



2021 1Q Isaiah: Lesson 1 Crisis of Identity

by Tim Jennings (announcements last page)

INTRODUCTION

- 930 BC Israel split into northern and southern kingdoms
- 722 BC the northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria
- 598-582 BC Judah fell captive to Babylon

Isaiah was son of Amoz and related to the royal family. He started his ministry toward the close of the reign of Uzziah (Azariah, 790–739 B.C.), during the coregency of Jotham (PK 305) sometime around 745 to 739 B.C. His term of ministry continued for at least 60 years (PK 310), spanning the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

Read the second to the last paragraph of the Introduction, “Isaiah counseled kings...” This highlights the central theme of the entire Old Testament—the coming Messiah! After the fall of Adam, all humans would be eternally lost if not for Jesus, and the Savior was promised right there in Eden. The entire OT is the story of the battle between the forces of Satan working to stop God’s plan of salvation by stopping the arrival of Jesus and God working to keep open the avenue for the Messiah.

Initially, when the world had only one language, when people lived centuries, and the specific family tree had not been identified Satan worked to corrupt and harden every human being and almost succeeded, but God intervened in mercy with a flood to keep open the avenue for the Messiah. Shortly thereafter, God promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that it would be through their descendants the promised Messiah would come. From that point onward Satan’s primary focus was on destroying the descendants of Jacob as they were the ones through whom the Messiah would come. That is why the Bible focuses on their family and not the rest of the world.

This gives great insight into everything occurring in the OT, why God sometimes acted to put people to sleep in the grave—He was NOT punishing sin as the punishment for sin is eternal death and also comes after the judgment not before. No, God was working to keep open the avenue for Messiah.

The story of the Assyrians attacking, Isaiah’s prophecy, Hezekiah’s faith gives us another lesson—that is trusting God with outcomes, not just our personal issues but trusting God with movements of nations, that when it appears things are going against God’s people, God has a plan and is working toward that plan. In Isaiah’s day it was keeping open the avenue for the Messiah—what is God working toward today and how is Satan working to counter God’s plan?

God, in Isaiah’s day, was working toward the first advent of Jesus, and is now working toward the second advent.



What would activities from God that would be preparing the world to meet Jesus look like?

- Sharing the true gospel of God's kingdom of love, which reveals God's character of love, and His design law methods and the free gift of salvation offered through Jesus
- The principles of God being lived out in His people—truth, love, freedom—thus we give God glory by revealing His character in our lives
- Greater love among God's people for God and others, including our enemies, those who would mistreat us, misrepresent us, and persecute us
- All of this exposes, draws a contrast, between the truth about our Creator God of love and the false Christianity of the Dark Ages with its imposed law lie and dictator punishing god. Thus we call people out of Babylon the confused system of legal ritualistic religions into God's reality—His kingdom of love, truth and freedom.

What would activities from Satan that obstruct people getting ready to meet Jesus look like?

- False religion—lies about God, denial of God, evolutionism, secularism, there is no God
- Any process that instills fear—the roar of the lion—because fear incites more selfishness, undermines love and divides society—do we see this today?

Like Hezekiah we will face overwhelming threats from sources we do not have the power to defeat—we must use the weapons of God—the shield of trust and the sword of truth.

SABBATH

What do you think of the title? *A Crisis of Identity*

The lesson points out that cows know the way home and a lost child recognizes its own mother, but the Judeans had forgotten that they belonged to God. What about Christians today? Do we know our identity, or have we also forgotten our Creator God and have instead identified with the Roman imperial dictator god who must punish sin?

How do we show that we know who we are and are children of the true God, the Creator God of heaven?

- By calling ourselves Christians? If that is so, then does that mean everyone who calls themselves Christian are children of God? Does it mean that there are no children of God who call themselves something else? So, does calling ourselves Christian differentiate the children of God from those who are not?
- Keeping the Sabbath? It is to be a sign that we are God's people right? So if we keep the Sabbath does that show that we are God's children? Does that mean that everyone who keeps the Sabbath are children of God and not His enemy? What about those who crucified Christ, they were Sabbath-keepers and Jesus said they were sons of their father the devil? So, does Sabbath keeping differentiate the children of God from the children of the enemy?



