

Part A: Salvation, Part B: Judgment, Part C: The Ages to Come

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C-2: Rewards, Rehabilitation, or Both?

From what we have seen so far, two features about the Resurrection stand out: 1) all who come to Christ will be resurrected, but 2) not all will be ready for life in Heaven... and perhaps, for the grand celebration, known as the “*marriage supper of the Lamb*”. ([Revelation 19:9](#))

On this latter point the Parable of the Ten Virgins is revealing. Jesus relates the story of how those virgins who were “*wise*”, whose “*lamps*” were “*ready*” were accepted by the “*bridegroom*” into the “*wedding*”. But those who were “*foolish*” were caught unprepared and were locked out of the bridegroom’s chamber and heard the bridegroom’s explanation, “*Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.*” ([Matthew 25:1-13](#))

In the Parable of the Wedding Garment (Matthew 22:1-14), the man who came to the wedding feast without a proper garment appears to symbolize those who had not actually come to Christ and donned His robe of righteousness but were trying to associate with believers out of some political expediency or desire for gain of some kind.

In the Parable the man, wearing his own garments of self-righteousness, was tossed out of the wedding feast, his misplaced honor transformed into shameful dishonor - the “*outer darkness*” of error, ignorance, and hypocrisy. Whether this symbolizes his getting barred from the Kingdom altogether and sent off to Hades, or merely barred from the Marriage Supper, is not altogether clear.

[On Matthew 22:13 - “*cast him into outer darkness*”] The Jewish

marriages were performed in the night season, and the hall where the feast was made was superbly illuminated; the outer darkness means, therefore, the darkness on the outside of this festal hall; rendered still more gloomy to the person who was suddenly thrust out into it from such a profusion of light... (from *Adam Clarke's Commentary*, 1831)

Anyway, the fact that the man was forced to dwell in “*outer darkness*” where there would be “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*” speaks of the kind of remorse that a soul might experience in Hades... or also in the domain of “*shame and everlasting disgrace*”. (Daniel 12:2, NLT) (This term appears also in the [Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servant](#) in Matthew 24:44-51 - a parable geared for those who call themselves followers of Christ.) These parables portray the sad fate of those who lose the inheritance that could have been theirs, and naturally, the realization of this would become a source of great anguish. A sober warning to be sure.

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away... how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation. (Hebrews 2:1,3)

From these parables it is evident that some who have entered the Kingdom will have to be excluded from some of its greatest blessings. Like the “*foolish virgins*” their lamps had gone out; or like the imposter at the feast, they don’t have a “*wedding garment*”. Whereas it is said of Christ’s bride, “*His wife has made herself ready.*” She has the wedding garment - “*arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints*”. (Revelation 19:7-9)

But sadly, others will not have the needed garments (“*righteous acts*”). Their faith was not “*completed*” by their works. ([James 2:22](#), ESV) In the parables they are pictured as “*unprofitable servants*” who hid their talent, having succumbed to disobedience, laziness, fearfulness. So, although blessed to be in the Kingdom, they are shut out from some of its greatest blessings and privileges, symbolized, it would seem, as exile into “*outer darkness*” - the outer fringes of the Kingdom.

Now of course, we’re all guilty of some of these shortcomings, but the crux of the matter lies in whether or not we continue on the wrong path. That was the big difference between king Saul and king David. Saul, when confronted with his errors, never changed. David, on the other hand, because of his love for God, did repent and did change.

“No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning.” (1John 3:6, ESV) But ***“a double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”*** (James 1:8, KJV) And that’s how it was with king Saul. He would briefly recognize his failings but then later would return to the very same way he was before - jealous of David and seeking to kill him.

What place or function these folks will have in the coming Kingdom, we don’t really know. They could not be given the same honor, privilege, and responsibility as those who were ***“faithful until death”*** (whether death by martyrdom or by maintaining their testimony to the end of their lives). ([Revelation 2:10](#)) Judging from some of Christ’s parables, they might not have the privilege of being invited to the Marriage Supper.

