

HEARING THE WORD



NIGEL BARGE

Hebrews 1-7
Work Book

Hearing the Word Hebrews 1-7 Work Book

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Nigel Barge, January 2019

Scripture Quotations taken from

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Resources

The *New Bible Dictionary* 3rd edition, published by Inter Varsity Press
The *New Bible Commentary* 21st century edition. A commentary on every Bible book, IVP
www.blueletterbible.org

Hearing the Word: A Tool for Bible reading



LOOK – What does it *say*?

- 1) The Text
 - a) What questions does it raise -
Who, What, When, Where, Why, How?
 - b) What surprises you?
- 2) The Context?
 - a) the surrounding text
 - b) the Book of the Bible
 - c) the whole Bible
 - d) the place in the Bible Story



LEARN – What does it *mean*?

- 1) What type of writing is it?
- 2) Answer the questions
- 3) Summarise the passage



LISTEN – What is the *message*?

- 1) Which is the main point?
- 2) Which is the key verse?



LIVE – How should we *respond*?

- 1) What does it show about God, (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) :
 - a) His nature and character?
 - b) His grace*
 - c) Jesus / his salvation**
- 2) What should I do?

* God's undeserved generosity is evident throughout the Bible, and it is perfectly expressed in Jesus.

** The Bible, from 'the fall' onwards, describes God's plan of salvation through his Son. Thus, *all* the Scriptures speak in some way of Jesus (Luke 24:27)

Reading ‘Letters’ in the Bible

Whatever we read, we unconsciously adjust to its style. We don’t approach a newspaper, a car manual, a cookery book, a poem, a scientific report, a ‘txt msg’ and a Shakespeare play in the same way. We take into account why it was written and how the writer uses words. Since the Bible also has many styles – law, poetry, history, wisdom, prophecy, letters and visions – we need to allow for the style if we are to discern what God is saying. Hebrews is a ‘Letter’. To approach it correctly, keep in mind the following principles:

The New Testament contains letters written by the Apostles to various parts of the church of their day. They are part of the Word of God and as such they not only *were* authoritative for the church then, but they *are* authoritative for the church of all time.

Since this part of the Word of God is written *as a letter*, in the first instance it must be read as such. We need to take into account that letters are:

a) *Relational.* A letter is addressed to a particular person or group of people and its contents apply to them.

So in the Bible, we must first remember that Paul/James/Peter/John/Jude or the un-named writer-to-the-Hebrews) is addressing individuals or churches in the first century. It is only once we have grasped what they are saying to *them* that we may generalise as to what God might be saying to *us*.

Note well: the two will always be consistent.

b) *Occasional.* Letters are one side of a ‘conversation’ between two people. They refer to matters in which details of situations and people are assumed to be common knowledge. A third party reading a letter needs to ‘read between the lines’ to work out the other side of the story.

We have to try and understand the situation to which this Bible letter was written, so as to grasp how the writer was addressing *it*. Only then may we ask how God might apply this Word to our own circumstance.

c) *Dated.* Letters are written at a particular time and place, and within a particular culture. So in the Bible, the letters of the first century are expressed within the habits and traditions of that day. In discerning what God might be saying to us, now, we need to separate any instruction that is ‘time-bound’ from principles that are *timeless*.

d) *To be read as a whole.* When we open a letter from a friend nowadays, we read the whole thing. We recognise it is a single communication and its contents are thus all related.

So with letters in the Bible; every part must be viewed in the context of the whole letter. Thus, it is best practice to read a Bible letter *right through*, before analysing its parts.

Reading Hebrews

Who are ‘the Hebrews’?

Our English title suggests they were Jews. The title seems to be a much later addition to the text and may indicate a later editor’s view!

The OT is quoted extensively in the letter (35 quotations from the Septuagint (Greek) version). There are also 19 summaries of OT material and 13 references to OT names or topics. So it may have been a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles who had come to faith in the Lord Jesus. The Jewish Christians may have been reluctant to leave Judaism behind and so lose the protection Judaism enjoyed under Roman law.

