

# Bristol Conference 1976-13 Studies in the Judges

by Bob Clark

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*The sermon explores the historical lessons from the Book of Judges, emphasizing the cycle of disobedience and the importance of repentance for spiritual growth.*

**Duration:** 36:27

**Scripture:** Judges 2:11-15, Nehemiah 9:8-30, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Bible Conference"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the historical context of the Israelites and their relationship with God. He emphasizes that God would discipline them when they failed to embrace their blessings, but would also provide a deliverer if they repented. The speaker highlights the importance of individuals who are willing to be called by God and lead others by example. He uses the example of Shamgar, who courageously fought against the Philistines one by one, to illustrate the impact of a wise and determined person in delivering God's people.

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## Transcript

Good evening. I trust the word of God is going to bring blessings to your soul as we turn to the book of Judges. But in order to have an introduction to this portion, I'd like you please to turn first for a reading in the book of Nehemiah, chapter 9. The book of Nehemiah, chapter 9. Nehemiah's grand prayer that's carefully recorded here.

We have an eloquent picture given to us of the period of time of the Judges. The nation of Israel is an historical people, and because of this, their history is not only important to themselves, but to you and me. God's people are an historical people.

Everything that you learn is based upon your history, your history and your relationship to God. And as a result, God builds line upon line, precept upon precept, upon previous experiences and dealings with him, the historical record of God's word and his relationship with others. So we also are an historical people, and the history of God's people is increasingly important for us, that we might learn much from the written word of God.

For those of you who sang in the choir, I appreciate that very much. I know that took time and you did a nice job, and I just have one careful suggestion, that in order to maintain this good balance that you have now, please don't let Tom start tomorrow and sing with you, okay? The book of Nehemiah, chapter 9. In the middle of Nehemiah's prayer, he took up in verse 25, historically recounting what the nation did, and they took strong cities and a fat land, and possessed houses full of goods, wells, digs, vineyards, and olive yards, and fruit trees in abundance. So they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness.

Remember now, Canaan is to the nation of Israel as to spiritual blessings in heavenly places is to us. We have done nothing to procure spiritual blessings. They are given to us by the sovereign grace of God.

We have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. Nevertheless, they, Israel, were disobedient and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocation. Therefore, here is the verse that we want to see and emphasize, thou delivered them into the hand of their enemies who vexed them, and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven, and according to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them saviors, judges, shalt attain the same word from the book of Judges.

Thou gavest them saviors who saved them out of the hand of their enemies, but after they had rest, they did evil again before thee. Therefore, left thou them in the land of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet, when they returned and cried unto thee, thou heardst them from heaven, and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercy." That should suffice.

This gives us a panoramic view from a historical writer hundreds of years later. In retrospect, he looks back and says this is the dealing of God with his people. They had failed to lay hold of their blessings.

He put them under disciplinary action with the thought of stimulating, provoking them, stirring them into a right relationship to God, and then subsequent to that, if they would cry out in repentance, then God would come in and provide a deliverer, bringing them rest, prosperity and blessing. But we shall soon see that the very rest, the very blessing, was meant to be a testing time for the nation, a trying time for them to be able to see that it is imperative that we have the hand of God in our lives. Some of us are God's people here this evening.

You know that you're a child of God, you have been taught the word of God, and you have a very real personal faith in our Lord Jesus. There is much to learn in the failure of a nation of Israel, exercises of soul that they go through from which we can learn. Always the lesson is a closer walk with our Lord Jesus, a more tender relationship with him, deeper sensitivity of conscience concerning his words, which the servant of the Lord mentioned earlier today in our first meeting.

But for those of you who are unbelievers, and you know who you are, you've never accepted Christ as your Savior, you have never yet bowed to the authority of God's word and confessed that you were a sinner. Deep in your heart. You may be religious, you're here attending the conference, you have some semblance of spiritual or religious interest, but God is concerned for your eternal soul.

And for you, the lesson is the same. There is no relationship with God apart from the confession of our sins, the repentance and turning away from that which is wrong, and the leaning upon God in his grace and mercy to spare us. That's how God delivers his people, and that's how God will deliver you from the

guilt of your sins.