And they might not be commissioned to fight in the ***Battle of Armageddon*** either, the armies of which are ***“clothed in fine linen, white and clean”***. (Revelation 19:14). Nor would it be given to them to ***“reign with Christ for a thousand years.”*** (Revelation 20:4) This does not mean to say they won’t be resurrected, which means they may be citizens, at least, during the Millennial Age of history.

Jesus said, ***“For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”*** (John 6:40, ESV) Whether this means the ***“last day”*** of this present Age or the ***“last day”*** of the Millennial Age, or both, is not altogether clear.

There is another Scripture about those who seek to ***“obtain a better resurrection”***. (Hebrews 11:35) Perhaps this means ***“better”*** to be part of the ***“first resurrection”*** at the start of the Millennium; it surpasses the glory of the second resurrection at the start of the Age of the New Heaven and Earth.

Whatever the case is, the main thing to keep in mind is this: a great deal, more than we may realize, hinges on our faithfulness and decisions we make out of our love for God during our earthly lives. And regardless of all these distinctions about the Afterlife resurrection, it is important to understand that those who do land in ***“shame and everlasting disgrace”*** will be blessed to be a part of the Kingdom in some way or another.

In earthly society, many a royal court or civil administration has had to send its rebellious members into exile to prevent them from hampering government activities. They lose their former standing with all its privileges, reward, and honor.

And as many of Christ's Parables seem to indicate, those who are not ready to enter into the Kingdom's full glory are proscribed into a sort of exile into its outer fringes. And some who were only faking it, pretending to be a follower of Christ for the sake of some earthly advantage, may get sent to *Hades* or the *Lake of Fire*.

Now in our world there is often great injustice in this practice of political exile, but in God's administration, any such measures requiring exile into "*outer darkness*" will be carried out with perfect justice and mercy.

One interesting example we can learn from is king David's banishment from the throne of Israel. ([2Samuel 12: 15-19](#)) God had to send David into exile for a time because of his sin of causing Uriah, husband of Bathsheba, to be killed, after committing adultery with her. To his credit David did not complain against God and was sorry for what He had done.

Nor did he try to persecute the one who had brought all this to his attention, Nathan the prophet. This was a much different reaction to that of king Saul, who tried to persecute his mentor and adviser, the prophet Samuel. As a result of his sincere repentance, David was granted mercy and returned to his throne, a humbler and wiser king.

Similarly, we might expect that those who are sent into that exile known as "*shame and everlasting disgrace*" can also be granted pardon, according to how they respond to their chastisement (or rehabilitation program).

As far as rehabilitation goes, we all may have to experience that to some extent; none of us are perfect or exempt from some kind of re-training; we all have blind spots - some past negative attitudes or bad habits to unlearn or wrong decisions we were so determined to make during our earthly lives.

Even the great prophet Isaiah, when he "*saw the Lord sitting on a throne... said: 'Woe is me for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips. . . for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.'*" (Isaiah 6:1,5) Daniel too had a similar reaction when he stood before the Lord: "*my comeliness was turned in me into corruption.*" (10:8, KJV)

In both cases, the Lord quickly restored his prophets to a state of well-being. To Isaiah an angel said, "*your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.*" (Isaiah 6:6) From this we could suppose that no one, not even the greatest of saints, is

exempt from some degree of re-training; and also, that God is merciful and more than willing to forgive and restore those who embrace repentance.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness... And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (1 John 1:9, Revelation 7:17, 21:4)

Our entrance into the Kingdom (our Salvation) means we have escaped the “second death” ([Revelation 20:5,14](#)) But to enter into the full glories and blessings of the heavenly life, many of us who are “born again” will not actually be ready. If we haven’t been working to “diligently seek him”, if we kept thinking, “My lord is delaying his coming”, then chances are we will be in need of some kind of correctional regime. ([Hebrews 11:6, Matthew 24:48](#))

As a result many of us will land in the heavenly equivalent of what on earth might be called a reformatory or rehabilitation camp. A reformatory is supposed to be a place with a “tough love” environment - not always pleasant but a place where there is, at least, an atmosphere of hope and concern for its inmates. In the celestial domain, this kind of region will have a beautiful and loving environment; nevertheless, it will be far removed from the glories and splendor of other regions in the Kingdom.

