

New Birth

You Must Be Born-Again

Jerry E. Smith, Ed.D.

Introduction

This teaching was done because of the Lord's concern for your eternal welfare. The most important issue of your earthly life is your eternal life, your eternal welfare. The word of God says your eternal welfare is not determined by anything other than the new birth. Many people are trusting their church or religious affiliation to save them. Many are trusting their good deeds or moral lifestyle to save them. Some are trusting in right thinking to save them. Some believe they will be eternally saved on the basis of having practiced a man-created belief system. Others believe salvation is achieved through proper meditation. Many believe human life ceases at death, hence the consideration of eternal welfare is a fanatic's folly!

However, the Bible clearly teaches that man does not cease to exist at the time of physical death. The Bible says you will transition from this life via physical death, face the judgment of God, and be eternally consigned to a place called Heaven or a place called Hell (Heb. 9:27). Furthermore, the Bible indicates that your eternal abode or welfare is determined by what you believe about Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Man has conceived many ways to achieve salvation for himself but God's word says every man-made method of getting right with God is as filthy rags in His eyes (Isaiah 64:6). You should not base your eternal welfare upon what any man or religious group says. You should base your eternal welfare upon what God says. The Bible is His word (2 Tim. 3:16). Trust your eternal welfare to its truth alone.

If you do not believe in God or if you sincerely question His existence, may I suggest you pray this simple prayer, "God, if you exist, would you reveal yourself and your truth to me? In the name of Jesus I pray." If you prayed sincerely, you may rest assured your prayer will be answered. God is real and your eternal welfare is at stake. Learning the truth is the wisest thing you will ever do. God desires that none should perish, suffer eternal damnation, but that all would be saved and spend eternity with Him. "The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent" (2 Peter 3:9-10 NLT).

If you are interested in immediately "getting to the bottom line," you may go to page eight and pray the Prayer of Salvation found there. If you are motivated to understand what the Bible says about God's original plan for man, what happened to disrupt that plan, and why man must now be born-again or saved, please study the intervening pages. As you read, verify the scripture references for yourself. My goal is for you to know the truth. Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32) This study may be the most important one you have ever read. Responding to its teaching will change your life eternally.

The New Birth

Jesus said, "Ye must be born again." He made this statement to Nicodemus, a very religious man, a leader in his church, and a prominent member of his community. Jesus reinforced His statement with these words, "Except a man be born of water and

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of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Jesus cut right through the rhetoric of Nicodemus. He said, Nicodemus your knowledge of God's word is not enough. Nicodemus, your membership in the church of the Pharisees is not enough. Nicodemus, even your leadership in the church is not enough. Nicodemus, your stature in the community is not enough. Nicodemus, you do not need more knowledge, religion, success, or good works. You need the new birth. You need to be born-again. You need to be born from above by the power of the Holy Spirit.

These penetrating words of Jesus challenged Nicodemus. Nicodemus said, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:1-7). In other words Nicodemus, the flesh can only give birth to that which is flesh and only the Spirit can accomplish the spiritual birth. The word Spirit is capitalized in this text. This means the Spirit referred to is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. Jesus is explaining that just as each of us has experienced a fleshly, flesh and blood, natural birth into this world there is also a spiritual birth available to us. And, this spiritual birth is accomplished by a spiritual being, the Spirit of God. Just as flesh gives birth to flesh, the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

In order to understand why it is necessary for man to have two births, it is necessary to understand how man was created. We learn this in the book of Genesis, the book of beginnings. In Genesis 1:26-27 God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ... So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them." "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). From these scriptures we discover that man is not just a flesh and blood body created out of the dust (elements) of the earth. Man is flesh and blood but man is also spirit. How do we know? The Bible tells us so!

