
The Daughters of Jerusalem and Jesus' Crucifixion

SCOTT HOEZEE

It has been said that each of the four gospels in the New Testament are essentially passion narratives with long introductions. In other words, the cross and Jesus' death at Golgotha were what the whole story had been about from the beginning. So, everything else we read in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is a prologue to get us to that cross. Well, today on *Groundwork*, in our Lenten stations of the cross series, we finally do arrive at the Place of the Skull. Just before arriving there, Jesus has some interesting things to say to the women of Jerusalem. So, stay tuned as we dig into these Bible passages.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is now program number five in this seven-part stations of the cross series. There are fourteen stations in all; and today, we will arrive at the ninth and the tenth stations. In the previous four programs, we went from Gethsemane to Jesus' betrayal and arrest; we saw Jesus before the Jewish Sanhedrin, who condemned Jesus, even as outside of the courtroom, Peter denied even knowing Jesus and he did it three times. Next, we saw Jesus before Pontius Pilate and then being whipped and fitted out with a crown of thorns by Roman soldiers. Finally, in the previous program, we saw Jesus take up the crossbar and is later helped to carry that heavy wooden beam by a man named Simon of Cyrene.

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So, now let's read what constitutes the ninth station of the cross in these verses from Luke 23, where it reads: ²⁶As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. ²⁸Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' ³⁰Then 'they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"' ³¹For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

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So, this is a rather curious development. So, Jesus is on his way to die, he has already been roughed up and beaten up and whipped mercilessly. He has to look like a car accident victim by now; and yet, in the midst of all that, Jesus stops long enough to deliver kind of a mini sermon almost to the ones he addresses as: the daughters of Jerusalem; and Darrell, what he has to say to them is chilling.

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I mean, in this situation, it seems kind of out of place for him to stop right here and have a message to talk to the daughters of Jerusalem about, and he actually appropriates their weeping and says: This is not what you are supposed to be weeping about. There is something bigger and something worse that is coming that you probably need to save your tears for. That is not something you would expect Jesus to say on his way to the cross.

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Jesus is always saying surprising things, and this is one of them. We could point out, too, Darrell, that although the focus here is on the women who were present, they really do stand in for all of Jerusalem and all of the Jewish people generally; but we are told they are weeping and mourning for Jesus, and that might be a little hard to square with the fact that only a little while earlier, when Pilate gave the crowds the option to release Jesus or a thug named Barabbas, they chose Barabbas; and when Pilate asked what they would do

with Jesus, they shouted, seemingly with one voice: Crucify him! The Gospel writers are pretty consistent in depicting the Jewish people as kind of one, unified mass of people. I mean, you do not read that only *some* or only a *few* shouted to crucify, but they all did; and yet, here are some women who are said to be weeping and mourning for Jesus. So, maybe that is an indication that not everybody was behind the effort to get Jesus crucified. These women seemed to know that maybe an unjust thing is taking place.

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I am glad that there is a distinction because you cannot just sweepingly say all the Jews, every single one of them, were yelling crucify in this situation. But in this situation, we are seeing that there are people who may have noticed the brokenness in the system. There is something that is not right and they are weeping for Jesus; and in this situation, they may have felt only that is all they could do. I mean, it is the Roman government. They have all the power. What else can you do other than to weep? And they thought that that was the appropriate thing to do at the moment; and Jesus again appropriates that weeping into something that is more important for his point that he is trying to teach them.

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Jesus basically tells the women that they were lamenting all the wrong things. What was happening to Jesus had to take place. Horrible though it was, this was all part of God's redemptive plan. Jesus' death and later his resurrection were the only way to make atonement for the sins of the human race. So: Don't cry for me, Jesus as much as says; and why not? Because there was something much *worse* to weep over, and that was the failure of God's chosen people to recognize their own Messiah when he arrived.

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When you said the failure of God's chosen people to recognize their Messiah, there is much worse to weep over...when you said that, I thought about the Triumphal Entry, because there is a passage in one of the