So how do we show that we know who we are and that we are children of the true God?

Jesus said, ““A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35 NIV84)

What does this love look like? Genuine love is more than compassionate and sympathetic feelings, genuine love is an intelligent love, it is a truth-based love, it is a love that works in harmony with God and God’s principles for life. Thus, God’s love motivates to action, to living lives that harmonize with God and will reveal truth that bring God’s methods to bear that are redemptive and healing. The truth of God that heals is like a sword, or scalpel, that cuts away lies, falsehood, and practices that are out of harmony with God’s design for life. Just like a surgeon cuts away gangrenous flesh.

Thus, sometimes, love severs relationships because some of the people in our lives are toxic, destructive, hardened against God and working to destroy us. But for those who are working with God there is a continual advancement in the methods of God and we constantly grow closer to those who are also following God in their lives.

Consider this quote from the book *Acts of the Apostles*:

The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was **organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world.** [What is the purpose of the church? Service, which means to love others, and the mission is what? Carry the gospel to the world, which is what? The good news about God and His kingdom of love—which requires people come to worship the Creator, which requires they understand God’s laws are design laws. As long as we teach God’s laws are rules like humans make we take the false Roman god to the world.] From the beginning it has been **God's plan that through His church** shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He **has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory.** [What darkness? The darkness about Him and His kingdom of love. What light? The light that Jesus revealed—He is the light that lightens all people, about what? “If you have seen me you have seen the Father.” Jesus’ primary revelation was the truth about God that has been misrepresented by Satan’s lies about God’s law. And we are to show Him glory how? By having His law of love written in our hearts such that we practice His methods in how we treat others. We must also become lovers of the truth, people who love to grow in truth as it is revealed.] The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to “the principalities and powers in heavenly places,” **the final and full display of the love of God.** Ephesians 3:10. AA 9.1 [What is the final and full display of the love of God? When did Jesus give the greatest display of the love of God? At the cross—how is this the greatest display? When do we give the greatest display? Is it when things are going well, or when things are difficult? Is the greatest display of love when we love those who love us, or when we love our enemies? Do we have opportunity today to show God’s love?]



Consider this quote by one of the founders of the SDA church, again focusing on our identity, how the true children of God are differentiated from those who are not:

Satan is always seeking to cause dissension, for well he knows that by this means he can most effectually counteract the work of God. [Satan is a divider, his methods, actions, movements stir up conflict, hostility, hatred, division. Satan uses deceit to stir up two big emotions, fear and a sense of being wronged—"it's not fair." These two emotions, then cause people to view others as threats to them and groups divide. Have we seen movements in the world recently that have caused greater division? Have we seen messaging bombarding society that increases fear and a sense of unfairness? But notice that what counters these movements of Satan effectively is love—when we actually love others we are not divided. When your grandchild doesn't wear a mask and comes running up to you to give you a hug, you are not angry, you don't yell, you don't want them punished. But if the child is not yours and you see them running around a store do you have the same smile, the same compassion, or does fear take over and you feel incensed, irritated, do you want to find a manager and have their parent educated? Fear makes us concerned with self and protecting self. When we love we value others more than self.] **We should not give place to his devices.** Christ's prayer for His disciples was, "That **they all may be one**; as You, Father, art in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that You have sent Me." John 17:21. **All true laborers for God will work in harmony with this prayer.** In their efforts to advance the work, all will manifest that oneness of sentiment and practice which reveals that they are God's witnesses, that **they love one another.** **To a world that is broken up by discord and strife, their love and unity will testify to their connection with heaven. It is the convincing evidence of the divine character of their mission.**—Testimonies for the Church 7:156, 157 (1902).

I would like to suggest that the evidence that we are true members of God's kingdom is that we love one another as God loves us. That we are not controlled by fear and envy but by love and truth, and that we live out God's methods trusting God with outcomes that we cannot control.