Some scholars feel they may have been a sub-group in a larger Christian community eg a house-church in a wider group of citywide house-churches.

The one thing we know for sure is that they were Christians! *see* 6:9-10; 10:39

Where did they live?

One clue comes in 13:24 where ‘those from Italy’ send their greetings to the readers. By mid-first century AD, Rome had a population of around one million, of whom 40,000 – 60,000 were Jews.

10:32-34 and 12:4 would fit the persecutions in Rome between AD49 and 64 *ie* between Claudius and Nero.

Who wrote it?

To quote Origen, ‘As to who wrote the epistle only God knows for sure’! 11:32 uses a masculine participle so the author was a male.

2:3-4 indicates secondary knowledge of the gospel message rather than reception by direct revelation so he was unlikely to have been one of the 12 apostles.

He was clearly well educated – fine grammar, vocabulary, style, rhetoric and philosophical knowledge – and was an expert in his use of the OT. He used religious symbols extensively.

He is a preacher with a pastor’s heart, tough and tender. It is widely agreed Hebrews starts off more like a *sermon* than a *letter*.

When did he write?

There are a number of definite references to Hebrews in *1 Clement*, an apocryphal letter dated around AD96 so it must have been written before then.

There is no reference to the Jerusalem Temple having been destroyed and it records High priest ARE selected 5:1 suggesting it was written before AD70.

If the ‘Timothy’ in 13:23 – released from prison – was the co-worker of Paul, then that would have been around the AD 50’s or early 60’s.

10:32-34 refers to persecution already faced. There was persecution in Rome, under Claudius AD49, under Nero AD64 and under Domitian AD91-95.

Background

Recent research by Dr Bruce W Winter on suffering under the Romans, generally, greatly helps our understanding of the pressures on Christians in NT times. The Christians reading this Letter had suffered much because of their faith (10:32) and understandably were very tempted to find ways of avoiding more agony.

1:2-3 proclaims the perpetual divinity of Jesus. But this was the same status granted to departed Roman emperors AD 14-68 (Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero). All new Caesars were given the title *pontifex maximus* of the Roman empire *ie* 'high priest'. To emperors, Jesus was a threat! The claim that Jesus' high priesthood meant Christians no longer needed to make sacrifices but did need to be loyal and obedient to Christ would be seen as a direct challenge to Roman peace and stability. 10:32-34 tells us Christians had already endured suffering and public humiliation. Another possible punishment lay ahead, namely exile to a harsh, desolate, isolated place, with a brutal climate, infertile land, polluted water supply, loss of citizenship and property. It was a fate greatly feared across the Roman Empire. Hebrews uses metaphorical phrases for exile: 'outside the camp', 'outside the gate' (13:11-14 and 13:12).

Jews had certain protections under Roman law, *eg* they were allowed to meet weekly; but Christians were not. All subjects in the Empire **except Jews** were required to offer sacrifices to the emperor in their temples. Christians generally were threatened with the death penalty for failure to bow to the Caesars. It was very tempting to shift into Judaism to avoid death or exile.

Why did he write it?

Recognising the dangers for his readers, he focusses on the unique person and work of Christ to motivate them to persevere in discipleship.

The author would appear to be addressing Jews by the very detailed references to the Old Testament – few Gentiles would have any background in this world. From inferences there was persecution of these Christians and this was so severe that some were contemplating return to the folds of Judaism

The themes he described would seek to bolster their determination to stand firm in their faith in Jesus and profession:

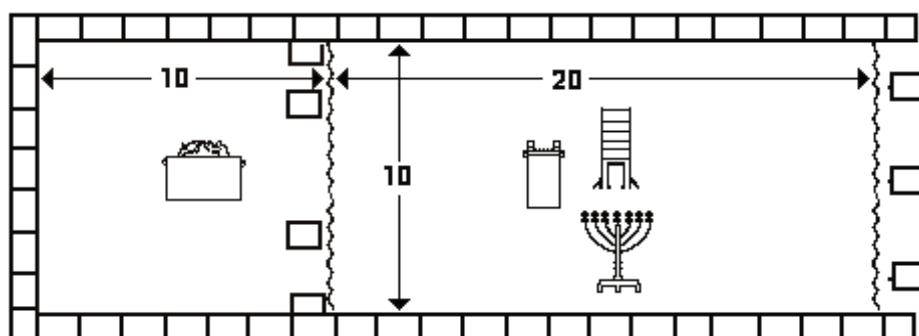
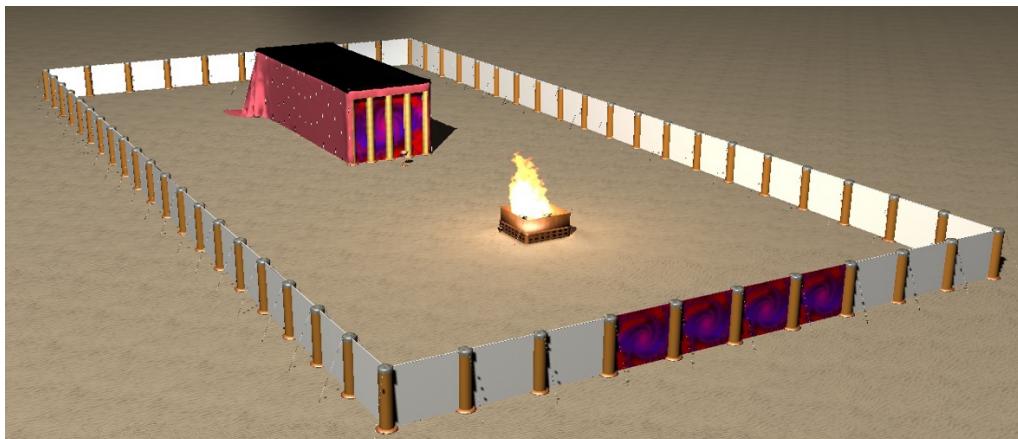
- 1) Jesus is divine
- 2) Jesus fulfils the Old Testament
- 3) Jesus enables us to pass through God judgement
- 4) Jesus is worth giving your life for.

This is the key and he begins with this. Jesus is God – the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His being sustain all things by his powerful Word (1:3)

The 7 studies in this booklet look at the first 7 chapters

Study	<i>Hebrews:</i>		Page
1	1: 1 – 2:4	Jesus is the divine saviour	9
2	2: 5 – 3:6	Jesus is our divine High Priest	12
3	3: 7 – 18	God must be believed	15
4	4: 1 – 13	Fellowship with God is our rest	18
5	4:14 – 5:10	Jesus, is our contact with Heaven	21
6	5:11 – 6:20	God is committed to His people	19
7	7: 1 – 28	Jesus is able and willing to save us	24
		Sharing the Word	44

The Tabernacle



Top – The layout of the tabernacle

Middle - The holiest place – only priests may enter

The holy of holies – the place where God's presence was manifested. It contained the Ark of the Covenant. One man, the high priest, entered once a year on the day of Atonement (Leviticus 16)

Bottom – The Ark of the Covenant within the holies of holies containing Moses staff, some manna from the wilderness, and the two tablets with the Law given to Moses on Mount Sinai

The lid, known as the mercy seat, had two cherubim on top.

The presence of God existed between them.

Background

Throughout history, God's servants have been his spokesmen. But now God has opted to send his own Son to deliver his final revelation to humanity.

Jews believed Moses occupied the highest place amongst the OT mediators. Jewish history associated angels with Moses in the giving of the law (Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19) This passage is full of OT references to show how Jesus is superior to angels. Angels are God's messengers, sent to serve (v14); but Jesus, God's Word, is the *message* as well as the *Messenger*.

2:1-4 is the first of three severe warnings. Others are 3:7-19 and 5:11-14.

Word list

1:1 *prophets* People through whom God spoke to his people.

1:2 *by his Son* literally '*in a Son*' or '*One who is Son*', ie referring to the *nature* of the agent of revelation.

1:6 *his firstborn* used here without limitation, descriptive of honour and glory.

1:10 *laid the foundations of the earth* figurative term for creation.