Even though “saved”, if we are still full of prejudices, bad habits, unloving attitudes, then a certain amount of time will have to be spent in the “waiting room” so to speak. We might call this waiting time a sort of “heavenly purgatory”, or God’s “correctional center” or “re-orientation program” - a necessary step to instill in us the kind of spirit we would need to have before we can enter into the full glories of the Heavenly Kingdom.

Jesus makes no promise that in the blink of an eye we will suddenly become totally different people who have vastly different tastes, attitudes, and perspectives. Paul makes it very clear that we will have our true selves revealed and that once the sins and habits and bigotry and pride and petty jealousies are prohibited and removed, for some there simply won’t be much left. “As one escaping through the flames” is how he put it.

It’s very common to hear talk about heaven framed in terms of who “gets in” or how to “get in.” What we find Jesus teaching, over and over and over again, is that he’s interested in our hearts being transformed, so that we can actually handle heaven. To portray heaven as bliss, peace, and

endless joy is a beautiful picture, but it raises the question: How many of us could handle it, as we are today? How would we each do in a reality that had no capacity for cynicism or slander or worry or pride?

(Love Wins by Rob Bell, pg. 50)

But how much better to enter that Realm in a state of readiness and hear the Lord's "well done, good and faithful servant". (Matthew 25:21,23) It is certainly a goal worth aiming for - to "obtain a better resurrection" and "receive a full reward". (Hebrews 11:35, 2John 8) As an incentive, the angel Gabriel, in Daniel 12:2, holds out the promise of heavenly reward and honor. The "wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."

Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. (Luke 12:35-37)

We can relate to what Christ was talking about here by calling to mind how it feels when we have labored diligently in a work situation. There is a feeling of satisfaction for a job well done. This in itself is a reward, which often comes with further rewards: pay raise, promotion, perks. Or we could do a sloppy, careless job and end up getting fired or demoted. If we can get fulfillment during our earthly lives for jobs well done, how much more fulfillment shall we receive for a lifetime that is lived well according to God's purpose and plan for our lives.

In all of this it helps to remember that true achievement does not come by working in the energy of the flesh; nor is it wise to judge one's efforts by human standards which are apt to differ from God's standards. ("For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways" - Isaiah 55:8.) We should strive and work hard towards godly goals, yet at the same time carry the spirit of rest and trust in the Lord, remembering that "it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." (Philippians 2:13)

And also, it helps to remember that no one can ever be perfect, and no one can escape having to own up to some mistakes and missteps from their earthly lives. Thankfully, the Lord is more interested in our desire to please Him; that is what He

rewards more than the outward achievements and works that we may accomplish in His service.

Indeed, service for God is more than just a matter of seeking “rewards”. Our earthly lives are meant to give us the opportunity to grow and mature, and thus to be better prepared for the next life, capable of handling the greater privileges, freedom, and responsibility that God would like to entrust us with.

Consider also the analogy of school enrollment. (We are “*enrolled in heaven*” according to [Hebrews 12:23](#) - ESV.) A student starts in grade 1 and works his way up. At the time of salvation we enter God’s “school”, and we can grow and move to more advanced levels. Or we can stay in grade 1. But a youngster in grade 1 cannot be trusted with very much responsibility or privileges. And that is not very advantageous for us, nor for those around us, who could benefit if we had a better and broader knowledge of God’s ways.

