our Min

A STUDY THROUGH THE BOOK OF JUDGES

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In those days
there was no king;
all the people did
what was right
in their own eyes.

Judges 21:25

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The People of the Covenant

(ABRAHAM & MOSES)

WEEK ONE • JANUARY 2ND

Genesis 15:4-7

⁴ Then the word of the Lord came to him (Abram): "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." ⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

- ⁶ Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.
- ⁷ He also said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."

Deuteronomy 5:2

² The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. ³ It was not with our analcestors that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today. ⁴ The Lord spoke to

you face to face out of the fire on the mountain.

Deuteronomy 7:7-10

⁷ The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8 But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9 Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. 10 But those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction; he will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him.

Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times.

Martin Luther

It is not possible to understand or interpret the book of Judges without understanding the context. The Bible is the story of God and His pursuit of a relationship with his highest creation, man and woman, made in His image to be his stewards and representatives in His creation and part of His dominion

over all things.

In the face of the terrible curse of sin and rebellion against God's glory and righteousness He reveals a plan of salvation and redemption. It is a beautiful plan of restoration of relationship through covenantal love and promise. God puts this plan into action through a covenant with Abraham and then later through Moses and the descendants of Abraham in the people of Israel. The Book of Judges is part of this story of God's glory and reveals the character of God as a deliverer, faithful to His covenant, and able to work, by the Holy Spirit, in His sin-cursed people for His own glory and righteousness and for their good.

Discussion

What is the difference between a covenant and a contract? How does God's covenant with Abraham and Moses reveal His character, grace, and power?

What do these covenants promise, reveal, and expect? (Read Genesis 12 and 15, Exodus 19-20; 33-34, Deuteronomy 5-8)

How does understanding the covenants change the way we read Judges?

The Promised Land, Joshua, and Disobedience

WEEK TWO • JANUARY 9TH

Joshua 3:9-13

⁹ Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. ¹⁰ This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. 11 See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. 12 Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹³ And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the Lord—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap."

Joshua 24: 24-28

And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the Lord our God and obey him."
 On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws. ²⁶ And

Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the Lord.

²⁷ "See!" he said to all the people. "This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the Lord has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God."

²⁸ Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to their own inheritance.

Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.

Augustine of Hippo, Confessions The conquest of the land promised to Abraham, Moses, and all of Israel was a glorious time in the story of Israel. God had kept His promise and He gave power and strength to the people to fight against the wicked people in the land. The people of Israel were filled with hope, faith, and love for God. They were willing to obey and trust God and worship Him alone.

Joshua means "God is salvation". He was God's chosen servant to bring deliverance and salvation to the people in keeping God's covenant. Thousands of

years later another Son would be born in Bethlehem who would be named after Joshua, a son of Abraham, and His name would be Jesus (a derivative of the name Joshua).

Even though the Promised Land was given to Israel they did not fully obey, worship, or rest in God. Their sin would continue to test the covenantal relationship with God. Only Jesus could deliver not just a promised land (the new earth and Jerusalem) but also deliver a new heart for a people whose hearts were prone to wonder.

Discussion

What is the significance of the land as part of God's promise and covenant with the people of Israel?

How is Joshua a type of Messiah?

How is Jesus a fulfillment of Joshua's calling and purpose?

How does the conquest of the Promised Land set the stage for the story of the Judges?

How did the Israelites miss the purpose of the Promised Land? How do we miss the purpose of the promised Kingdom in Jesus Christ?

Disobedience Right off the Bat

JUDGES 1-2:5

WEEK THREE • JANUARY 16TH

Judges 1:27-36

²⁷ But Manasseh did not drive out the people of Beth Shan or Taanach or Dor or Ibleam or Megiddo and their surrounding settlements, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that land.

Judges 2:10-15

¹⁰ After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. ¹¹ Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. ¹² They forsook the Lord, the God of their ances-

tors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the Lord's anger ¹³ because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. ¹⁴ In his anger against Israel the Lord gave them into the hands of raiders who plundered them. He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. ¹⁵ Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the Lord was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress.