1:13 *footstool for your feet* custom of conquerors to put their heel on the neck of a defeated foe as token of complete subjection.

2:3 *ignore* neglect, same Greek word in Matthew 22:5 where invited guests made light of the king's invitation.

Bible Connections – see OT quotations in ch 1:

1:5 Psalm 2:7; 2 Samuel 7:14

7 Psalm 104:4 v8 Psalm 45:6,7 v10 Psalm 102:25-27

9 *Jesus' life and ministry on earth* *see also* Philippians 2:7-9

12 *Jesus remaining the same, without end* *see* Hebrews 12:8

13 *Jesus sitting at God's right hand* *see* Psalm 110:1

2:4 *gifts of the Holy Spirit* *see* 1 Corinthians 12

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

What surprises or confuses you?

2) The Context

What other parts of the Bible – surrounding passage, individual book, whole Bible, or Bible story – might help you understand this passage?

LEARN

- 1) How do you answer the questions the passage raises?

- 2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?
- 3) Give an overall ‘picture’ of the passage in a few sentences.

LISTEN

- 1) What is the lesson or the main point?
- 2) Which verse best sums up the message of the passage? v.

LIVE

- 1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?
 - a) His nature and character?
 - b) His grace?
 - c) Jesus and His salvation?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

- 2) What should I do?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Study 2

Hebrews 2:5 – 3:6

Jesus is our divine High Priest

Background

The writer now expands the argument for Christ's superiority over angels. There is OT evidence that the governance and administration of this world has been allocated to angelic powers, *eg* Michael who champions the people of Israel, but some are evil and hostile *eg* the angelic 'prince of Persia' and 'prince of Greece' (Daniel 10:20-21; 12:1). However Hebrews tells us the world to come has not been entrusted to angels but rather to the Son of God. Jesus must realise this sovereignty through the twin pathways of deep suffering and painful death.

9b-18 expand how Jesus suffered *with us* and *for us*, using three OT quotes.

v17 introduces the high-priestly ministry of Jesus on their behalf.

3:1-6 is startling to the Jewish Christian readers as the writer tells them Jesus is superior to Moses. To them Moses was saviour, leader, law-giver, patriarch, the greatest of the prophets, but the writer describes him as a 'servant in God's household' whereas Jesus is the son over God's house (v5-6).

Word list

7	<i>little</i>	in a temporal sense, i.e. 'for a little while'
9	<i>little</i>	here it is <i>little</i> in degree, rather than <i>little</i> in time
12	<i>congregation'</i>	Greek <i>ecclesia</i> , the church, the brothers of Christ
16	<i>Abraham's descendants</i>	i.e. the whole family of faith
17	<i>atonement</i>	the removal of man's sin and his resultant reconciliation with God

3:1 *apostle and high priest* ie combining roles of divine envoy and intercessor

Bible Connections – *see* OT quotations in ch 2:

6-8 Psalm 8:4-6	12 Psalm 22:22	13 Isaiah 8:17; Isaiah 8:18
9 <i>the humility of Christ</i>	<i>see</i> Philippians 2:6-8	
<i>Jesus crowned with glory and honour</i>	<i>see</i> Philippians 2:9	
10 <i>Our reconciliation to God is in Christ.</i>	<i>see</i> 2 Corinthians 5:19	
18 <i>Jesus is the one able to help us.</i>	<i>see</i> 4:15-16	
3:1 <i>holy brothers</i>		<i>see also</i> Colossians 1:2
3:7 <i>Moses faithful in God's house</i>		<i>see</i> Numbers 12:7

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Now underline the application of the Main Point.

- 2) What should I do?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

God must be believed

Background

Failure to listen to, and respond in obedience to, the voice of God is taken very seriously by God.