So we pray that you'll tune your heart. Maybe you're not interested in these archaic old writings in the Old Testament, but there's the voice of God to be heard. In the book of Judges, chapter 3, in verses 1 to 4, we have the proving of the nation of Israel.

Verse 1, Now these are the nations which the Lord left to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan. Verse 4, And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the Lord, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses. The nations were left for the singular purpose of testing and trying God's people.

Moses speaks of dividing the nations according, in the book of Deuteronomy 32, that all the nations of the world are divided and kept in relationship to the nation of Israel. Historically, the nation of Israel is a physical key to the secrets of the world and God's dealings with the world, and our God is deeply involved in national history and controlling government and powers, and the very experiences that we are going through, whatever they're to teach us, even in this election year, is under the control of God, and God knows and he has a purpose, and he is working with us as a company of peoples in this world, some of us believers and others just a nation that has been richly blessed of God. But God has never lost control of the world, and this is the key to the book of Judges.

All of these powers are under his control, and whatever Israel thinks they are doing and accomplishing here during this material epoch in their time, yet God knows that he has left the nation to punish, to control, to teach, to discipline God's people. Five lords of the Philistines in verse 3 are introduced to us. They had a five-city state.

The Philistines, we are introduced for the first time here to them, they are immigrants from out of the Egyptian area. They came not through the Red Sea, but they came from Egypt in a circuitous manner, immigrating into the land and slowly obtaining areas, taking over in a subtle form. They have five cities, and as a result they have five lords or rulers.

Their cities are Gaza, Escalon, Ashdod, Akron and Gaeth. The others are people that are residents of the Promised Land, and they have been left in there to discipline God's people. In verse 5 through verse 7, we have the second section of the chapter, and that is the provoking of God.

The people of Israel had left their right relationship with God. Religious ties which they have tolerated in the land has led to closer marital ties which have caused God's people to be guilty of two grave sins to which they are charged. There, in verse 7, the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.

One, they forgot the Lord their God. Two, they served Balaam and the groves. Man is incorrigibly religious, and God's people have accepted all God's blessings and brought them to a place that was richly endowed.

Buildings that they never built, land that they never sold, properties that they never labored over, and now they are the possessor of it, and it's bred negligence. You and I have been inheritors of spiritual blessings, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the potential filling of the Holy Spirit, the privilege of priesthood, various things, the deepening assurance of your personal salvation, the confidence of communion with God. These are spiritual blessings, and for some of us they do not mean very much.

You're still dabbling in the world. You're still allowing the carnal opposition around us, the world, the flesh, and the evil one, to plunder and to destroy and to negate our lives, and it need not be. The Lord saw that they had done evil in their eyes? No.

This phrase is repeated again and again in the book. In fact, we'll have on our little chart here in a moment or two a cycle which is characteristic seven times of the people during this book, but it's in the sight of the Lord that they sin. They seem to have no sense of their own sin, and this is the importance of God's word, and the study of God's word, and the exposing of ourselves genuinely to one another in Christian fellowship such as this, and we'll see attitudes of heart, behavioral patterns amongst each other, and they will see what we are lacking.

That's where your gift, your cheer, your joy, your ministrations amongst the body of Christ is of such great importance to each and every one of us. But the people of God had provoked him. Separation is the essential principle of God's people.

Sanctification is the essential goal that God desires. You may think it's narrow. If you're 15, you think it's terrible.

When it's 19, you think it's religious nonsensicalness. When you get to be 30 in my age, no, I think it's 29. That sounds bad.

But when you get to be as old as I am, you shall see that it's of tremendous importance, and you will have a proportionate impact in this world in direct relationship to your separation from the world. Any amalgamation with the world in existence, John says, stop loving the world. That's the five words of the Philistine, the religious profession, the five senses that creep in to our spiritual inheritance that begins to govern us, and where we yield our authority and our life away from the Word of God into external things, superficial.