Man was created in the image or likeness of God and God is Spirit (Gen. 1:26, John 4:24). If man was created like God then man must be spirit because God is Spirit. The words translated spirit in the Bible have the underlying concept of breath or wind. What did Genesis 2:7 say? First, God formed the body of man from the elements of the earth. Secondly, God breathed into this flesh and blood body the breath of life and man became a living soul, a living being. But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding (Job 32:8). It is the spirit of man that gives life to the body because the body without the spirit is dead (James 2:26).

What is the outcome then? Man is flesh and man is spirit. Therefore, we can understand why Jesus addressed the need of Nicodemus' spirit. It was obvious to Jesus that Nicodemus had been born of the flesh. If a person is physically alive, he has been born of the flesh and has natural life. But, Jesus wanted to emphasize the importance of the spirit of man. Yes, Nicodemus, you are alive in the flesh, but are you alive in the spirit? Do you have spirit life?

You might say, "Well, if God breathed His Spirit of life into man in the beginning then man must still have spiritual life." But, we need to consider the rest of the story. In Genesis 2:17 we discover that God placed man and woman in a beautiful place filled

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with living creatures, gorgeous vegetation, trees, pure springs, and rivers of water. This place was called the Garden of Eden, a place of unimaginable beauty and abundant provision. Man's responsibility was to dress and keep the garden; to be God's steward over the garden, the earth and everything in it. God's plan for man was very good. Man, this flesh and blood creature, given spiritual life by God was to live in a state of health and well being, overseeing the earth as God's representative. Man was to have unbroken fellowship with his Creator as he carried out the Creator's will on the earth.

The eternal God desired for man to live eternally. The only requirement placed upon man was that he live in obedience to his Creator. In particular, he was warned not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). God said, "In the day you eat of it, you will die." You probably know the rest of the story. Man chose to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He disobeyed his God. When man disobeyed God (sinned), death entered his experience. Man was cut off from the Breath of Life, the Spirit of God. Man's fellowship with God was broken. Man died spiritually the instant sin, disobedience to God, entered his experience. Physical death for Adam, the man through whom sin came, arrived 930 years later (Gen. 5:5). Since the time of Adam, the affects of sin on mankind have reduced his life expectancy to a few years. As the Apostle Paul said, "The wages of sin is death..." (Rom. 6:23).

Originally man had the gift of eternal life, the Life of God, resident within. But, sin separated man from this spiritual life. Separation from the Spirit of God, the Spirit of life, is called spiritual death. Spiritual death entered man's experience through the disobedience (sin) of Adam. Because Adam is the progenitor of the human race, spiritual death has been passed on to all mankind. The Bible says it this way: "Wherfore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men..." (Rom. 5:12). "For as in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). Since the time of Adam, to be born of the flesh is to be born into spiritual death. When Adam disobeyed God (sinned), he passed from life to death, from righteousness to unrighteousness, from imperishable to perishable, from saved to unsaved. To be born once is to be born unrighteous, perishable, unsaved, and dead. Not Good!

The fruit of man's birth from righteousness to unrighteousness, or sinfulness, becomes quite evident as we continue in the book of Genesis. Immediately after his disobedience to God (sin), man died spiritually. He lost intimate relationship with God. He suffered spiritual separation from God. Man became a sinner and many symptoms of sin began to manifest. Some of these symptoms were hiding from God (fear), gaining knowledge of evil, anger, jealousy, refusal to accept responsibility (passing the buck), wickedness, rebellion, murder, and physical death. Sin and death infiltrated the entire human family. Furthermore, man's disobedience brought a curse on creation itself (Genesis 3:16-19). That's the reason thistles and weeds come easily but vegetables and flowers require the sweat of your brow!

Over a season of time, sin and its accompany curses, caused mankind to degenerate to the point that God's heart was grieved. "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only on evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart" (Gen. 6:5-6 NASV).

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This passage does not mean that God no longer loved mankind. It means that He loved mankind so much that He would rather man had not been created than to have him live in this fallen sinful state with all its wicked consequences. God is not against man because of his sin. Rather, He is for man, for you and me, against sin. Because of His great love for mankind, immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, God began to search for them saying, "Where are you? As you may remember, they were hiding from His presence as sinful man does to this day (Gen 3:8-9).