The early church saw the death of Christ as the new exodus (Luke 9:31), he is the true Passover sacrificed for his people, (1 Cor 5:7b) and they are the ‘church in the wilderness’(Acts 7:38) etc

So the writer warns them not to be like the Israelites in the desert:

After the first exodus there was a whole string of complaints by the Israelites to Moses, *eg* about lack of water in Exodus 17:2,7, which stretched over 40 years of wandering. In Numbers 13 we read how the spies were sent from Kadesh Barnea to spy out the land of Canaan but only Joshua and Caleb came back with a favourable report of this land promised to them. The unfavourable response of the others resulted in another 38 years of wandering until that generation had died out (Numbers 14:27ff) They did not enter the ‘rest’ of the earthly Canaan.

Hence the reference to Psalm 95 quoted here.

Unbelief is a sin and the writer warns them not to be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. We are to encourage each other to persevere.

Word List

7	<i>today if you hear... i.e. ‘oh that you would ...’</i>	<i>n.b.</i> Repeated 3 times (3:7,15; 4:7)
7,9	<i>rebellion, testing</i>	equivalents of Meribah and Massah (Ex 17:7)
12	<i>turns away</i>	rebellion, Greek word is root of <i>apostasy</i>

Bible Connections – *see* OT quotations in ch 3:

7-11 Psalm 95:7b-11 15 Psalm 95:7b,8

7ff *Be warned from Israel’s history.* *see also* 1 Corinthians 10:1-5; Jude 5

14 *confidence in God through Christ* *see* Ephesians 3:12

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Now underline the application of the Main Point.

- 2) What should I do?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Fellowship with God is our ‘rest’

Background

The writer turns again to the spiritual counterpart of the earthly Canaan, telling them they need to persevere and attain this goal of entering eternal rest in God’s new order. They need to appropriate the Gospel by faith. The ‘rest’ of God has been available since the end of creation.

The Word of God *must* be taken seriously, *must* be accepted in faith and *must* be put into daily practice.

Word list

4 <i>seventh day</i>	i.e. at the end of creation
8 <i>Joshua</i>	OT leader who led the people into the earthly Canaan
	NB In Greek, Joshua and Jesus are the same word!

Bible Connections – *see* OT quotations in ch 4:

3 Psalm 95:11 4b Genesis 2:2 7b Psalm 95:7,8

4 <i>seventh day God rested</i>	<i>see</i> Genesis 2:2
8 <i>God gave Israel the promised land.</i>	<i>see</i> Joshua 21:43ff; 22:4

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- 2) What should I do?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Study 5

Hebrews 4 :14 – 5:10

Jesus is the contact with Heaven

Background

4:14 The high priest was the only priest who was allowed to go into the sanctuary in the Temple, once per year on the Day of Atonement. He made temporary atonement for the people's sins.

V14-16 reiterate how deeply Jesus identifies with us and is able to meet our every need because he has experienced them too.

5:1-10 compares the earthly high priests and Jesus. They need to sympathise with those they represent before God. They are called by God, not self-appointed (v4). The earthly high priest is still sinful himself, only Jesus is perfect and his priesthood is eternal.

Word list

4:14 *gone through the heavens* *or* gone into heaven

4:16 *let us then* Better translated 'Therefore let us'

4:16 *throne of grace* throne of God where He shows unmerited favour to those who approach in Jesus name.

used here as antitype for the mercy seat *see below*

5: 4 *Aaron* Brother of Moses, the first high priest

5:10 *Melchizedek* King of Salem (probably Jerusalem)

Bible Connections – *see* OT quotations in ch 4:14-5:10:

5:5 Psalm 2:7 5:6 Psalm 110:4

4:16 *throne of grace* *see also* Mercy seat Exodus 25:21,22; Hebrews 9:

5:6 *Melchizedek* *see* Genesis 14:18

5:7 *Jesus' 'loud cries and tears ...'* *see also* Mark 14:33b-36; John 12:27f

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Now underline the application of the Main Point.

- 2) What should I do?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

God is committed to His people

Background

Before pressing on with further explanation of the ‘priestly order of Melchizedek’ the writer breaks off to address the serious problem of his readers’ immature spiritual development. Maturity is more than knowing facts; it is the ability to use that knowledge to solve situations and problems in relation to daily living.

He sees no point in repeatedly going over the basics again. The list covers orthodox Jewish beliefs and practices, which have acquired a new significance in a Christian context. He wants to move on to the serious material on high priesthood and looks for Christ to work in them.