SUNDAY

Let's read Isaiah 1:2-20 and consider what might happen if at your church someone gave this message—not merely reading Isaiah as a historic Scripture given to people over 2500 years ago, but consider it as if this message was spoken to your church today as an original message—I have edited it to be applicable to the church today:

- ² Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth!
For the LORD has spoken:
"I reared children and brought them up,
but they have rebelled against me.
- ³ The ox knows his master,
the donkey his owner's manger,



- but [Christians do] not know,
my people do not understand.”
- 4 Ah, sinful [church],
a people loaded with guilt,
a brood of evildoers,
children given to corruption!
[You] have forsaken the LORD;
[You] have spurned the Holy One of Israel
and turned [your] backs on him.
- 5 Why should you be beaten anymore?
Why do you persist in rebellion?
Your whole head is injured,
your whole heart afflicted.
- 6 From the [bottom] of your foot to the top of your head
[nothing is healthy]—
only wounds and welts
and open sores
[that are not cleaned and] bandaged
or soothed with [ointment].
- 7 Your countries are [decaying],
your cities [are burned with fire and looted];
[your business are being ruined]
right before you,
laid waste as when overthrown by strangers.
- 8 The [Bride of Christ] is left
like a [open store in a riot],
like a [unlocked car during a crime spree],
like a city under siege.
- 9 Unless the LORD Almighty
had left us some survivors,
we would have become like Sodom,
we would have been like Gomorrah.
- 10 Hear the word of the LORD,
you [church-leaders] of Sodom;
listen to the law of our God,
you people of Gomorrah!
- 11 “The multitude of your [rituals]—
what are they to me?” says the LORD.
“I have more than enough [baptisms],
[ordinations] and [foot washing services];
I have no pleasure



- in [your praise bands or communion services].
- 12 When you come to appear before me,
who has asked this of you,
this trampling of my courts?
- 13 Stop [preaching] meaningless [sermons]!
Your [prayers] are detestable to me.
[Sundays], Sabbaths and [camp-meetings]—
I cannot bear your evil assemblies.
- 14 Your [Christian concerts] and your [worship services]
my soul hates.
They have become a burden to me;
I am weary of bearing them.
- 15 When you spread out your hands in prayer,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even if you offer many prayers,
I will not listen.
Your hands are full of blood;
- 16 wash and make yourselves clean.
Take your evil deeds
out of my sight!
Stop doing wrong,
- 17 learn to do right!
Seek justice,
encourage the oppressed.
Defend the cause of the fatherless,
plead the case of the widow.
- 18 “Come now, let us reason together,”
says the LORD.
“Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson,
they shall be like wool.
- 19 If you are willing and obedient,
you will eat the best from the land;
- 20 but if you resist and rebel,
you will be devoured by the sword.”
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (NIV84)

If this were spoken to you and your church, what would be the likely response?

Is this message appropriate for the church today, or does it only apply to ancient Judah?



Why did the religious services of Israel become a burden to God? Why did He get tired of them? Because they were meaningless, done by rote. Because the people no longer understood that all the various rituals were teaching tools, so they were no longer learning, instead all the rituals became an end unto themselves and thus darkened rather than enlightened the mind.

The issue in salvation is the actual condition of the heart and mind. God is working to free our minds from lies and the infection of selfishness. This requires that we engage, we think, we reason and when we reason with God we grow in the truth and we are transformed in the process. But when we don't reason, when we instead accept either lies, or merely accept rituals as having some benefit toward salvation, then we close ourselves off from God and become more corrupt.

This is what was happening in Israel, and sadly what happened to the church of the Dark Ages, the Reformation brought light, got people thinking, examining evidence, resulting in rejection of many errors, falsehoods and gradual growth in the church—however, today the church is again, to a great degree, in darkness, deceived by lies about God's law as they have rejected the advancing light.

MONDAY

Read first paragraph, "The same hands..." What does the lesson mean by, "By mistreating other members of the covenant community, they were showing contempt for the Protector of all Israelites"?

Why didn't they say by mistreating other people? Was it okay to mistreat people who were not Israelites?

Didn't God call Israel to be a priesthood to all people and nations?