Now on a more basic level, regarding some of His religious enemies, Jesus told them, “*Tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.*” (Matthew 21:31) The implication here is that, before one can enter the Kingdom (or the full glories of it), one must be ready. One has to prepare. And if that did not happen during one’s earthly lifetime, then it will have to happen afterwards.

To any faithful follower, Christ promises that He will “*open [the door] to him immediately*”. (Luke 12:36) For some of us who haven’t been so faithful, that door may seem to open rather slowly as needed changes in attitude and thought patterns are given time to take root and grow.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus encountered some folks who were far from ready - like “*the chief priests and the elders of the people*” (who brazenly “*confronted [Christ] as He was teaching*”). Their pride had led them to become false guides. Having set themselves up as authorities “*in Moses’ seat*”, their reputations and influence were leading the people astray through their false teachings. Not only were they not ready for Heaven, many of them would not even be allowed entrance into the Kingdom. (Matthew 21:23, 23:2)

Christ did them a great favor by trying to wake them up out of their spiritual stupor with some strong rebuke: “*But woe to you... hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in... Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape*

the condemnation of hell?" (Matthew 23:13,33))

The religious-political leaders whom Christ was addressing would have to show fruits of repentance before being allowed entrance into the Kingdom. Their prejudice and animosity and religious pride would have to be purged before such divine favor could be granted.

Whereas those, like the *"tax collectors and harlots"*, were humble before God and gladly received His Christ. In God's eyes, they were righteous and better prepared for the Kingdom than those *"who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others"*. (Luke 18:9) The elders of the land who rejected Christ, fought against Him, and brought about His crucifixion were the ones destined for Hell; whereas the *"sinners"* whom they looked down on were destined to enter the Kingdom.

But even some of these who were enemies of God's people may gain entrance into the Kingdom. It is hard to fathom the great love and mercy of God in these cases. But we can probably assume that the entrance process for them would entail no small amount of repentance and rehabilitation.

As an example, we can look at what happened with the ancient king Manasseh, who *"caused his sons to pass through the fire... used witchcraft and sorcery... did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger... seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations."* But when the king of Assyria invaded Israel, he *"took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon."*

Then began the restoration process. *"Now when he [Manasseh] was in affliction, he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God."* (2 Chronicles 33:6,9,11-13) Repentance and restoration are always possible in the great love and mercy of God.

Now it seems Manasseh did not know the Lord until he got into hot water with the king of Assyria. His sufferings were a picture of what a soul might go through in *Hades* or the *Lake of Fire* - the kind of chastisement that would turn the rebellious soul towards repentance and reconciliation with God.

Presumably, in the domain of *“shame and everlasting disgrace”* (for those who do know the Lord, or did know Him at some time in their lives), the chastisement is designed differently, probably not so drastic, with the aim in mind to bring souls back into fellowship with their abandoned Savior.

With Manasseh, repentance came near the end of his life; with others it comes in their youth and the rest of their lives are spent going against God’s ways. But whether repentance happens at the end or at the beginning, it is still repentance, and it is enough, at least, to gain entrance into the Kingdom. These who enter this way, somewhat unprepared for life in a heavenly society, may well have to spend some time in a celestial reformatory of some kind. And as it was with Manasseh’s rehabilitation program, that initial shocking, painful realization of error could be difficult.

Even though Jesus promised that *“all that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out”*, that doesn’t mean that there won’t be any accounting for the life one has lived on Earth. (John 6:37) He did, after all, counsel believers to *“enter by the narrow gate... which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”* (Matthew 7:13-14)

We may wonder, how this jibes with Christ’s promise that He will not *“cast out”* anyone who comes to Him? The one statement sounds restrictive while the other sounds very open and accepting of new believers. But here is where it helps to understand that the Kingdom is an extremely varied environment and even has a level known as *“shame and everlasting disgrace”*. And this helps to make sense of what might seem like contradictory statements.

