

# An Atheist Answered

by T. De Witt Talmage

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*The speaker defends Christianity against Robert G. Ingersoll's attacks, arguing that the Bible is a book of truth and that Ingersoll's misrepresentations impeach his credibility.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 27:21, Matthew 8:4, Luke 10:31, Acts 6:7, Hebrews 7:1-9, 1 Peter 2:9, Revelation 1:6

**Topics:** "Priesthood Of Christ", "Christian Ministry"

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## Description

The preacher delves into the significance of priests in the Bible, highlighting their role as sacred or consecrated individuals who serve deity. While most references to priests in the New Testament pertain to Jewish ceremonial officials, Acts 14:13 mentions a priest of the pagan cult of Zeus. Jesus is portrayed as our Great High Priest, emphasizing His continuous intercession for us. The sermon also touches on believers in Revelation being described as priests who will reign with Christ, showcasing the dual nature of priests in the Bible.

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## Transcript

"Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them" (Ephesians 4:18).

It seems from what we have recently heard that the Christian religion is a huge blunder; that the Mosaic account of the Creation is an absurdity large enough to throw all nations into rollicking guffaw; that Adam and Eve never existed; that the ancient flood and Noah's Ark were impossibilities; that there never was a miracle; that the Bible is the friend of cruelty, of murder, of polygamy, of obscenity, of adultery, of all forms of base crime; that the Christian religion is woman's and man's stultification; that the Bible from lid to lid is a fable, an obscenity, a cruelty, a humbug, a sham, a lie; that the martyrs who died for its truth were miserable dupes; that the Church of Jesus Christ is properly gazetted as a fool; that when Thomas Carlyle, the sceptic, said, "The Bible is a noble book," he was dropping into imbecility - that when Theodore Parker, the infidel, declared in Music Hall, Boston, "Never a boy or girl in all Christendom but was profited by that great Book," he was becoming very weak minded; that it is something to bring a blush to the cheek of every patriot, that John Adams, the father of American independence, declared "The Bible is the best Book in all the world"; and that lion hearted Andrew Jackson turned into a snivelling coward when he said, "That Book, sir, is the rock on which our Republic rests"; and that Daniel Webster abdicated the throne of his intellectual power and resigned his logic, and from being the great expounder of the Constitution and the great lawyer of his age, turned into an idiot, when he said, "My heart assures and

reassures me that the Gospel of Jesus Christ must be a divine reality. From the time that at my mother's feet, or on my father's knee, I first learned to lisp verses from the sacred Writings, they have been my daily study and vigilant contemplation, and if there is anything in my style or thought to be commended, the credit is due to my kind parents in instilling into my mind an early love of the Scriptures"; and that William H. Seward, the diplomatist of the century, only showed his puerility when he declared, "The whole hope of human progress is suspended on the ever growing influences of the Bible"; and that it is wisest for us to take that book from the throne in the affections of uncounted multitudes, and put it under our feet to be trampled upon by hatred and hissing contempt; and that your old father was hood winked, and cajoled, and cheated, and befooled, when he leaned on this as a staff after his hair grew gray, and his hands were tremulous, and his steps shortened as he came up to the verge of the grave; and that your mother sat with a pack of lies on her lap while reading of the better country, and of the ending of all her aches and pains, and reunion not only with those of you who stood around her but with the children she had buried with infinite heartache, so that she could read no more until she took off her spectacles, and wiped from them the heavy mist of many tears.

Alas! That for forty and fifty years they should have walked under this delusion and had it under their pillow when they lay a dying in the back room, and asked that some words from the vile page might be cut upon the tombstone under the shadow of the old country meeting house where they sleep this morning waiting for a resurrection that will never come. This book, having deceived them, and having deceived the mighty intellects of the past, must not be allowed to deceive our larger, mightier, vaster, more stupendous intellects. And so out with the Book from the Court Room, where it is used in the solemnization of testimony. Out with it from under the foundation of Church and asylum. Out with it from the domestic circle. Gather together all the Bibles - the children's Bibles, the family Bibles, those newly bound, and those nearly worn out and pages almost obliterated by the fingers long ago turned to dust - bring them all together, and let us make a bonfire of them, and by it warm our cold criticism, and after that turn under with the plough share of public indignation the polluted ashes of that loathsome, adulterous, obscene, cruel and deathful Book which is so antagonistic to man's liberty, and woman's honor, and the world's happiness.

"Stop!" says some silly old man. "Stop!" says some weak minded woman. "Stop!" says some small brained child. "Perhaps you had better give the Bible a trial before you condemn it." Well, we will give it a trial. I empanel this whole audience as a jury to render their verdict in this case -Infidelity, the plaintiff, versus Christianity, the defendant. Twelve jurors are ordinarily enough in a case, but in this case, vaster in importance than any other, I this morning empanel all the thousands of people here gathered as a jury, and I ask them silently to affirm that they will well and truly try this issue of traverse joined between Infidelity, the plaintiff, and Christianity, the defendant, so help you God.