gospels that has Jesus weeping while that is happening; and then, he also cries: Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I long to bring you with me as a mother hen brings in her chicks, but you are not willing; and he is weeping for Jerusalem then, before all of this. So, I think this situation...when you brought that up, it reminded me of what he is weeping about, and now he is letting them know that if they don't recognize the Messiah, that is the most tragic thing ever. Not the part that: I going to go die right now. I already have a plan for that; but the fact that you did not recognize me when I was here, that is the thing you should be weeping about.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; Jerusalem is going to pay a heavy price for rejecting the Christ of God. Again, as you just said, this has come up often in Luke. In Luke Chapter 13, Jesus told a parable about a well-planted and well-tended fig tree that just never bore any fruit. The owner of the fig tree grove gave that tree every opportunity to sprout figs, but it never did; and so, at the end of the parable, the owner has the tree cut down and thrown into the fire; and that was clearly a symbol of what would happen to Israel and to Jerusalem for its failure to bear spiritual fruit and to recognize the hour of the coming of God's Messiah. You just mentioned Luke 19, everybody is whooping it up when Jesus comes to Jerusalem on that donkey's colt, but Jesus, in the midst of the party, starts to cry. He predicts the destruction of the temple, the suffering of the people; the suffering, tragically, even of little children. In Luke 21, two chapters earlier, he again predicted the desolation of Jerusalem, and now here in Luke 23, he does it again; and he tells them that there are worse things going to happen. In fact, Jesus utters kind of a reverse beatitude here...

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In Jesus' day, women who could have children were seen as blessed, and women who couldn't have children were seen as almost cursed, but now Jesus blesses those who never had children; and why is that a blessing?

Because those mothers won't have to watch their children suffer and die, because that is going to happen, tragically enough.

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Yes; and Jesus' warning of the future destruction is happening and he doesn't even have time to get into all of things that are going to happen, but what he does say is that there will be a time...where he is quoting Hosea 10...they will say: Mountains fall on us and hills cover us; because of the desolation of what is going to come; and because he is literally on his way to die, he does not have time to give them the details on all of that stuff; but he is saying that that will be the time when you will be really weeping; and those who have children will be weeping because their children that they have borne will also endure this stuff. It is really, really powerful.

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Yes; you mention that the quote is from Hosea 10, and in Hosea, the reason the Babylonians are going to come and destroy the temple *that* time was because Israel had fallen into idolatry. Now, Jesus invokes those same words when the people fail to embrace Jesus as their Messiah. So, it really is a rather bracing moment in Jesus' journey to Golgotha. At the very moment that you would think, Darrell, that Jesus would appreciate all the sympathy he could get, he rejects it and points ahead to something that in the end would be far, far worse. Again, as we said earlier, just chalk this up to yet another of the oodles of moments in Jesus' ministry when he said things you never thought he would say.

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Segment 2

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And let's now go back to Luke 23, and pick up right where we left off, verse 32: Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. ³³When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. ³⁵The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One." ³⁶The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." ³⁸There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

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So, here we are Darrell, the Place of the Skull; apparently it was a common place where the Romans crucified people, and its rocky outcropping somehow resembled a human skull. We call this place Golgotha from the Hebrew word *gulgoleth*, which means head or skull, or we call it Calvary, from the Latin word *calvarium*, which also means skull.

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DARRELL DELANEY

And this is the place where most of the crucifixions that they did happened. It is up on a hill so everyone can look up and see it. It is a spectacle, like they did it. It is kind of like the death penalty out in front, like an electric chair or something like that. It is right out in front, where everybody can see it. If you do mess with the Roman government, this will happen to you; and you've got Jesus going up there, even though he is innocent; he is going up there and there are two criminals, on his left and on his right, in this situation.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; crucifixions like this...they wanted this public display. It was just like you said, Darrell, like a giant public billboard: Obey the Caesar and his minions or this is where you will end up. Crucifixion was grotesque and barbaric at every level. Men hung naked on those crosses, exposed in every sense of the word; and it was all meant to send a message: Behave or else. As you said, Darrell, just as a reminder of how routine crucifixions had become, on this day, Jesus was not even the only one. There were two other alleged criminals who were on the execution schedule that day as well. I mean, this just happened all the time; and

so, yes, they put the criminals on either side of Jesus, which kind of draws your focus to that cross in the middle, Darrell, and the Son of God impaled on it.

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Yes; so, what is interesting is the fact that Jesus is up there, and you've got the thief on the left; you've got the thief on the right...the two criminals...and then they hear Jesus say: Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. I think it is really powerful that Jesus would utter such a statement in the situation that he is in. Maybe unpack that a little bit.

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These thuggish soldiers had done this maybe more times than they could count, but in this case, on a far more important level, they had no idea what they were doing. They did not know they were murdering the very Son of Almighty God. They did not know they were putting spikes through the hands and feet of a man who was holy, righteous, sinless, perfect; and yet, somehow, from the depths of his agony, Jesus actually took pity...not on himself...but on *them*.

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So, we see Jesus' pattern here. When the daughters of Jerusalem we talked about in an earlier segment, he does not take their sympathy. He said: Don't weep for me. Weep for what is going to happen next. But then, in this situation, he is also decentering again, where he is not allowing the pity to be on him, but he is actually pitying the people who were doing this. They were instruments of the darkness that is around them. They are the ones who were putting Jesus to death; and he is telling the Father: Don't put it on their account. I am dying for that very reason; I am dying for those sins right there; so, have mercy on them.