Pride is a person having too high an opinion of himself. Pride is the first sin that ever entered into the universe, and the last sin that is rooted out. Pride is the worst sin. It is the most secret of all sins. There is no other matter in which the heart is more deceitful and unsearchable. Alas, how much pride the best have in their hearts! Pride is God's most stubborn enemy! There is no sin so much like the devil as pride. It is a secret and subtle sin, and appears in a great many shapes which are undetected and unsuspected.

Iohnathan Edwards

The primary theme in the book of judges is one of rebellion and disobedience against God. The human tendency to try and live life apart from God is endemic. The primary evidence of rebellion against God is how we worship other gods or created things. This means we put trust and faith and seek glory in other things apart from God. The worship of

Israel became corrupted by the worship of the surrounding culture.

Jesus came to deliver us from false worship and to invite us to worship in Spirit and in truth (John 4).

When our thinking and behavior is corrupted by sinful pride, we have a hard time seeing ourselves and the world around us rightly through God's eyes.

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Discussion

How should we define disobedience against God? Why is this so serious? And why is God justified in bringing judgment against those who are disobedient?

Read Romans 1 and 2. What are the characteristics of sin, rebellion, pride, and false worship? Who is guilty of sin?

How does Jesus reveal sin in us? How does He deliver us from sin (Romans 3)?

Why Did Israel Need Judges?

JUDGES 2:6-3:6

WEEK FOUR • JANUARY 23RD

Judges 2:16-19

¹⁶ Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. 17 Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. They quickly turned from the ways of their ancestors, who had been obedient to the Lord's commands. 18 Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the Lord relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them. 19 But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.

Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.

Corrie ten Boom

Even though the book of Judges is a dark story full of failure, there is a thread of light and hope in this story. Even though sin is endemic, God never changes or fails. He acts to raise up men and women who place their faith in God and choose to worship and trust in Him above all else. These Judges are flawed and imperfect in their humanity and yet every judge is chosen by God to deliver His people in times of crisis. The judges reflect God's care and concern for His people. They reveal the fierce love

of God for His children. They show that God will always make a way in the darkness towards His overcoming light and life. This is why Jesus chose you and I for such a time as this. To be his representatives on earth. To bring light and hope to a despairing world. The book of Judges is a prophetic picture of God's ultimate plan to fill His people with His Spirit to be His chosen priesthood in Christ in this present dark world (Matthew 5; 1 Peter 2; 1 Corinthians 6:2; 2 Corinthians 5).

Discussion

Why did Israel need judges?

How does God reveal his purpose and plan through the judges?

Read Matthew 5:13-16; 1 Corinthians 6:2; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21. What do these passages teach us about our identity in Jesus?

In Jesus Christ, what is our role as His representatives in the world? How does this shape our identity and purpose in life? What is the significance of this in your life?

Discussion

What does it mean to cry out to the Lord? What does this look like in your life?

God Sends a Deliverer and Complete Rest

WEEK FIVE • JANUARY 30TH

Judges 3:9

⁹ But when they cried out to the Lord, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, who saved them.

Use thy duties, as Noah's dove did her wings, to carry thee to the ark of the Lord Jesus Christ, where only there is rest.

Isaac Ambrose (1737)

In the book of Judges there is a consistent cycle and pattern in the people. There is rebellion, judgment, repentance, and God's deliverance. This cycle repeats over and over through the whole story of Israel. If we are honest, this cycle continues in us today. The key to the story is God's faithfulness and unchanging character. The only way to experience God's deliverance is to humbly cry out for his help. Asking, surrendering, and trusting open the door to experiencing God. This is why Paul says the gospel of Jesus is a message of "faith from first to last".

Jesus said, "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden". The invitation to find our deliverance and rest in God remains unchanged from the days of the judges. We can learn from their cycle so we can avoid repeating the same cycle over and over. Jesus made a way to be delivered from sin and judgment and to be able to rest in him not only in this lifetime but for all of eternity.

How would you define repentance? How does a realization that we are in the wrong change our perspective and thinking about God, ourselves, and others?

Why is God's judgement and justice such an important and good aspect of His character? What would be the implication if there was no judgment from God? How does His right judgment give us hope?

