atmosphere in Jerusalem be changed by the coming judgments (vs. 13-14)?

5. What would signal the beginning of a significant change in Jerusalem (vs. 15)?

LIVING
out the Word

1. We often think of how wonderful it would be to live in a perfect world. But how would God need to change you so that you could contribute to such a world?

2. Do you ever feel yourself becoming complacent about your character flaws, habits or attitudes?

3. What actions might you need to take to clear away any “thorns” or “briers” in your heart and life?

WINDOW
on the Word

*“In little more than a year” (v. 10). Judah should stop being complacent about their sin, for in little over a year judgment would begin. This could refer to Assyria’s push into Judah in 701 B.C. Although God would defeat the Assyrians, it would still be a sobering experience for the Jews to have the Assyrian army surrounding them. **“Till the Spirit is poured upon us”** (v. 15). This is a repeated theme in the Old Testament—that the future would be characterized by the Holy Spirit living in all believers (Eze 36:26-27, 37:14, Joel 2:28-29, Zec 12:10). It is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that causes such a dramatic change in human behavior (Ac 2).*

Getting Away With It?

DAY 24

Isaiah 33

Does it sometimes seem to you that evil people receive no punishment for their actions? Have you ever seen their “charmed” life go up in smoke later?

1. What would be the result of Judah’s attempts at brokering a peace with the Assyrians (vs. 7-9)?
2. How did God describe their attempts to save themselves through an alliance (v. 11)?
3. What are the differences in attitude between people in Jerusalem (Zion) who forsook the Lord and those who exercised faith in him (vs. 14-19)?
4. Verse 24 looks to a time of healing. Do you feel this healing is physical or spiritual—or both?

1. Think of people you know who seem to get away with everything God abhors. How many of them are still “getting away” with the same things 5-10 years later? What consequences have some of them reaped?

2. When someone does something to hurt you, what is your initial reaction? (a) remember that vengeance belongs to God, (b) ignore it, (c) get even, (d) get mad at God for allowing it.

3. When someone has done something to hurt you, is your final reaction usually: (a) appropriate and godly, (b) culturally appropriate but maybe not godly, (c) inappropriate and ungodly.

*The **destroyer** was the Assyrian army and the **traitor** probably refers to those in Judah who were hoping to form alliances with Egypt or other powers to protect them. Since the Lord was their God, and he had promised to be their protector, God considered their activity traitorous. “**You conceive chaff**” (v. 11). All their best laid plans to stave off the invasion would result in a failure so complete that the envoys would weep bitterly. They would have nothing to show for their efforts but chaff, the worthless husk of grain that must be blown away.*

OPENING

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DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

*"Thorns will
overrun her
citadels,
nettles and
brambles her
strongholds.
She will
become a
haunt for
jackals, a
home for
owls."*

Isaiah 34:13



Photo of owl by G. Ronald Austing—National Audubon Society;
landscape by Monte Wolverton; digital montage by Omar Cova—PTM

Keeping His Promise

DAY 25

Isaiah 34

Do the promises God has made seem vague, or are they specific?

1. Who is included in the phrase “you nations” (v. 1)?

2. Read verses 2-4 and ask yourself whether this seems like a temporary punishment against some nations, or God’s final judgment.

3. Who is Edom and why does God single them out here (v. 5)?

4. What will be the purpose for this coming day of judgment (v. 8)?

1. What promises from God are you still waiting for him to fulfill?

*“**The Lord is angry with all nations**” (v. 2). Here God appears to be looking forward, past his punishment of Assyria, to his judgment on all nations. The people of **Edom** were descendants of Esau, Jacob’s older brother. Edom became a constant enemy of Israel and symbolized all the nations who would seek to destroy the people of God. “**She will become a haunt for jackals**” (v. 13). These animals do not inhabit populated towns and cities. The only way this prophecy could be fulfilled is if Edom’s population no longer lived there.*

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When All Is Right With the World

Isaiah 35

OPENING
up to the Word

Has there ever been a time in your life when it seemed as if everything was going right? (a) yes, most of the time; (b) yes, but only briefly; (c) no, never.

DIGGING
into the Word

1. How did Isaiah say that nature itself will respond to God's perfect rule (vs. 1-2)?
2. What effect did God want this prophecy to have on his people in Isaiah's day (vs. 3-4)?
3. Do you feel verses 5-6 are a reference to physical or spiritual disabilities—or both?
4. Where will the future highway, called the Way of Holiness, lead people (vs. 8-10)? Is this a physical highway, or a metaphor for something else?
5. What will the atmosphere of Jerusalem (Zion) be like (v. 10)?