On the one hand, Jesus’ arms are wide open to accept new believers into the Kingdom; but this does not undermine the obligation to *“enter by the narrow gate”* - that is, continue to follow and to walk *“worthy of the calling”*. (Ephesians 4:1)

In the Kingdom one enjoys the presence of God and His heavenly beings, and past sins are forgiven. Nevertheless, there may be a reconciliation period of acknowledging past errors that we were blind to; and this could result in feeling conscience-stricken for a time.

For some people it may feel like hell in heaven, at least for a time until their rehabilitation period, or whatever it may be, is complete. But at least they will be in

Heaven, not in Hell separated from the presence of God. And their companions and mentors will be other believers and angels and good spirit beings. But to partake fully of life in the Heavenly realm, it will be necessary to shed the wrong habits and mindsets that have been picked up during the earthly life.

No one is perfect, of course, and no doubt we all will have something from the past to own up to. But for these wayward ones in *"shame and everlasting disgrace"*, that process will take longer. But eventually, even they will be restored, freed from the guilt and shame of the past.

This term *"everlasting"*, by the way, is often taken to mean an infinite length of time. But this is a rather narrow definition. A better concept of *"everlasting"* sees the term as pointing beyond the earthly realm to the celestial - that realm which is not subject to our boundaries of time and space. (More on this subject in [post C-4](#).)

In a nation there are many social levels - from the prisons and reformatories to the highest levels of elite rulers. But regardless of anyone's station, all are citizens of that nation. Likewise, all who come to Jesus receive the right of citizenship in God's Kingdom, and that in itself is a wonderful thing.

And even those who land in the "reformatory" level will be glad to be there, rather than have to dwell as non-citizens cast out of the Kingdom - in what the Revelation Book refers to as *"Death and Hades"*, or even worse, in the *"lake of fire"*.

But like convicts or criminals, those who land in the "basement" of Heaven will have to be restricted and denied freedom to participate in much of the Kingdom's affairs and activities. Citizens they are, as Christ has promised, but unable to enjoy many of the blessings and privileges that could have been theirs - at least until such time as they are ready to move on to a new stage in their celestial journey.

Thus we see the reason for part of the title of this study - "Hell in Heaven?" It's not really Hell or the Lake of Fire, but for those who must spend some time in *"shame and everlasting disgrace"*, it might almost feel like hell. But they are still in the Kingdom, and wherever one is in the Kingdom, there is always hope.

We might compare that to how, in our earthly realm, a person thrown in jail loses their reputation, and it seems like a great shame and dishonor. Nor is there is any glory or reward attached to having to enter a reformatory or rehabilitation

center. Likewise, Christians who turn back on the Lord may have to endure something similar.

That does not mean a soul cannot shake off the “*shame*” of having landed in that domain of the Kingdom; his or her repentance and future conduct and rehabilitation can restore such an one to a place of blessedness and honor. In our earthly society too, many a convict in jail has experienced release and a new start in life with a renewed sense of dignity.

How much more would this be true in God’s Kingdom. And even though a soul may have to experience a difficult time of correction and chastening, there will be constant reminders and tokens of mercy. In God’s Kingdom love is the prevailing atmosphere, even in those situations where severe chastening (in modern terms, “tough love”) needs to be administered.

Unlike those who get sent to the Lake of Fire, those who land in “*shame and everlasting disgrace*” will not have to keep company with Satan and his demons; they are still in the Kingdom, and under the loving care of Christ, His angels, and His people. Unlike those who must be sent to Hell, they can enjoy living in a heavenly environment.

Regarding this “*everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*”, it would appear that unhappy destination is meant primarily for the demons. (Matthew 25:41) Human beings are less accountable. The reality of God’s presence and the Heavenly Realm are somewhat invisible to human beings. Plus we are bombarded with evil influences from the Devil and his minions.