Why is God's deliverance such an important and good aspect of His character? What if there was judgment but no deliverance? How does God's deliverance teach us about grace and mercy and salvation?

The Spirit of God

JUDGES 2:6-3:6

WEEK SIX • FEBRUARY 6TH

Judges 3:10

¹⁰ The Spirit of the Lord came on him, so that he became Israel's judge and went to war.

It is not as if we had to seek to have more of the Spirit: we have Him in the fulness of the gift as it is. It is rather the Holy Spirit who must have more of us. As we yield ourselves entirely to Him, He will entirely fill us. It is from WITHIN that the blessing must come: the fountain of living water is already there; the fountain has only to be open and every obstruction cleared and the water shall stream forth. It must spring from WITHIN.

Andrew Murray, Experiencing The Holy Spirit

As Christians we believe the Scriptures reveals God as One God in three persons. He is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The book of Judges is one of the books in the Old Testament that highlights the work and person of the Holy Spirit. God as trinity is mysterious to us, but it is also glorious to us in how it reveals the personal and relational character of God. He is not a distant unknowable God, rather He is near and able to be known and loved as a relational being. The Holy Spirit as a person in the Godhead is present in the lives of those whom God calls to be in relationship with Him. In Judges we are told the Spirit of the Lord comes upon the chosen deliverers that are chosen to lead Israel in times of crisis. Jesus himself is conceived in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit and is led by the Spirit into the wilderness. The

Spirit is present with Jesus throughout

His life on earth. In the book of Acts, the

early church receives the gift of the Holy

Spirit and His power and presence guides

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and forms the church to be the people of with His people. Without a king or the	
God in a broken world. In many ways, physical presence of Jesus, the Holy Spirit	
Judges is the Old Testament book of becomes the fulfilment of God's purpose	
Acts. God's plan and purpose is to dwell to dwell and guide His people.	
Diamasian	
Discussion —	
What are your past and current understandings of the Holy Spirit?	
Read John 14:15-31. What does Jesus teach us about the Holy Spirit?	
What is the evidence that you are being filled with the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5)?	

Discussion

What are some observations you make from the story of Ehud? What unique traits did he have that God used for His purpose and glory?

Ehud: God Uses Our Unique Traits

WEEK SEVEN • FEBRUARY 13TH

Judges 3:15

¹⁵ Again the Israelites cried out to the Lord, and he gave them a deliverer—Ehud, a left-handed man, the son of Gera the Benjamite.

"Presumption prevents the breakthrough to self-knowledge that would otherwise open the door to new levels of leadership."

Will Mancini, Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement

One of the traps we fall into as humans is to think everyone else is better than we are. We are painfully aware of our own flaws and weaknesses. The conflicting desires within us to be unique yet fit in with everyone else can drive us crazy! The beauty of the Holy Spirit's work and presence in our life is that He helps us see the gift he uniquely gives us for the common good of others (1 Corinthians 12). Only the Spirit of God can help us find this beautiful humble balance which is confidence in our uniqueness and desire to use what we are given for the good of others for a greater purpose.

The judges in the book of Judges are flawed people. Yet God's Spirit brings to life the gifts and traits of each person for a glorious purpose. Likewise, you have a glorious purpose that God has for you in this life. I believe you will discover this purpose in God when you allow His Spirit to help you find confidence in Him and then be able to give yourself to that purpose.

What are some unique traits/gifts that God has given you?

How have you seen God work through these traits in your life?

Could you write down or share in a few sentences what God's purpose and calling is in your life is?

Deborah *and* Jael: Women *of* Valor

JUDGES 4-5

WEEK EIGHT • FEBRUARY 20TH

Judges 4:4-5

⁴ Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading[a] Israel at that time. ⁵ She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided.

Judges 4:23-24

²³ On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites. ²⁴ And the hand of the Israelites pressed harder and harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed him.

"When obedience to God contradicts what I think will give me pleasure, let me ask myself if I love him."

"The fact that I'm a woman doesn't make me a different kind of Christian, but the fact that I'm a Christian does make me a different kind of woman."