Is it less damaging to a person to cheat, murder, or steal from a non-Israelite than an Israelite?

Would the Israelites become more godly if they banded together to rape, murder and pillage the non-Israelites—acting like the raiding Viking hordes?

Why is sinning against people sinning against the Lord? Why did Jesus say,

"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' 'He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' (Matthew 25:44-45 NIV84).

Is this just metaphorical—or is it actual, literal in some way we don't fully comprehend?

Consider these texts in regard to doing to others is doing to God, do they shed any light?

- **Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.** (1 Co 12:27 NIV84).



- speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the **Head, that is, Christ**. From him the **whole body, joined and held together** by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Eph 4:15–16).

What is the reality that this metaphor of a body is trying to teach us? Remember, metaphor is only metaphor if it is connected to some reality—if there is no reality, then it is fantasy. So, this idea of a body and many parts all connected as one, is pointing us to some larger reality—what is it?

Are we actually connected to God in some way beyond our current comprehension?

Remember this quotation from EGW:

It is God's plan that every part of His government shall depend on every other part, the whole as a wheel within a wheel, working with entire harmony. **He moves upon human forces, causing His Spirit to touch invisible chords, and the vibration rings to the extremity of the universe.**—Manuscript 22, 1897. Ev 93.1

Does the fact that the chords are invisible mean that they are not real? Are radio not real because they are invisible?

Is there some aspect of God's universe, that we cannot fully comprehend, that connects God to everything, including us?

If we consider the metaphor of the body—is every cell of your body part of you? Yes, but is every cell you? We are part of God, but we are not God.

If someone were to take a knife and cut off your big toe, would you be hurt, injured, feel pain and loss? Does God feel pain and loss when His children are cut off from Him by sin and He loses them eternally?

Is there an aspect of how sin not only injures us, but also actually hurts God? If we consider this to be real, then do we see why Satan seeks to destroy every child of God because he hates God and in this way he can hurt God and cause Him pain?

Read second paragraph, “Of course, God Himself...” What was the purpose of the rituals? To educate and teach! Was there ever any salvation benefit in the rituals themselves?

Again the lesson emphasizes repenting from unjust actions toward other members of the covenant community—did they not need to repent from unjust actions toward people who were not part of Israel?

When are rituals beneficial and when are the obstacles?

Can you think of any examples that are beneficial today or are obstacles today?



I have an entire chapter in my book *The God-Shaped Heart* in which I explore ritual and metaphor, but here is a small section from that chapter:

When symbolism is clung to in minds that remain infected with imposed-law constructs, not only is healing impaired but also division and fragmentation are incited. Imagine that during the Dark Ages, when the Black Death was ravaging millions, we had a cure (e.g., penicillin, an antibiotic that cures bacterial infections) and wanted to teach people how to identify symptoms of the disease so they could take the medicine if the symptoms appeared. But because the masses could not read, the use of books, magazines, or flyers would do no good. Therefore, we devise a play, a little drama to act out what to do in case the sickness arises.

We have actors come on stage with red circles drawn on their skin; they act feverous and weak. Another actor playing the role of healer, perhaps in a white robe, sees the symptoms and pulls out a red jelly bean (symbolic of the penicillin in its red capsule) and gives it to the sick ones. Then the red marks are washed off, and those who were formerly sick jump up and dance with joy. A simple play to illustrate a simple lesson: if you get these symptoms, take the remedy and you will get well.

As the years go by and the play is enacted from town to town, one group runs out of red jellybeans, so instead they use blue ones. But this is met with stern opposition from members of the original acting troupe who have always used red jelly beans. They insist that only red jelly beans are to be used because the penicillin capsules are red and red more closely represents the reality. Soon the two groups split forming separate acting companies, each claiming that only their play rightly teaches how to be saved from the plague. Does it really matter if the jellybean is red or blue so long as the people take the actual antibiotic when the disease occurs? Or worse, what if people forgot reality and believed that there was some potency or power in the ritual, so they religiously—prayerfully—ingest jelly beans but fail to ever take the antibiotic? They would have a form of godliness but no power. This is exactly the state of Christianity today—stuck in forms of religion but devoid of the actual healing power of God!
pages 164-165.