The severe warning in 6:4-8 is very difficult to interpret! However he is confident of better things in their case and urges them to imitate the great heroes of the faith (*see ch11*) and also obtain the promises of God. He uses Abraham, the father of the faithful, as the great example of faith and perseverance. God’s word alone is sufficient, but He swears an oath to give us double assurance. He then brings them back to Jesus’ high priesthood saying their hope is securely anchored to Jesus who has delivered our salvation by shedding his blood.

Word list

6: 1 <i>foundation</i>	used metaphorically here, refers to elementary truths <i>i.e.</i> antithesis to maturity
	<i>acts that lead to death</i> or useless rituals of ineffective Levitical sacrifices(OT)
6:2 <i>baptisms</i>	plural Greek word used refers to ceremonial washings
6:4 <i>once . . .</i>	Greek aorist tense indicates something that is never repeated <i>of 9:7,26; 10:2; 12:26</i>
<i>tasted</i>	In Greek this signifies holding something in common with someone else
6:6 <i>repentance</i>	Greek <i>metanoia</i> the initial repentance to salvation (<i>metamellomai</i> is used in NT for repentance which leads to restoration to fellowship)
6:20 <i>curtain</i>	separated the sanctuary area with the ark of the covenant from the rest of the temple

Bible Connections

6:13 *God’s promise to Abraham*

see Genesis 22:15-18

6:20 *sanctuary behind the curtain*

see Leviticus 16:2

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Jesus is able and willing to save us

Background

There are just two references to Melchizedek in the OT:

In Genesis 14 Abraham returns from defeating four kings who had invaded from the east and taken his nephew, Lot, among the captives. Melchizedek the King of Salem came out to meet him. He blessed Abraham and was given a tenth of the plunder. No mention is made of his genealogy and it reports that 'like the son of God, he remains a priest forever' (7:3).

Psalm 110:4 indicates order of the Melchizedek priesthood was known in the Psalmist's day.

Agricultural produce was tithed and allocated to the priests (tribe of Levi) in Israel. By 1st century AD they probably did the administration themselves. The Levites were receiving the tithes from fellow-Israelites, who were children of Abraham, *like themselves*. Abraham however has accepted the superiority of Melchizedek by paying tithes *to him*.

The Aaronic priesthood was never designed to usher in the age of fulfilment. The priests died but the Christian's high priest is immortal.

Word list

1 <i>Melchizedek</i>	means 'king of righteousness'
<i>Salem</i>	Means peace.

Bible Connections – see OT quotations in ch 7:

17 & 24 Psalm 110:4

12 *change of the law* *see Galatians 3:24f*)

25 *Jesus intercedes for us.* *see Rom 8:33f; Is 53:12; Luke 22:32 John 17*

27 *Jesus' one sacrifice is sufficient.* *see Isaiah 53:10; Mark 10:45*

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Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Sharing the Word

Use

'Hearing the Word' can be used alone, with one other person, or in a group

Preparing for a group

Time put in alone beforehand will greatly benefit time spent together.

Work through the stages - LOOK, LEARN, LISTEN, LIVE.

Write down your own questions and answers. *

Format

- a. LOOK - Any questions? (If answer is known or not!)
Relevant cross references in rest of the Bible?
- b. LEARN - Answers to questions?
- c. LISTEN - Key verse and Main Point?
- d. LIVE - What does it show about God /His grace/ Jesus?
What should I do

n.b. Leave plenty of time for the LIVE section!

By also eating together and a time of prayer, you will have shared something of the life of the early church! (Acts 2:42-47)

Remember!

As we gather round God's Word -

- a) Listen to the views of others.
- b) Make room for the novice. (They can join in too when you start by listing 'Any questions'.)
- c) Don't let the 'knowledgeable' dominate. Encourage everyone to think for themselves.
- d) Try to include others, especially 'seekers', in your time together.

* The **process** is explained and practiced in a four-hour course, suitable for all, called '**An Introduction to 'Hearing the Word'**

<https://hearingtheword.org.uk>

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