Elizabeth Elliot

Part of the curse of sin in the world is a battle for power over others. This plays out many times in our culture as a conflict between men and women. Even more recently this battle is over the very definition of gender itself. The Bible has a very different way to approach this subject. It presents men and women made equally in the image of the Creator with two genders both endowed with His image, worth, and purpose. In God, there is no battle for power or identity because we recognize His Lordship, authority, and power over all things. His glory is the greatest good and our ultimate purpose. Both men and women struggle with the same sin curse and equally we need a de-

liverer to give us new hearts, identity, and a new way of thinking and being.

In the book of Judges, we have some inspiring examples of women filled with God's Spirit who lead, sacrifice, and glorify God in how they live out their purpose in Him. In Acts 2 we are told that the Spirit of God is being poured out on all people; men, women, young, and old. The church is made up of men and women who worship, serve, lead, sacrifice, and are filled with God's Spirit together. The new creation in Jesus is ordered according to His good design of men and women living as image bears of God himself representing His light, love, valor, character, and creativity in the world for His glory.

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Discussion

What do you observe about Deborah in the story?
What do you observe about Jael's story?
What can we learn from Deborah's leadership, inspiration, and encouragement of others? What stands out to you in her song?
Who are some women that have inspired and helped you in your life?

Gideon: God's Patience and Power in Spite of Our Own Flaws

JUDGES 6-8:32

WEEK NINE • FEBRUARY 27TH

Judges 6:11-12; 15

¹¹ The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. ¹² When the angel of the Lord ap-

peared to Gideon, he said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior."

¹⁵ "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

"I seek not a long life, but a full one, like you Lord Jesus."

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

Jim Elliot

Fear of failure or a lack of confidence in who we are is common to most of us. Gideon's story is so compelling because we can relate to his questions and doubts. The most encouraging truth of this story to me is that God is patient and never gives up on Gideon. In the same way, I don't believe that God has given up on me or you in spite of our own fears and failures!

The apostle Paul says, "God's power is made perfect in our weakness" (2 Corin-

thians 12:9). In this way, His grace wins the day in spite of it all. Gideon's army won the battle not because they were strong, but because they found strength in God in their weakness.

May we all, like Gideon, take steps of humble obedience and trust in God so He can accomplish His glorious purpose in us! This is the difference between seeing ourselves and others from our own eyes and seeing ourselves and others from God's point of view.

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Discussion

How have you experience fears or doubts about your abilities?

How does lack of confidence affect our lives?

How did God view Gideon? How does God view us?

What is the difference between self-confidence and confidence in our true God given identity?

What does obedience to God look like in your life with the truths from the Gideon story?

Abimelek: Leaders Using *Their Own* Power

JUDGES 8:33-9

WEEK TEN • MARCH 6TH

Judges 9:56

⁵⁶ Thus God repaid the wickedness that Abimelek had done to his father by murdering his seventy brothers. ⁵⁷ God also made the people of Shechem pay for all their wickedness. The curse of Jotham son of Jerub-Baal came on them.

Self-denial means knowing only Christ, and no longer oneself. It means seeing only Christ, who goes ahead of us, and no longer the path that is too difficult for us...Self-denial is saying only: He goes ahead of us; hold fast to him.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Unlike Gideon in the early part of his life as judge, Abimelek never surrenders his weakness to God. Instead he uses power as a means to try accomplish something for his own glory. This is a central theme of the whole story of mankind. From Adam and Eve, the Tower of Babel, the flood, religious leaders who opposed Jesus, to the final battle of Armageddon there has been a struggle for power. It is a mistake to think this is only a struggle between human beings, it is ultimately a struggle against God.

The only hope we have in this power struggle is the cross of Jesus. The cross not only exposes the shamefulness of our selfishness and desire for power it also overcomes this with a greater power. The power of self-sacrifice for the good of others. The cross is the juxtaposition of both perfect justice and unconditional love.

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Only this crux of the cross can free each of us and the whole world from the curse of the struggle for power which is ultimately idolatry.