LIVING
out the Word

1. How does the kingdom of God transform the spiritual, physical and emotional lives of its citizens?
2. Which change would you welcome the most?
3. What "sorrows and sighing" do you wish would flee away now?

WINDOW
on the Word

"The wilderness will rejoice and blossom" (v. 1). *God brings physical, emotional and spiritual renewal. "Strengthen the feeble hands"* (v. 3). *Though the time for this kingdom was future for Isaiah's original audience, he urged Judah to begin to adopt the kind of behavior that would be fitting for it. "The Way of Holiness"* (v. 8). *Isaiah described this as a road that only godly people can walk on. Although an actual road may be involved, the main reference seems to be figurative—that only godly people look to Jerusalem and gather to worship God. The road is called the Way of Holiness, for the road will take spiritual pilgrims to the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel.*

Only Fools Taunt God

DAY 27

Isaiah 36

Do you ever hear people mocking God? Do you ever wonder when and how God will answer them?

1. How many fortified cities of Judah did Sennacherib capture (v. 1)?
2. What three things did the Assyrian field commander say the Jews had claimed could save them (vs. 5-7)?
3. Did Hezekiah remove all the altars to the Lord, or was the commander misinformed (v. 7)?
4. What did the Assyrian army commander sarcastically offer to the men of Judah to help them in their battle (vs. 8-9)?
5. What outrageous statement did the chief officer make about the Lord? What was the claim designed to do to morale (v. 10)?
6. What bold claim did the Assyrian governor make about their trust in the Lord to save them (vs. 18-20)?

1. Has anyone ever ridiculed your faith? How?
2. What is your typical reaction to someone ridiculing your faith? (a) anger and returning the insult, (b) anger and wishing them ill, (c) staying quietly angry, (d) quietly feeling pity for them, (e) praying for them to see the light of Christ.

*This was the 14th year of **King Hezekiah's reign** in Jerusalem (his reign began in 715 B.C.). He was a good and godly king (2Ki 18:3). Even so, God allowed the nation to be invaded. "**High places and altars Hezekiah removed**" (v. 7). This showed the commander's ignorance of Hezekiah's reforms in Judah. He had torn down the high places used to offer sacrifices to idols. The commander may have thought Hezekiah no longer trusted or worshiped God. "**2,000 horses**" (v. 8). In other words, "if you can find 2,000 men brave enough to ride against us, we'll give them the horses. But all of them combined couldn't stand against just one of our lower level officers." **Aramaic** (vs. 11-12) was the diplomatic language of the day—similar to Hebrew, but not all Jews understood it.*