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And this, of course, one of the well-known, seven last sayings of Jesus on the cross. We will pick up some more of those in the remaining two programs in this stations of the cross series here on *Groundwork*. We have mentioned before on *Groundwork* that no single gospel account has all seven sayings. Three of the sayings are right here in Luke 23, and they occur only in Luke. Another three are found only in John 19; only one saying: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" occurs in two places: In Matthew 27 and also in Mark 15; but, as you said, Darrell, in any event, Jesus' very first words after being nailed to a spit of wood were appropriately words of grace and mercy. Since grace and mercy are the very reason why Jesus was on that cross in the first place, that only makes sense.

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It does make sense. I think it is also interesting, because you mentioned that all seven sayings are not in one book, but they are in the group of the gospels, but I think that it is important that the gospels all slow down and get this moment where he is on the cross crucified and died in every gospel. So, even though the sayings are not all in one gospel, in each gospel, there is an account of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

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So, he speaks words of grace and mercy in the middle of his agony, and how do the people respond? Insult, mockery again. What great sport it is, you know: A man who saved others unable to save himself now apparently. They even tacked up a sign over Jesus' head: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS, and that was

mockery, too; because, you know, a true king...a true Son of God would never end up on a cross. This is amplified if we go to Matthew 27:39: Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads ³⁹and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” ⁴¹In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. ⁴²“He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe him. ⁴³He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

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Yes; so, in this situation...we talked about this in the other segment, but it is even more so in this segment...that it looks like evil is winning; it looks like Rome, in their complete power, is over Jesus right now. People are mocking him; people are shaking their heads; they are disappointed. They are like: Hey, he can save all these people. He couldn’t save himself. And everybody has something to say about this situation. Unfortunately, what they are saying shows they completely miss the reason why he is doing it, and his mission. They did not understand what he was doing, why he had to do it; but we know that, when we read back on this, he did it for us, and he did it for the sins of the world.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, in this situation...we talked about this in the other segment, but it is even more so in this segment...that it looks like evil is winning; it looks like Rome, in their complete power, is over Jesus right now. People are mocking him; people are shaking their heads; they are disappointed. They are like: Hey, he can save all these people. He couldn’t save himself. And everybody has something to say about this situation. Unfortunately, what they are saying shows they completely miss the reason why he is doing it, and his mission. They did not understand what he was doing, why he had to do it; but we know that, when we read back on this, he did it for us, and he did it for the sins of the world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Some of us might remember years back, a movie that was based on a book titled *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and this is it—this is the last temptation: Come down from the cross. You know, in the first program of this series, we followed Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane, and we suggested in that program that the devil was active in that garden. Maybe that is why the disciples kept falling asleep; the devil wanted to isolate Jesus, tempt him to not drink that cup that he was praying about; and certainly, Satan is behind all these mocking words, tempting Jesus to snap his fingers and leap down from the cross: “Save yourself,” they cried in grim and vicious glee...and you know, Darrell, you have to think Jesus thought about it. Let’s admit, the people jeering at Jesus had a point. I mean, if Jesus had managed to leap off the cross; if he made the nails and the ropes disappear and he stood in front of those people without a mark on him, yes; people would have come to believe in him, Darrell; but unfortunately, there really would not be anything to believe in, then, would there be?

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DARRELL DELANEY

No, there wouldn’t; because, I mean, he came to die on the cross and pay for the sins of the whole world. Salvation would be a mockery. Salvation would be hollow; it would be like what Paul said: If we stood for Christ and we lived according to the way he wanted us to live, and he didn’t actually have a death, burial and resurrection to atone for the sins in our lives, we would die for nothing. This moment right here, it is the inescapable moment that needs to happen.

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In just a few moments, we need to wrap up this program, and we are going to ponder a few aspects of the tenth station of the cross and its meaning for our lives today. So, stay tuned.

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Segment 3

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Darrell, in the next and final two programs in this stations of the cross series, we are going to look at a few other things that happened on the cross; and then the second and the last station will be the death itself; but for now, let’s take a step back and ponder what all actually happened through this crucifixion and its abiding

meaning for us yet today. You alluded to this a few minutes ago, Darrell, but let's pick up these words from the Apostle Paul in Galatians 2.