This is why Jesus said we must take up "our cross" if we follow him. The Chris-

tian life is the exchanged life of self-denial and receiving God's life in us (Galatians 2:20). The way of Jesus frees us from the god of self-power to live in freedom in the glory of God in us and for others.

Discussion

What observations do you make from Abimelek's story?

How have you observed in yourself and others the use of power for our own glory? What is the result of this?

Read Philippians 2:1-11. How is the way of Jesus so different? How are we to follow the example of Jesus?

How does the cross change everything for us in our relationship with God and others?

Jephthah: Making Rash Vows

JUDGES 10:6-11

WEEK ELEVEN • MARCH 13TH

Judges 11:29-30

²⁹ Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites. ³⁰ And Jephthah

made a vow to the Lord: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, ³¹ whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."

History isn't just the story of bad people doing bad things. It's quite as much a story of people trying to do good things. But somehow, something goes wrong.

C. S. Lewis

This is maybe one of the saddest stories in the whole bible. The temptation to bribe or try and use God for our own gain is a clear and present danger. Jephthah is a cautionary tale for all of us!

How many of us pursue a career, relationships, health, or material possessions and we promise God that if He gives us success, we will serve him or give him a sacrifice in return? This is the folly of Japhthah and human pride. God will not be mocked! God can't be used for our ends. Our true purpose

and genuine joy and satisfaction can only come when we yield our life to God's ends.

Romans 12 says that God's invitation to us to be "living sacrifices". Instead of a sacrifice of folly for our own ends we are to give our lives to God as an act of worship. Jephthah received so much grace from God as an outcast given an opportunity to worship and honor God with his life. His rash vow led to his own sorrow and the sorrow of all Israel as they mourned the loss of a needless sacrifice.

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Discussion

What stands out to you in the story of Japhthah?

How do we use vows today in our culture? Why is it foolish to try and use God for our ends?

How is the God of the Bible different from other gods and idols? Other religions?

What is the difference between performance or appearement and true love and worship (John 4)?

Read Acts 5:1-11 for a very similar story. How is it similar or different than Japhtahah?

Where is God calling us to obey and trust Him in our lives today?

Samson: God Still Accomplishes His Plan in Spite of Struggles

JUDGES 13-16

WEEK TWELVE • MARCH 20TH

Judges 16:23-24; 30

²³ Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to celebrate, saying, "Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands."

²⁴ When the people saw him, they praised their god, saying,

"Our god has delivered our enemy into our hands,

the one who laid waste our land and multiplied our slain."

³⁰ Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.

The story of Samson always produced the most curiosity in me as a young boy growing up. His super strength and strange Nazarene vow intrigued me. Which boy has not wanted to be like Samson in strength and courage! His story is a drama of intrigue and betrayal. It is ultimately a tragedy.

In one sense we can all relate to Samson. We have a good side and a shadow side that we like to hide from others. All of us have appetites that will consume us if we give over to them. Most of us are better at hiding them than Samson, but we all have a temptation that will destroy us and others.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in Continued on page 38

To live by grace means to acknowledge my whole life story, the light side and the dark. In admitting my shadow side I learn who I am and what God's grace means.

Brennan Manning

Spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God". The upside-down way of God's kingdom is victory through humility and healing through confession. Freedom comes by admitting our sin and receiving grace and help from God. God

The amazing thing about grace is that it always wins the day. In Samson's story he cries out to God for help on his final day. His pride brought him low, but God's grace gave him victory in his lowest place. When we hit bottom

opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.	there is always the possibility of God redemption and deliverance!
Discussion —	
What stands out to you in Samson's story?	
In what ways can you relate to Samson? Ho	ow does Samson deal with his struggle?
Why is it so hard to admit or confess our st	truggles?
Are you open to doing an inventory of you temptations?	r life to see and recognize your sin, pride,
In what ways can we see evidence of grace broadly with the people of Israel?	even in the tragedy of Samson and more
What is the contrast between obeying God right in our own eyes?	l's will and trying to figure out what is
What parallels do we see in Israel's story at the United States?	nd our current culture we live in now in
What is God calling us to do during our tie	me?

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