OPENING

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DIGGING

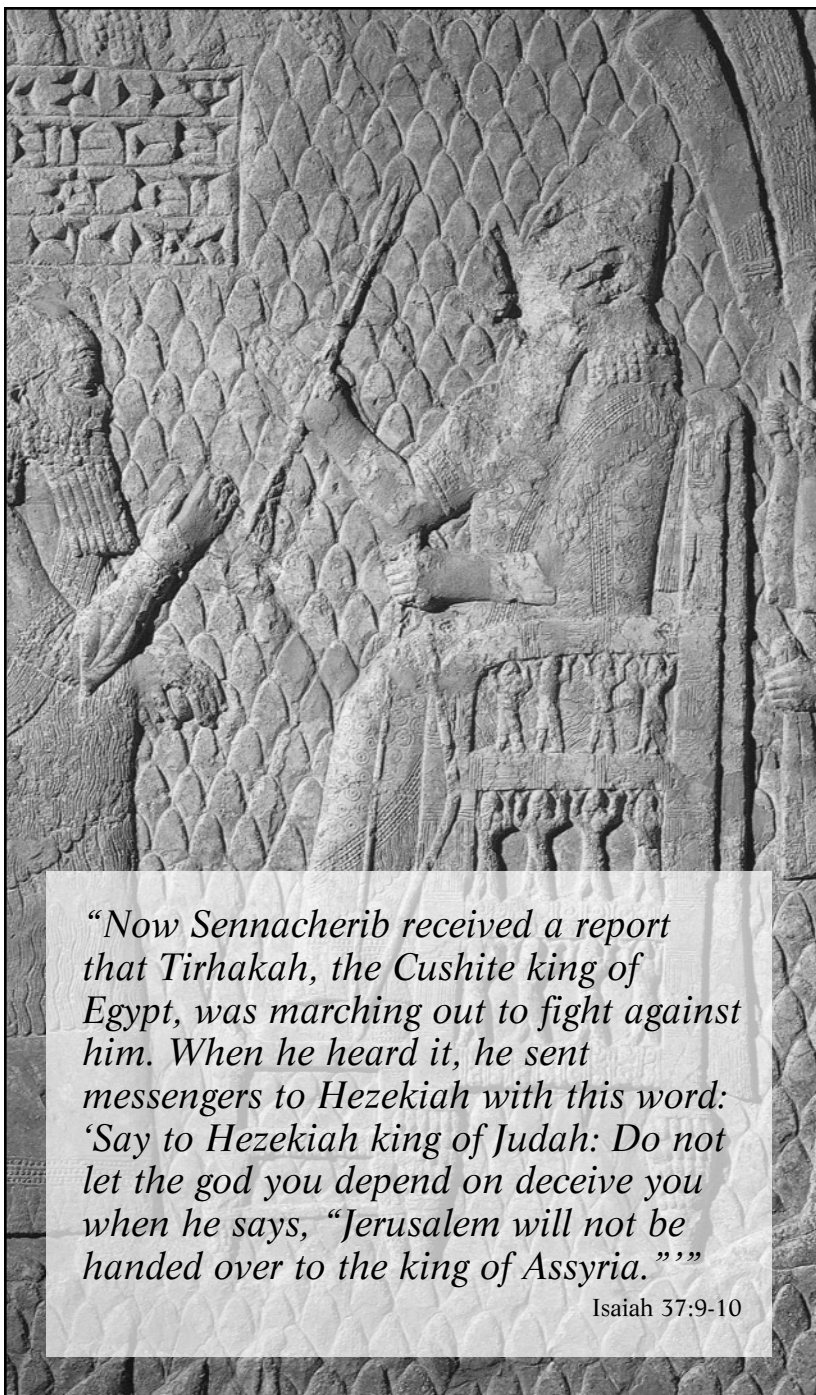
into the Word

LIVING

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“Now Sennacherib received a report that Tirhakah, the Cushite king of Egypt, was marching out to fight against him. When he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah with this word: ‘Say to Hezekiah king of Judah: Do not let the god you depend on deceive you when he says, “Jerusalem will not be handed over to the king of Assyria.”’”

Isaiah 37:9-10

Relief of Sennacherib seated on throne. His image was defaced by a subsequent ruler.

Deliverance!

DAY 28

Isaiah 37

What does *deliverance* mean to you? Does God still deliver his children? How?

1. How did Hezekiah respond to the Assyrian demands (v. 1)?
2. What did Isaiah tell Hezekiah *not* to do (v. 6)?
3. What did Hezekiah admit to God in verses 18-19?
4. What two promises did God give Hezekiah to show him he would deliver Jerusalem (vs. 30-35)?
5. What did the Assyrian army wake up to the next morning (v. 36)?

1. Is it possible to exercise your faith when little is at stake?
2. Why does God ask us to place faith in him in the middle of a risky situation? What would be his purpose?
3. Have you ever found your faith in God being strengthened when something precious to you was at stake? As a result, do you trust God more—or less? Why?

To **tear your clothes** was a symbolic act showing distress or mourning. So was putting on sackcloth. **Tirhakah** (v. 9) was from Cush, south of Egypt. He became king of Egypt in 690 B.C. **“In the third year”** (v. 30). God tells Hezekiah that things would be rough for the first two years as they replanted their crops, but by the third year things would be back to normal. It takes a vineyard three years to begin producing grapes. **“Cut him down with the sword”** (v. 38). Sennacherib was assassinated 20 years later by his sons.