And, beloved of God, there is something better for you and me, and God expects it of us. And so, he's going to lay out for us three men in this particular book, and these three personalities are the provision of God. Even though God has been provoked by his people, now verses 8-31 give us the provision, or the providing, of God.

This comes in the form of three men, and this is what we'd like to draw to our attention. The anger of the Lord was hot against Israel in verse 8 because of their sin in verse 7, and the anger of the Lord was hot, and he sold them into the hand of Cushan Rishasam, king of Mesopotamia, a northeastern empire. The children of Israel served Cushan Rishasam eight years.

It would appear from their original battle, and other things that are written in other portions of scripture, that their first maneuver was to take the gentlest city of Jericho. It had been destroyed, it was not livable, it was not being lived in by God's people. But they came in and appropriated that property, even though it was under the curse of God, which didn't interest them, and they used it as a pivotal point.

They crossed Jordan, began to reach out on their tentacles under their control, but under God's supervision. I don't know what Cushan Rishasam thought. His name is Cush, a man of double wickedness, an exceedingly evil and wicked man from Mesopotamia.

He migrated over, had rule and power, and now he's dominating God's people. I don't know what he thought when he was conquering Israel, but it was God that was doing it, and God was superintending this

and allowing these circumstances. I don't know what it is in your life.

I sometimes will see what it is in my life that God begins to deal with me and discipline me, and it's imperative that I begin to respond and see his hand more and more in my life, and the most eloquent way to which God addresses himself to my soul is through the written word of God. So I would reaffirm what Brother Thomas told us in the morning. Study her words.

Don't be discouraged if you're not able to read a psalm 30 times in the Hebrew. Read it in English. God will only hold you accountable for the language you know.

God shall speak to your heart, and never be discouraged by those who have been graced and gifted and educated and capacitated above that which you and I have. Beloved of God, he wants you to ponder his words and give it careful consideration, and from verses 8 to 11 we have presented to us a man. From verse 11 and 12 all the way through verse 30 we have brought for us, drawn to our attention, the method that God is using.

And then in the last verse, the means. This is up on the board if you'd like to jot those down. First thing we want to see is this man.

He's drawn to our attention because the Lord has appointed him. When the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord God raised up and delivered to the children of Israel. He is a divinely appointed person.

There is no such thing in reality of us gaining gifts, acquiring gifts, acquiring usefulness. That's absurd. We do not do that.

We find out where God wants us and what God desires. He must be supreme in our life, and the Lord raised up a deliverer, a man who by his example and behavior and attitude and disposition is going to be a well-prepared leader amongst God's people. He is a man of patience.

He has tolerated eight years of oppression. He's a man of experience and courage. You'll read this in chapter 1, verses 10-12, which is that brief rehearsal of that which has happened in Joshua chapter 15.

We read over these things and we see that he's a man of vigor, but he's a man that has a close relationship to Caleb. The Hebrew language is rather cumbersome, and so it either means that he is a nephew of Caleb or a younger brother by a second wife. Either way, he is intimately related to those that have had a real relationship with God.

Some of us, when we're young people, think that it's a real drag to have Christian parents. Disabuse that thought in your mind. There's no greater blessing than you have than your Christian friends.

Some of them seem to harass you a bit because maybe your dress or attitude at a school you're going to or your lack of participation or your too much participation, but basically it's because of a concern and a desire that spiritual things become of paramount importance to you. The greatest blessing in my life was to have a godly mother who, in my earliest years, insisted on disciplining me into having a relationship with God's people to God save my soul, and then subsequently to that, quietly petition God three times a day that he deliver me from the things that I was involved in in the world, and ultimately give myself to God when I was in my teens. I am deeply thankful for family and loved ones who know Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Here's a man who had a personal relationship with Caleb. A great man of God. One of the two men that God could bring over into the promised land.

A man of courage and a man of character, and a man who had a very charming and lovely and valuable wife. And as a result, this man Othniel decides that she's appropriate to really make an effort for. In fact, that's a kind of a good clue for any woman.

Somebody who is well worth working for and to attain, and she had been a blessing to him. This man is drawn to our attention, but in verse 10 is a significant thought. Not only was he divinely appointed, he was divinely enabled.