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DARRELL DELANEY

Picking up at verse 19, it says: For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. ²⁰I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Now, as we may recall, Paul wrote to the Christians living in the region of Galatia after hearing that many, if not most of the Galatians had fallen prey, Darrell, to a false teaching. So, when Paul lived in Galatia, he preached the pure Gospel...the good news...we are saved by grace alone through faith alone because of the utterly perfect and complete saving sacrifice and the work of Jesus. What's more, Jesus did what none of us could do: He was an innocent man who sacrificed his life for guilty people. He died so that we could gain life, but once Paul left that area...and has often seemed to have happened, Darrell, he was followed by a group of false teachers, and near as we can tell, their message went something like this: Hey, Paul told you many good things, but he didn't tell you quite everything. The truth is, Jesus got the salvation ball rolling, but now it is up to you to finish the work; so, you need to observe kosher food laws, follow all of God's rules; if you are a male, you need to be circumcised, as scripture tells us. If you do all that, then you will for sure be saved.

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DARRELL DELANEY

So then, Paul comes with the pure gospel: You are saved by grace through faith, justified by Christ's work finished alone; and then afterwards, these people come in and they say: You gotta follow the law of Moses; you gotta do all these things. They are adding extra things, but we need to remember that those people are not Jews; so they didn't grow up with all those different regulations. So, you are saying: Now I have to actually

act as if I am a Jew, *and* believe in Jesus? I don't think that that was the priority or the true essence of the gospel, which is why Paul was so upset when he talked to the Galatians when he heard about this.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; it reminds me of that horrible and heretical tee shirt I once saw: a picture of Jesus on the cross, and the slogan was: Jesus did his best; you do the rest. No, no, no, no. That's what they were thinking in Galatia, that we have to get ourselves across the salvation finish line; and Paul went ballistic. We have thirteen letters of Paul, Darrell, in the New Testament, and the letter to the Galatians is the only one of the thirteen that has no thanksgiving section at the start of the letter. Otherwise, Paul always said to the Romans or the Philippians or the Ephesians: I give thanks to God for you all the time. Your love and faithfulness are known all over the world. So glad for your partnership in the gospel. Things like that, but not in Galatians. He just writes: Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ to the church in Galatia: You fools! You idiots! Who bewitched you to believe in another gospel, which is no gospel at all? I mean, Paul was hot under the collar. What does it really boil down to, Darrell? Why is Paul so mad? What are they, in essence, doing?

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DARRELL DELANEY

Well, Paul is actually upset because they are literally gutting the essence of the Gospel. So, if Jesus needed help...if the cross and his resurrection were not enough to save us and we had to do all these extra things, then what is the point, if we have to add extra things? So, you talked about the shirt. I have heard in my time: God helps those who help themselves; and I am like: That is nowhere in the scriptures...

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At all; and so, that is part of the situation that they are being told in Galatia, in essence; and Paul has to get in front of that quickly, because it can squelch the real gospel.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; I mean, right; you just said it. What made Paul so angry is they were gutting the cross of its power and its beauty. If the cross wasn't necessary... Wow! What a horrible thing that is to think of: The Son of God died for nothing? I mean, let that sink in. That would be one of the most horrible prospects to consider in the world; and as Paul continues to point this all out, we get that famous line we just heard from Galatians 2: I have been crucified with Christ. Of course, that was not literally true for Paul, or any of us; but spiritually, when we are baptized, our old self dies...our old self drowns in the waters of baptism; and in that moment...in our baptisms...we die along with Jesus on the cross. In that moment, the righteousness, goodness, and yes, the very life of Jesus becomes ours. So, Paul writes: It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. Darrell, this is what we call "Union with Christ."

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DARRELL DELANEY

It's a beautiful thing; and he not only writes about it here, he writes about it in Romans Chapter 6, where he talks about being baptized with Jesus into his death and coming up into the new life, which is why we don't keep on sinning, and why we don't offer our members—our bodies—to any other places; and we have a new life now. We have been bought with a price. So, Paul is making sure that we identify with the crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection with Christ. It is now our history that has been buried, and we have the new life that he has afforded us, thanks to his finished work; and Paul is saying: Galatians, don't miss that; and believers who read Galatians: Don't miss that.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

We move to a new cosmic situation where the old is gone, the new has come; darkness is in retreat; light has come; the kingdom is breaking in. That is what Jesus did; and Paul is saying to the Galatians: You couldn't do that. You don't even have anything to chip in to that. It is all Jesus; it is all the cross. So, Darrell, you know, as we stand at this tenth station of the cross and we see Jesus lifted up to die, those are the things we need to bear in mind; and what we see and ponder at this station is truly horrific, tragic, it is sad beyond the telling of it, but it is a depiction of how great the amazing grace of our God is; or, as Paul put it in Romans 5:

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DARRELL DELANEY

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

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SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we look at Jesus on that cross, and as we do, we rightly have tears in our eyes. To see this precious savior that way breaks our hearts, but by the alchemy of grace, we see in the end is not finally death but life—our very life in God—thanks be to God.

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