TUESDAY

Read first paragraph, “God has provided...” What is the core problem with this paragraph, the lie that is imbedding in the wording?

That God’s law functions like human law and therefore sin is a legal problem and people are criminals deserving of execution and are on death row.

This lie is Satan’s lie from the beginning and corrupts the gospel and our understanding of reality.

Human beings are not criminals on death row waiting execution by the heavenly government.



We are children of God infected with a terminal condition that without remedy will result in our death. Thus, as the Bible says, we are born in sin and conceived in iniquity. We are born terminal, not guilty.

Until we reject the imposed law lie and embrace the truth about God's law as design law, we will continue to misrepresent God and fail to take the final message of mercy to the world.

Read second paragraph, "The Lord says to them..." I like the focus on God offering to change them, but then the lesson becomes less clear, even confusing by using the language of forgiveness without explaining what it means, right after the criminal language in the paragraph before.

What do you think of this idea that God is offering to forgive His people? Is God offering to forgive OR has God forgiven His people and is offering to heal/save them from sin if they will trust Him and let Him?

The penal/legal lie, based on the lie about God's law, sees sin as a legal problem and salvation as legal adjustment. Thus the penal/legal fraud sees the core issue in salvation as *securing God's legal pardon or forgiveness*. This is another lie. God's forgiveness has never been lacking or at issue. God forgave instantly when Adam sinned, but **what was lacking was our trust in God and a remedy that would cure the sin condition.**

Thus, God so loved the world that He not only forgave us from His heart of love, but sent His Son to dispel the lies, reveal the truth, win us to trust, and procure the remedy that we could receive by faith that cures us—giving us a new heart and right spirit restoring us to unity with God.

So, yes we are forgiven by God and in our guilt, in our shame, in our misunderstanding of God we are filled with fear and falsely believe God is angry at us, is against us, is seeking to punish us, so it is important to hear the words like the woman caught in adultery, "neither do I condemn you." We need to hear that God does forgive us—but as we grow in our relationship and knowledge with God, we will learn just as a small child learns about their loving parent, that the God was never against us. God is for us and if God is for us who can be against us!

We must reject these lies that make the sin problem out to be a legal problem with God and salvation a legal adjustment that secures divine forgiveness.

Why does God connect reasoning with Him and cleansing from sin?

Why do so many religious teachers undermine the importance of reasoning?



WEDNESDAY

Read the first paragraph, “Notice the logical...” Is this promise to every human being, that if you do good you will get health and wealth, but if you disobey God you will get sick and poor, OR, is this a promise specifically to Judah at a place in time in regard to fulfilling a specific purpose?

I think it is a promise to Judah regarding fulfilling their mission to be the avenue for the Messiah. If you stay loyal and follow me, I will protect you and keep you here, healthy as a nation, for the arrival of my Son, but if you don’t, then you will go into captivity so I can keep a remnant for the arrival of my Son.

Why should we not think this applies to all people of all time?

Consider the book of Job, was his suffering because he failed God?

Consider the man born blind that the disciples asked Jesus about, or the poor woman with her two mites compared to the rich man who gave a big offering. Does health and wealth, in this world, reliably indicate who is right with God?

Read last paragraph, “Scholars...” Is the covenant with God a legal transaction? When we enter a covenant with God do we bind Him to some legal requirements in some way?

Consider a marriage covenant, while in our society today marriage does contain societal legal elements, next of kin rights, not testify in court etc. these are all added in our society. In God’s original design was the marriage covenant a legal transaction?

What about the New Covenant—it says that God writes His laws on our hearts and minds—is that a legal transaction?

What is the problem if we construe of the New Covenant as a binding legal transaction?

What would happen in your marriage if at the ceremony it focused on the legal requirements—instead of a pastor, the event was led by a lawyer who had a contract like we have at a mortgage closing. The lawyer, rather than speaking about love, trust, devotion, instead reads all the legal requirements of both parties:

“This contract of marriage is between Mr. Jones, henceforth known as party A, and Ms. Smith, henceforth known party B, is made effective today, December 19, 2020. As of the effective date of this contract all properties of party A and party B will be merged into a new corporate entity, henceforth known as corporate C. Both party A and party B will have equal rights and ownership of all assets contained within corporate C and neither party A nor party B may remove assets from corporate C without prior written consent from the other party.”