The Spirit of the Lord came upon him. Now, it's a misconception to say that the Spirit of God never indwelt Old Testament believers. He never sealed Old Testament believers.

After you believe in Jesus Christ, those of you who are believers, after that you believe the gospel message, you were sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, and sealed unto the day of redemption, the return of the Lord. In the Old Testament, here the expression is, the Holy Spirit came in and clothed himself. It's said of Gideon, a little bit later of Jephthah, and kind of interesting expressions concerning Samson in this book about giving him spiritual impetus and provoking him to a relationship with God.

Here, the Holy Spirit of God comes upon this man, dresses himself, and his first act is to make censurous, discerning scrutiny concerning the wrong amongst God's people. He becomes a leader, a man who has been forged by character and patience and experience, godly background. He is called of God, and he yields himself to God.

And, indeed, an arduous battle is fought, and he becomes the victor and the leader of God's people. And the answer is, in verse 11, the land had rest forty years, and Osmeo, the son of Canaaz, died. Has God's people learned? No.

And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord strengthened Eglon. Now, at this particular point, I want to show you something up on the chart, and this is a little diagram of a cycle that constitutes five stages, and it's going to be repeated. And I would really appreciate it if you'd either note it mentally, jot it in your Bible, put it in a margin, and best yet is to memorize the five words.

Not because the words are important, but rather the concept is repeated again and again, seven times in the book of Judges, and it's the key to the book, and it's the key to your spiritual welfare. You'll notice that each of these people, in verse 7, the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. Verse 12, the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.

It was described by Nehemiah in chapter 9 of his prayer that it was rebellion. Rebellion against God, and God's plan, and God's purposes. From rebellion there was divine retribution.

You notice in verse 8, the Lord, the anger of the Lord, was steeped. He sold them into the hand of Cushan Rishithah. In verse 12, the Lord strengthened Eglon, the king of Moab, against Israel because he had done evil in his sight.

This is a constant rehearsal, the rebellion of the people. They are making progress from the left to the right, and then their progress is stopped, and they make a loop in their experience. They're sinned.

Now they're under divine retribution. It varies in periods of time. They're under the discipline of God.

They cannot progress until they come to the bottom part where there is repentance, and that's characterized in this book by, in verse 9, the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, and if you would again in verse 15, the children of Israel cried unto the Lord. There is their repentance. Characterizing their acknowledgement of the hand of the God, their failure, now they've come down to the lowest spot, repentance.

They would rise up by God raising up a deliverer. There is restoration, and after each one of God's raised up deliverers, there is a rest period. That period of rest, cessation of conflict, struggle, is perpetuated by that deliverer, not only because of his military victory or his particular service as a deliverer, which varies through the book in each of these twelve deliverers or saviors, but also a time to test God's people, a time to try them, to prove them again whether they have learned the past lesson.

This is the cycle of your life, and if by any chance you have come to that spot where there is rebellion and resistance, you're somewhere in the loop, and we pray that you will repent, be restored and find spiritual rest, and be able to go on and make progress in the things of God. Firstly, Ophimiel teaches us concerning the man. It's the man himself that's brought to our attention.

Now we see the method that is used, illustrated by Ehud, and he occupies from verse 12 through verse 30. The emphasis is upon the method here. There is oppression by the Moabites.

There's nothing like a Moabite who will oppress you spiritually. You know what that means? That's kind of abstract, biblical language. Who were the Moabites? You say, immediately I know.

Oh, well, Moab was the brother of Amnon, wasn't he? That's exactly right. And who were Moab and Amnon? They were children born to Lot, who in a drunken stupor had an incestuous relationship with his own daughter. And the father of the Moabite and the father of the Ammonite were directly linked in natural tie and blood relationship with God's people.

The very closest relationships to you shall sometimes cause you spiritual oppression and loss of things eternal. The Moabites and the Ammonites amalgamated with the Amalekites, indirect cousins, and here they combine to have an oppression of God's people. And there's nothing quite like that which is natural in your life.