As a result great numbers of Earth’s inhabitants probably will be spared from having to enter the “*lake of fire*”; except for the stubbornly wicked and rebellious, it is not likely to be their destination.

God is fair in His judgments. “*The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.*” (Psalm 19:9) Jesus taught this principle of accountability in Luke 12: “*And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few.*” (12:47-48)

As the ignorant Roman soldiers were going about their business of crucifying

Him, Jesus said, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”* (Luke 23:34)

But the chief priests and elders, who knew the Scriptures and knew of the mighty works Jesus had done, were not so ignorant. Pilate *“knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.”* They had even *“plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.”* (Matthew 27:18, John 12:10-11) No surprise then that Jesus had warned them once of *“many stripes”* to come: *“how can you escape the condemnation of hell?”* (Matthew 23:33)

The accountability principle means that everyone will receive whatever it is he or she deserves and will be judged according to their knowledge of God’s ways and words. The more we learn from God and put into practice what He shows us, the more we are blessed. In the example of Abraham we read that he *“believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness”* and was *“justified by works”*. ([James 2:23,21](#))

Regarding the subject of rehabilitation, it should be safe to conclude that, even though we may have *“passed from death into life”* by coming to Christ, there will be no escape from having to account for those wrongdoings that we did not turn away from. (John 5:24) And if we have too much backlog of unaccounted-for misdeeds, then chances are there will be need for a more intense program of re-training.

(This may bring up a question about forgiveness of sins: if salvation means that Jesus paid the price for our sins, then how is it that we are still accountable for them? See Appendix below.)

Let us say, for example, a person, during his or her earthly life, was in the habit of gossiping and speaking negatively about their next door neighbor. And upon entrance into the Kingdom, who should happen to be there on the welcoming committee, but that next-door neighbor? It would, of course, be necessary to humbly make things right with that person before advancing to the next stage of blessing in that Heavenly Realm.

Doubtless, all of us will have something or other to unlearn or undo from our past lifetime. Better though to recognize and repent of those things now, as much as possible, than to wait till we get to the Other Side.

Coming face to face with our errors is not an easy process. *“Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful.”* (Hebrews 12:11) Repentance is a shattering experience, a crumbling of one’s self-image, the hardest words in any language to say (“I was wrong”). But once a person manages to get that far, he will find the door thrust open to greater blessing and salvation.

Continue to [C-3: A Word of Comfort](#)

APPENDIX: (Prophetic message from Jesus regarding the paradoxical question of how can there be forgiveness of sins, releasing a soul from having to pay the price for them, yet at the same time accountability is required, and chastisement is needed to correct sinful behavior?)

The one who doesn’t know Me is forgiven because of their ignorance. Think of the apostle Paul’s example. But once you know the Truth, then you are accountable. And in a sense, for any future sins you will have to pay the price, albeit under My care and supervision.

As I told the woman taken in adultery, “Your sins are forgiven. And then I said, “Go and sin no more.”

Once you have been enlightened and forgiven, it is a sin to continue in the old way. Many do, of course. But when you do, you’re not exactly “forgiven” (let off the hook) - at least not until you wake up and go in the right direction (that is, repent).

Those who reject Me and My ways are on the road to misery and a hellish existence. Paul thought he was doing the right thing, but when confronted with the Truth, he changed. Others, like king Saul, were confronted with the truth but went back into their old ways.

There is no simple formula to entirely understand how these things work. I have made it simple enough though: *“He that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out.”* You’re in the Kingdom, you’re Mine. But even in the Kingdom, I have My places of rehabilitation and reformatories.

For the ignorant, in the Afterlife, if they have been worthy, I will appear to them, and then, of course, they easily, almost automatically come to Me. For the evildoers, I do not appear to them, or rather, I will delay My appearance. They will have to experience life in the spirit realm without Me and feel the full weight of sin

and their empty lives, by which time many will turn to Me, when I finally do appear to them, when they are ready and fed up with life without My presence.

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