What would a marriage covenant be like, if it was a legal contract?



Is our covenant with God a legal contract?

Why did God use the format or language of a legal transaction if it is actually not a legal transaction? It was merely grace, love, mercy using language and format to help alleviate the fear and doubt that sin instills in the heart of sinners. It was to help us understand how committed God is to us and that we never need to fear God betraying us! In other words, we doubt God would do what He says simply because He says it, so we want a legal constraint placed upon God that requires Him to do what He said.

THURSDAY

Read first paragraph, “God explains...” Is God’s love for the Hebrews only or for the entire world, for every descendant of Adam and Eve?

What was the role of Jacob’s descendants? To be God’s helpers in taking the truth about God to the world, the truth about the condition of humankind because of Adam’s fall, the promise of the Messiah to save humankind, be the avenue for the Messiah, and prepare the world for the first Advent—but the plan of salvation is for all humankind, not just Jews.

What determines whether we stay in favor with God and thus experience His blessings in our lives, or whether we are out of favor and experience cursings?

What are the cursings? From where does pain and suffering of sin originate?

Is there a difference in a thief using a knife and cutting a person while attempting to rob them, and a surgeon using a scalpel to cut someone attempting to heal them?

In both instances a person uses a sharp instrument to cut on someone else—but are these actions the same?

Do we ever find God using power to take action that can be experienced as painful? But does that mean God is the source of inflicted harm, suffering, death?

Read last paragraph, “If we persistently...” What causes this to occur?

Who hardened Pharaoh’s heart?

- "The Lord said to Moses, “When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. **But I will harden his heart** so that he will not let the people go." Exodus 4:21



- "Yet **Pharaoh's heart became** hard and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had said." Ex 7:13
- "But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, **he hardened his heart** and would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said." Exodus 8:15

So, who hardened Pharaoh's heart? What is God's role, what is Pharaoh's role? Was Pharaoh a puppet, was he free?

What causes a heart to harden?

When the Bible describes Jesus standing at the door to the heart knocking, what is that representing? With what does Jesus knock upon the door to our hearts? Truth and love—what happens to a heart when truth and love are rejected?

If a person never rejects truth or love do they harden as much?

So what happened to Pharaoh? God provided evidence after evidence, truth after truth that the gods of Egypt were false and He was the true Creator, and Pharaoh was convicted, but later rejected the truth. And what is the result to any heart that rejects truth—it hardens.

God's role in Egypt was to present the truth to which Pharaoh had to decide how he would respond. If no truth had been presented to Pharaoh his heart would not have hardened against God as it was, but when truth is presented, and we reject it, the rejection of truth results in hardening of the heart.

So why did God present truth to Pharaoh when He, in His foreknowledge, knew Pharaoh would reject it and experience a hardened heart?

Even though Pharaoh was going to reject the truth, God knew it is only by the presentation of truth that sinners can be set free (John 8:32). God would not deny Pharaoh the opportunity to be freed from sin. God would not deny Pharaoh the opportunity to be saved. Therefore God presented truth to Pharaoh in order to reach his heart and save him.

God did not force Pharaoh's will. Pharaoh freely chose to reject the truth and when Pharaoh hardened his heart, God used Pharaoh as a powerful demonstration of the futility of worshipping false gods. The lessons of Egypt were publicized throughout the ancient world and awareness of the true God spread.

Therefore, God presents truth, which sets free all those who accept it, but God does not force the will of individuals to either accept or reject the truth. When we reject the truth our hearts harden in proportion to the truth rebuffed. The Bible record of all three descriptions of this event is accurate. God hardened Pharaoh's heart by presenting truth in such a way that Pharaoh was forced to make a decision upon it. But it was Pharaoh who hardened his own heart by rejecting the truth and refusing to repent.



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