After God found Adam and Eve. He prophesied a plan of redemption; a plan to redeem (purchase or buy back) mankind from sin. He announced a plan to bring His life back into man's spirit, a plan of regeneration of the spirit and forgiveness of the sins which resulted from spiritual death. God said He would accomplish this redemption through the "seed of woman" (Gen 3:15, Isaiah 7:14). In the meantime, in order to re-establish fellowship with them, God covered Adam and Eve with skins of innocent animals (Gen. 3:21). Applying the blood of innocent animals to cover the sin of His people was the pattern throughout the Old Testament.

Thousands of years later, in confirmation of His word, the seed of woman is miraculously born in Bethlehem of Judea. His name is Jesus. He is God's answer to sin and spiritual death. Jesus is God's plan for giving life back to man. "For God so loved the world (all mankind), that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish (suffer eternal spiritual death) but have everlasting life (John 3:16). Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for our sins (I John 4:10). But, God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners (spiritually dead), Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened (given life to us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in Heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4-6). God chose Jesus, the One through whom all things were made, to redeem His creation from sin and its consequences, which include physical and spiritual death (John 1:1-17).

Jesus is unique in human history because man's need for a savior was unique in human history. In order to redeem man, the Redeemer had to be man. In order to redeem man from sin, the Redeemer had to be without sin. In order to redeem man from spiritual death, the Redeemer had to have spiritual life. Jesus had to be born of the flesh to have a flesh and blood body like ours. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me (Heb. 10:5). Also, He had to be born of God to have spiritual life, the life of God. The dilemma: how do we get a flesh and blood man born into the earth without the sinful seed of man? God's answer: the virgin birth, the seed of woman! God did a miracle! He found a woman who would receive His word in faith, the virgin Mary. God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary saying, "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God, And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shall bring forth a son, and shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people their sins" (Luke 1:30-31, Mt. 1:20-21).

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Jesus was the first, and only person, to be born into the earth without a flesh and blood father, without the seed of sin and death. He was not born of the corruptible seed of man but by the incorruptible seed of God's word (I Peter 1:23, John 1:14). Because He was born of God, He has the life of God. "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). Because He was born of God, He is the Son of God. Because He was born of God, He was untainted by sin. The seed of sin, which is in the blood of man from the time of Adam, was not passed to Jesus. "Forasmuch, as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold... But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19). The blood of Christ is the blood of God, not the blood of man. Consequently, His blood is incorruptible. Jesus is without sin in the flesh and He is without death in the spirit. He is alive physically and He is alive spiritually. He is man and He is God. He is Emmanuel, God with us (Mt. 1:23). Therefore, He is fully qualified to redeem man from sin, which resulted in death. This is why the Apostle Paul said, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). "For as by one man's (Adam's) disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One (Jesus) shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19).

While we were yet sinners, God demonstrated His love for us by creating a plan of redemption. This redemptive plan enables man to be birthed from sinfulness back to righteousness, from perishable back to imperishable, from corruptible back to incorruptible, from unsaved back to saved, from spiritual death back to spiritual life. Through this redemption, degenerate man could be regenerated by the Spirit of God. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4-7). Because of the love and grace of his Creator, man could again have the life of God breathed into him.

Like Nicodemus, you might ask, "How do I obtain this spiritual regeneration from death back to life and be born-again?" God made it very simple. He said, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart (inner man) that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation... for whoever will call upon the name of the Lord (Jesus) will be saved" (Rom. 10:9-10, 12).