Family ties, the things that naturally and instinctively appeal to you and me, which vary. There's no sense in legislating. You can't put it on a list, because your background and family and training and experience and education, your position in life, your social life, your temperament and personality is entirely different from mine.

But by putting in these general terms, the Spirit of God can press upon you, and you know what it is that creeps into your life, even in family relationships, that deters you from going on spiritually. Maybe it's an unsaved loved one, maybe it's disparagement, maybe it's personal grief and burden that causes you to have some kind of an offense, and you begin to pettey and cater to this dispositional attitude. Whatever it is in your life, it becomes a very heavy, massive oppression to God's people, and it negates spiritual growth.

And it's pictured here by Eglon, who you'll notice is a very fat man. Prosperity of the flesh, indulgence. How did he get to be so large and so gargantuan in size that he'd be separated from all the rest of the

citizenry by saying, a very fat man? The activity of a natural man, the constant feeding of what we are on ourselves.

Oh, dear child of God, the Word of God teaches us clearly that the flesh has nothing to offer God. The flesh has nothing to offer God. You are essentially, in your ego, in your direct, intricate, I-myself person, you are neuter.

You are neither good nor bad, and you will either yield to the old man, the flesh, the Adamic nature that operates within, or you shall yield to the Holy Spirit of God operating within. And we are like a pawn to be moved by one of the two, and if only you would give up to that concept, and accept the truth of all these teachings, and see that God has condemned you, and nailed you, and sentenced you with Christ to Calvary, that very fact shall be our spiritual liberation, and it frees us to go on. And we see that what we are in the flesh is just a ponderous, gluttonous, fat, self-indulgent nature.

Eglon was a very fat man, and so is your old nature, and it would love to oppress you. And there's one way to conquer Eglon. Ahud is raised up, left-handed Benjamite.

It's interesting that so many in the little tribe of Benjamin are left-handed. Most of them are stone-throwers. It doesn't mean that they're very good with their left hand, it means they're limited in their right arm.

So, that's what the Hebrew term means. They're either not crippled, necessarily, but they don't have a strong right arm, which is the logical tool, so they are humble in needing to use the left hand. Left-handed Benjamite, he does something unusual.

He creates for himself a short, 18-inch sword, a cubit long, with the elbow to the tip of the finger, just long enough to give it a good handle, and a two-edged blade, which is rather unique also, because the average fighting weapon of the time was a much longer sword used for longer range with one long blade and one sharp edge. And here's a two-edged sword, and it's going to be found underneath his garment on his right thigh. There's only one way to conquer the flesh.

There's only one way to have victory over that oppressive, natural thing that will dominate and destroy me, and that's a secret, quiet battle with the flesh with a two-edged sword. The Word of God is a two-edged sword, and by it you are soon enabled to discern that which is soulual and that which is spiritual. There's nothing in this world, absolutely nothing in this world, that can make a demarcation and a delineation between the spirit and the soul except God's Word.

And praise the Lord he's given us this provision. And interestingly enough, it's recorded for us in the book of Hebrews chapter 4, where the concept is, how do we lay hold of our spiritual inheritance? And so we don't use the two-edged sword on others. The Word of God is never called a two-edged sword to use on the Christian.

If you're a ministering brother or a Sunday school teacher or a youth worker, you don't use the word like a two-edged sword on others. Oh no, you use it on yourself, to cut deeply into our own lives. And this is exactly what's pictured here.

Ahab sneaks in, he makes a presentation, no doubt the tributary money, the tax money that's due Eglon. And in verse 17, he brought a present unto Eglon, king of Moab, and Eglon was a very fat man. In the middle of verse 19, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king, who said, Keep silent.

He thought he was going to get something a little bit above the tribute money, the little excess and the flocks and the herds and other tax money that was being brought to him. He got a little bit on the side, so he put everybody out of the room, and Ahab sneaks over to him and he says, I have a little something for you. Good, just hold on now, we'll get the room empty.

Then he comes over, draws his sword, and Eglon is seated. And the description, you can read the material, our time is escaping us, but the easiest description is, it's an Eastern technique. The man is seated, a thrust downward, a twist of the wrist will disembowel the victim, and that's exactly what's incurred here.