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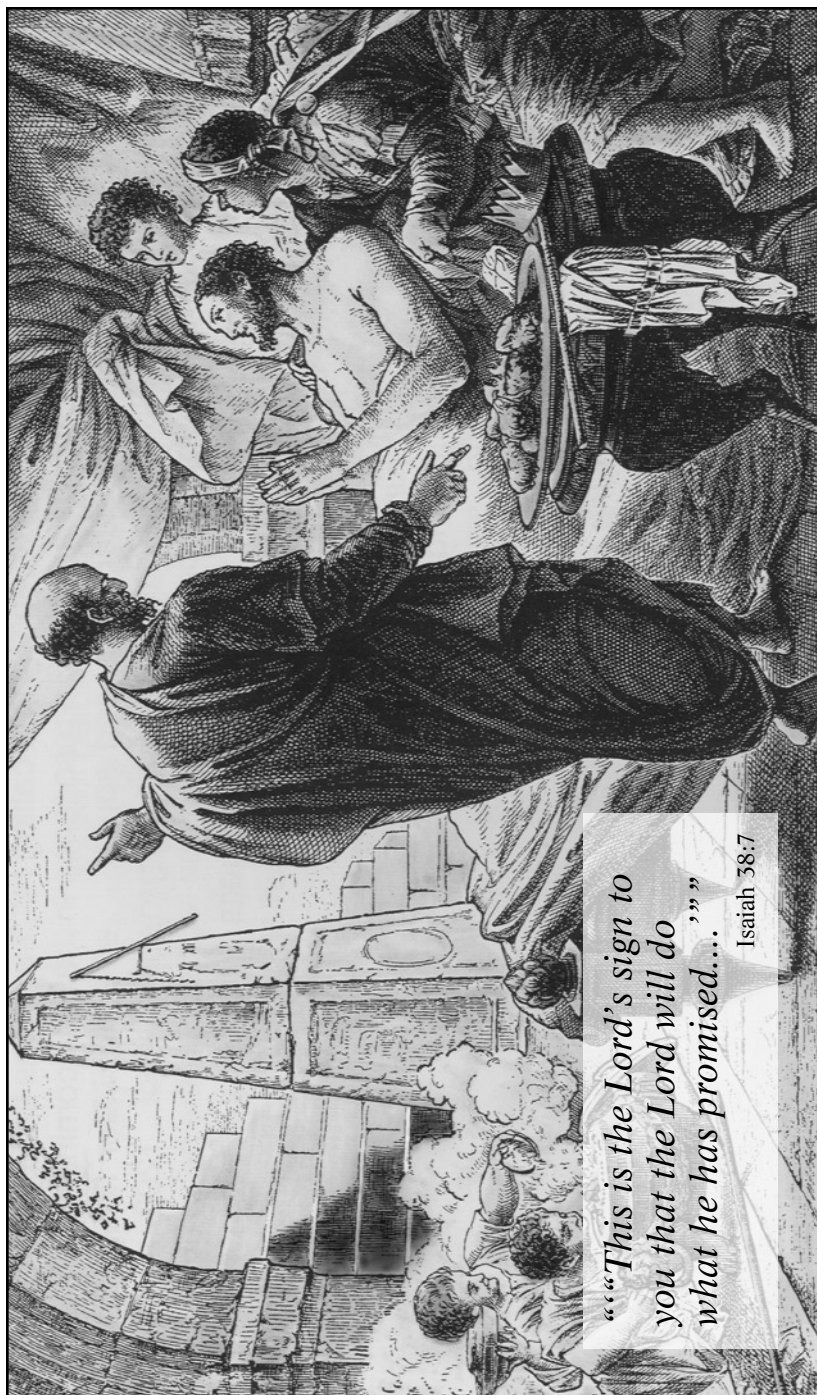
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LIVING

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*““This is the Lord’s sign to
you that the Lord will do
what he has promised....””*

Isaiah 38:7

A Second Chance

DAY 29

Isaiah 38

What do you think is God's purpose for your life?
List five things.

1. When Hezekiah learned his illness was going to lead to death, how did he respond (vs. 2-3)?
(a) with calm acceptance, (b) with sadness and regret, (c) with anger and recrimination, (d) with fear and panic.

2. What two things did God agree to do for Hezekiah (vs. 4-6)?

3. What did Hezekiah pray that moved God to save him (v. 14)?

4. What benefits did Hezekiah later claim to have received from this experience (vs. 17-19)?

1. Would you want another 15 years added onto your life? Why, or why not?

2. As you consider your own mortality, would you say you are: (a) willing to go, but wanting to stay; (b) wanting to go, but willing to stay.

"I will add 15 years to your life" (v. 5). Hezekiah died in 686 B.C., and this promise was given in 701 B.C. "The stairway of Ahaz" (v. 8). It seems as though a stairway had been built that formed a sundial. As the sun set the shadow moved up the stairs. God caused it to reverse itself.