Because God loves you so much, He chose to favor and bless you with the gift of salvation, the new birth. God's favor and blessing toward you is called grace. Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast." Your salvation (*new birth*) is not based upon your efforts but rather, upon the efforts of Jesus. The Bible says it this way, "He (God) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin on your behalf, that you might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

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We might say it like this: God loved you so much that He sent Jesus, His sinless Son, to bear your sin and its consequences thereby enabling you to have right standing with Him. By believing with your heart (inner man) and confessing with your mouth that God, through Christ Jesus, has done this for you; you are saved, birthed from death to life. You are born of the Spirit. You are born again. You are transformed from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive. You receive eternal life. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life..." (John 3:36). As you repent of your sins and confess heartfelt faith in what Jesus has accomplished for you, the Holy Spirit of God miraculously transforms your spirit from death to life. As previously mentioned, "He saved us according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:4-7).

When you act upon God's word, you can rest assured that He will do what He has promised. Your assurance of salvation is based upon His word. God always performs His word (Isaiah 55:11). The scripture also tells us that we will have a knowing on the inside that we are born again, that we have right standing with God. "The Spirit (Holy Spirit) Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16). Your salvation experience is guaranteed by the truthfulness of God's word and confirmed by the witness of His Holy Spirit in your spirit. You will know in your "knower" that you are a King's kid!

At this point in our discussion, you might be wondering about the blood of Christ. After all, the scripture says "we are not redeemed (purchased from sin/sinfulness) with perishable things like silver and gold ... but with the precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1Peter 1:18-19 NASV). In order to understand the role of the blood in the redemption process, we must return to the beginning, the book of Genesis. Remember Genesis 6:5? "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of as man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart (inner man, spirit/soul) was only evil continually." As we have already learned, when sin entered man's experience, his heart was constituted sinful. Spiritual death, the removal of the sinless nature of God from the spirit/heart of man produced a heart problem. The resulting sinful heart of man urged him to commit acts of sin. As I heard someone say, "Man is not a sinner because he sins. He sins because he is a sinner." In other words, acts of sin are the fruit of the sinful heart of unsaved man.

As we have discussed, God the Father chose the method of Holy Spirit regeneration to birth the spirit (*heart*) of man from sinfulness to righteousness. He chose blood to deal with the acts of sin which are the fruit of a sinful heart. He chose the blood to cleanse us from the guilt of sinful behavior. God initiated this plan in the Garden of Eden immediately after Adam and Eve sinned and died spiritually. "And the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21 NASV). After Adam and Eve died spiritually through disobedience to God, He covered their sin by sacrificing innocent animals, shedding their blood, and covering them with their skins. The sins of Adam and Eve were covered by the shedding of innocent blood. The innocent atoned for the guilty. The innocent suffered and died for the guilty. This was the first "type" of God's method for covering the sin of man. Between God's holiness and man's sinfulness there was the blood of the innocent. This covering of blood

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allowed a holy God to restore fellowship with sinful man. God declares there is death in sin but life in the blood. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement" (Lev. 17:11).

Throughout the Old Covenant, God followed this pattern. The blood of sacrificial animals, particularly the lamb, was used to cover (atone for) the sin of man. "And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22). It should be understood that the blood of sacrificial animals was not able to change the sinful nature of man but was simply a covering for sin. However, when Jesus came as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world; His blood was able to obtain eternal redemption from sin. The Bible says it this way. "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place (God's eternal Heavenly altar), having obtained eternal redemption for us... How much more shall the blood of Christ Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:12-14, John 1:29).

Indeed, with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, you have been redeemed. All those former works, which produced death, are cleansed, remitted, washed away by His blood. "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1: 7). "Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." The Amplified Bible says it this way, "... We are now justified, acquitted, made righteous and brought into right relationship with God by Christ's blood" (Rom. 5:9). "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). Our loving Father God chose to remove our transgressions through the blood of Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. Just as the sin of Adam and Eve was covered by the blood of the innocent, our sin has been more than covered; it has been remitted through the blood of the innocent Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin (Rom. 4:8).