He never left his throne, he is immediately slain and disemboweled, and there he is plump. This very fat man is enslaved. Beloved of God, notice the picture symbolism.

Your flesh will never be slain here at this concert, but it will be when you and I sit quietly in our room, alone with the word of God, and allow it like a two-edged sword to cut deeply and expose the flesh, and how much the natural domination controls and has kept me from spiritual victory. A quiet, secret battle. That's the method that God uses.

He becomes a leader. He retreats, circles to the north, picks up the Ephraimites, and then attacks. He circumferences the city of Jericho and goes over to the river of Jordan, and cuts off at the forge and kills 10,000 of the Mesopotamians.

God's people have been delivered. Verse 30 says, So Moab were subdued that day under the hand of Israel, and the land had rest four score years. You notice the rest period is in terms of multiples of 40, the time of testing in Scripture.

Verse 11, the land had rest under Osmeo 40 years. Verse 30, and the land had rest four score years under Ahaz. God has provided for us a simple lesson.

God is looking for a man or a woman. Not a generic term, I'm just talking about a believer who themselves is ready to be called of God, separated, equipped, appointed, and yielded to him, courageously, humbly willing to do what they are able under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. They are thus prepared by the method of that personal victory, through the use of the word of God on ourselves to slay the flesh and prepare us to be a leader where we can also say, follow me.

God's people need examples. They need those in the young and the old that will walk a light God's people can follow and find blessing. And after him was Shemgar, the son of Anab, which blew of the Philistines 600 men with an ox's nose.

He also delivered Israel. That's the third of the deliverers, and he illustrates for us the means that is used, and what is the means that is harmed. Notice if you would turn over now, please, to chapter 5, in part of Deborah and Barak's song of victory, they mention an historical circumstance that's going on during the day of Shemgar.

In verse 6, In the days of Shemgar, son of Anab, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied. The caravan trails were unoccupied. The travelers walked through byways.

The inhabitants of the villages ceased. They ceased in Israel until that I, Deborah, arose, a mother in Israel. What's the circumstance? Shemgar did not fight a battle.

I should not say that. It is my conviction that Shemgar did not fight a battle and kill 600 Philistines. The Philistines were migrating in the land to terrorism, the oppression of God's people.

They weren't able to go out on the open highway. The poor farmer had to fight for his life. What is an ox that's got a long stick with a point on the end, sometimes large enough to hold about the size of a baseball bat, more often just a very simple thing with a sharp metal point to goad the ox to playing onward, to move onward and do its work? And on Monday, Shemgar would run across a couple of Philistines and kill them.

And on Tuesday afternoon, he'd see another Philistine or two, and he'd kill them. And over a protracted period of time, he maintained a vigil by one of the time, slaying these enemies that are creeping amongst God's people, putting them under, and God says, the words of a wise man are like oxen's goad. They probe others, and that ministrations is so needed to deliver God's people.

The gift of exhortation, that one who can draw alongside of God's people and goad them with the word, tenderly, graciously encouraging them on in their service. It's a delivery from that which you'll practice. So it makes no difference whether we are saints or sinners.

The only relationship we have with God is when we have come around and we acknowledge there is rebellion in our life. That you are presently now, if you're an unbeliever under the disciplinary hand of God, he is correcting you, he's dealing with you, he's remonstrating with you, and he's waiting for you to repent of your sins. I refuse to make any foolish, shallow invitation on the basis of some kind of an emotional plea to you.

But those of you who are unbelievers at this conference, you know your spiritual condition, and I command you to repent. Repent of your sin this day, and honor the Lord Jesus Christ, who has indeed been willing to love you and die for you. You've procrastinated long enough.

You need to repent of your sins, be restored to a right relationship to God. Mr. Redmond, myself, one of the conveners, we would love to sit down and show you from holy writ how you can be rightly related to God and have your sins forgiven. And, dear child of God, remember, the man of God that's available, the method to slay the flesh with the word of God, to mean anything that's at hand, to exhort, to stir up, to provoke God's people through spiritual blessing.

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