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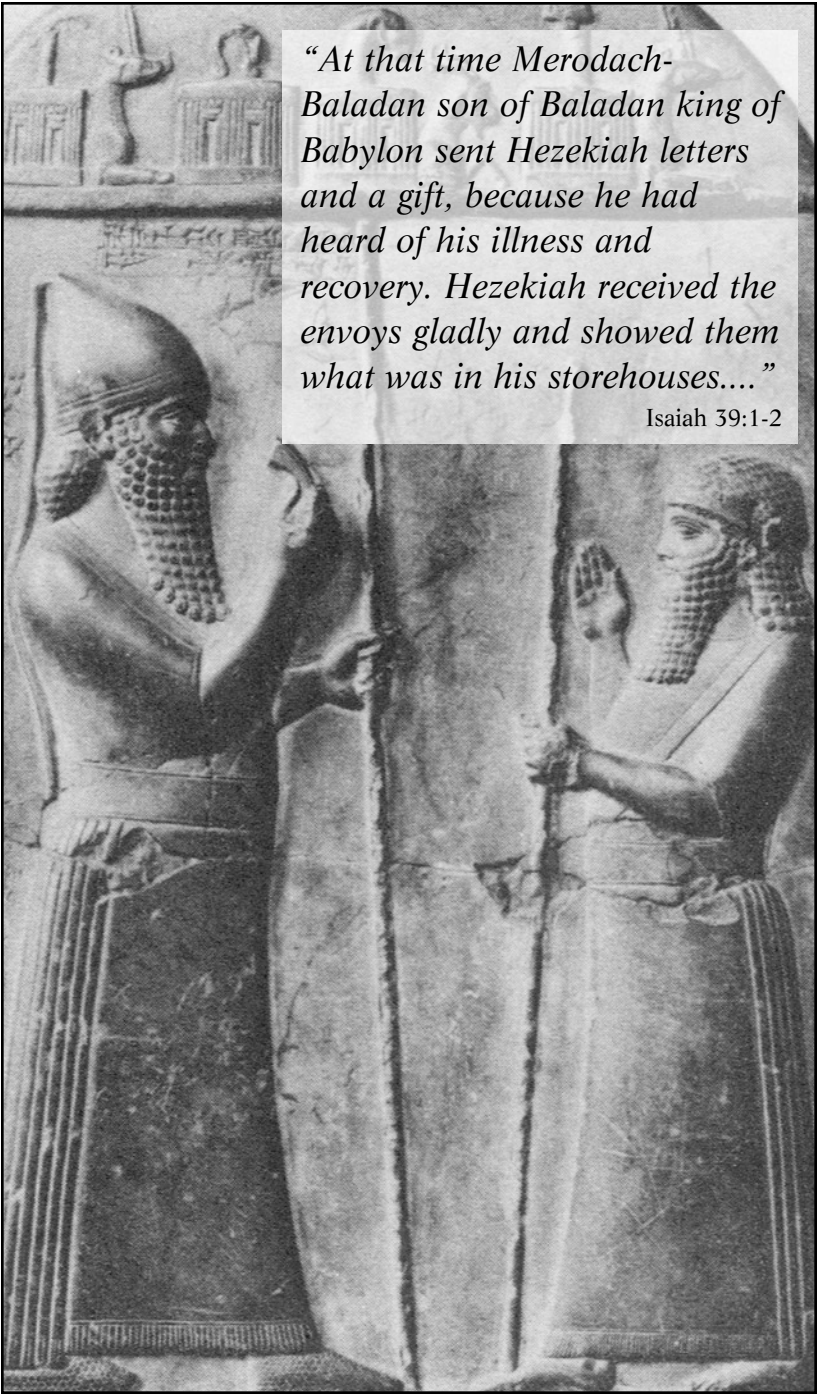
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“At that time Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters and a gift, because he had heard of his illness and recovery. Hezekiah received the envoys gladly and showed them what was in his storehouses....”

Isaiah 39:1-2

Relief of Merodach-Baladan (left) from Babylon

The Danger of Flattery

DAY 30

Isaiah 39

Have you ever had someone flatter you in order to take advantage of you?

1. Why did Merodach-Baladan send Hezekiah gifts and letters (v. 1)? Could there have been ulterior motives?
2. What did Hezekiah show the envoys of the king of Babylon (v. 2)? Why did he do it?
3. What judgment did God put on Hezekiah for his folly (vs. 5-7)?
4. Though he had been corrected for a sin of pride, what was Hezekiah's response (v. 8)?

1. When you receive flattery, how do you feel?
(a) uncomfortable, (b) affirmed, (c) suspicious, (d) embarrassed.
2. When you compliment someone, are you always sincere? Why might you flatter someone you really don't like?
3. Have you ever divulged either a family or corporate secret to someone you shouldn't have? How did you feel about it afterwards?
4. In light of Hezekiah's puzzling response in verse 8, what steps have you taken to ensure that others enjoy peace and security after your death?

Merodach-Baladan was also known as Marduk-apal-iddina, the invader. Several times he had tried to break away from Assyrian domination. This visit was probably intended to coax Hezekiah into joining an anti-Assyrian invasion. Unfortunately, it succeeded only in revealing the tremendous wealth of the city, something later kings of Babylon would remember.

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