Not only has the blood of Jesus cleansed us from past sin, it provides ongoing cleansing. "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). As we walk in obedience to God's Word and His Spirit we are continually cleansed by the blood of Jesus. However, all we Christians commit acts of sin in thought, word, or deed by omission or commission. None of us "Christ-like-ones" is Christ-like all the time! God anticipated our problem and made a way of escape. "If we (Christians) say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9). How does He cleanse us? Again, it is by the blood of Jesus. The lifestyle of the Christian should be one of quickly confessing our sins. Confessing our sins places them under the cleansing blood of Jesus thereby removing them from our account. Indeed, "Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered" (Rom. 4:7).

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When you repent of your sins and confess heartfelt faith in Jesus as the Son of God, that He bore your sin, that He shed His blood to redeem you from that sin; God the Father by the power of His Holy Spirit regenerates you. He makes you a new spiritual creation in Christ Jesus. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new (2 Cor. 5:17). The Spirit of Jesus comes to reside within. Indeed, Christianity is Christ-in-me-ity (Col. 1:27).

This is the dynamic of the new birth. It is the only way any person may receive eternal life and enter the kingdom of God. As we learned from the account of Nicodemus, you cannot become a son of God by being the member of a religious organization. You cannot become a son of God through baptism. You cannot become a son of God by taking sacraments. You cannot become a son of God by completing catechism or being confirmed. You cannot become a son of God by being a leader in the church. You cannot become a son of God by being a Bible scholar. You cannot become a son of God by doing good deeds. You cannot become a son of God by being a good person. To become a son of God, you must be born of God, born anew by His Spirit. Therefore, the experience is called being "born-again."

The new birth, resulting from repentance of sin and confession of sincere faith in Jesus, is the only way into the family of God, the kingdom of God. This is why Jesus said, I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me (John 14:6). This is why Jesus told Nicodemus, You must be born-again. Unless you are born-again you will not enter the kingdom of God.

One can only be born-again (become a child of God and receive the gift of eternal life) by confessing heartfelt faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As the apostle Paul said, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23, 10:9-10, 13).

Prayer of Salvation

If you will pray this simple prayer from your heart, you will be saved and receive the gift of eternal life. God's word guarantees it!

God, I believe that Jesus Christ is your only begotten Son. I confess that I have sinned and need a Savior. I believe Jesus shed His blood that I might be forgiven and cleansed of my sin. I believe in my heart and confess with my mouth that Jesus was crucified on the cross as the penalty for my sin. I believe You raised Jesus from the dead that I might have eternal life in Him. Jesus, I ask you to be Savior and Lord of my life. Thank you Father for birthing me into your family by the regenerating power of your Holy Spirit. Thank you for saving me and giving me eternal life in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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If you prayed this prayer sincerely, you can rest assured that God, by His Spirit, has birthed you into His family. You are one of His kids! Here is the scriptural assurance. The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself and the witness is this, that God has given us (you) eternal life, and this life is in the Son. He who has the Son has the life. The Spirit (*Holy Spirit*) Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God". These things I have written to you in order that you may know that you have eternal life" (Rom. 8:16, 10:13; 1 John 5:10-13).

If you have followed these scriptural steps to salvation through faith in Jesus, there is joy in Heaven over your decision (Luke 15:7). You are now a child of God. You have become a partaker of His divine nature. You are a recipient of all His exceeding great and precious promises pertaining to life and godliness. Also, you are what the Bible refers to as a babe in Christ. In order to grow and succeed as a Christian, it is essential that you make these commitments: (1) Obtain a Bible and begin to study it, especially the New Testament. Just as natural food sustains you physically, God's word sustains you spiritually. (2) Affiliate with a local Bible-believing church. As a new believer, you need the fellowship of other Christians. You need sound Bible teaching and pastoral care.

Just as the angels in Heaven are rejoicing over your salvation, I want to rejoice also. Please notify me of your decision. God has many wonderful gifts for His children. As a new Christian, you particularly need to receive the gift of Holy Spirit baptism.

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