The jury empanelled, call your first witness. Robert G. Ingersoll! "Here!" Swear the witness. But how are you to swear the witness? I know of only two ways of taking an oath in a Court Room. The one is by kissing the Bible, and the other is by lifting the hand. I cannot ask him to swear by the Bible, because he considers that a pack of lies, and therefore it could give no solemnity to his oath. I cannot ask him to lift the hand, for that seems to imply the existence of a God, and that is a fact in dispute. So I swear him by the rings of Saturn, and the spots on the sun, and the caverns in the moon, and the Milky Way, and the nebular hypothesis, that he will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in this case between Infidelity, the plaintiff, and Christianity, the defendant.

Let me say that I know nothing of the private character of that person, neither do I want to know. I have no taste for exploring private character. I shall deal with him as a public teacher. I shall not be diverted from this by the fact that he has again and again in lectures and in interviews assailed my name. I have no personal animosity. I invite him the Sabbath after he has changed his views in regard to the Christian religion to stand here where I stand and preach his first sermon. I deal with him only as a public teacher.

You say: Why preach these three or four sermons which I intend to preach in answering the champion blasphemer of America? Am I afraid that Christianity will be overcome by this scoffing harlequinade? Oh, no. Do you know how near he has come to stopping Christianity? I will tell you how near he has come to impeding the progress of Christianity in the world. About as much as one snowflake on the track will impede the half past three o'clock Chicago lightning express train. Perhaps not so much as that. It is more like a Switzerland insect floating through the air impeding an Alpine avalanche.

The Sabbath after Mr. Ingersoll in this region extinguished Christianity, we received in this Church over four hundred souls in public and beautiful consecration of themselves to Christ, and that only a small illustration of the universal advance. Within ten years Mr. Ingersoll has done his most conspicuous stopping of Christianity, and he has stopped it at the following rate: in the first fifty years of this century, there were three million people who professed the faith of Christ. In the last ten years, there have been three million people connecting themselves by profession with the Church of Christ. In other words, the last ten years have accomplished as much as the first fifty years of this century. My fear is not that he will arrest Christianity. I preach these sermons for the benefit of individuals. There are young men who through his teachings have given up their religion and soon after gave up their morals. Ingersoll's teachings triumphant would fill all the penitentiaries, and the gambling hells and houses of shame on the continent - on the planet. No Divine system of morals, and in twenty years we would have a hell on earth eclipsing in abomination the hell that Mr. Ingersoll has so much laughed at. My fear is not that Christianity in general shall be impeded, but I want to persuade these young men to get aboard the train, instead of throwing themselves across the track. God is going to save this world anyhow, and the only question is whether you and I will refuse to get into the lifeboat. Besides that, I want to put into the mouths of these young men arguments by which they can defend themselves in the profession of their faith in Christ when they are bombarded.

But that trial comes on. The jury has been empanelled. The first witness has been called. In the opening sentences of my sermon, I gave Mr. Ingersoll's charges against Christianity. Now, my friends, it is a principle settled in all court rooms, and among all intelligent people, "false in part, false in all." If a witness is found to be making a misrepresentation on the stand, it does not make any difference what he testifies to after; it all goes overboard. The judge, the jury, every common sense man says, "False in part, false in all." Now, if I can show you, and I will show you, the Lord helping me, that Mr. Ingersoll makes misrepresentations in one respect, or two respects, or three respects, I will demand that, as intelligent men and as fair minded women, you throw overboard his entire testimony. If he will misrepresent in one thing, he will misrepresent all the way through. "False in one, false in all."

In the first place, he raises a roystering laugh against the Bible by saying: "Is this Book true? The gentleman who wrote it said that the world was made out of nothing - I cannot imagine nothing being made into something." In nearly all his lectures he begins with that gigantic misrepresentation. I offer a thousand dollars reward to any man who will show me any passage in the Bible that tells me that the world was made out of nothing. The very first passage says it was made out of God's omnipotence. "In the beginning God created the Heaven and the earth." I do not ask you to refer to your Bible. Refer to your

memory that you may see it is an Ingersollian misstatement - a misstatement from stem to stem, and from cutwater to taffrail, and from the top of the mainmast down to the barnacles on the bottom. If he had taken some obscure passage, he would not have been so soon found out; but he has taken the most conspicuous, the most memorable, the most magnificent passage, all geological and astronomical discovery only adding to its grandeur. "In the beginning." There you can roll in ten million years if you want to. There is no particular date given - no contest between science and revelation. You may roll in there ten million years, if you want to. Though the world may have been in process of creation for millions of years, suddenly and quickly, and in one week, it may have been fitted up for man's residence. Just as a great mansion may have been many years in building, and yet in one week it may be curtained and chandebred and cushioned and upholstered for a bride and groom.

You are not compelled to believe that the world was made in our six days; you are not compelled to believe that. It may not have been a day of twenty four hours, the day spoken of in the first chapter; it may have been God's day, and a thousand years with Him are as one day. "And the evening and the morning were the first day" - God's day. "And the evening and the morning were the second day" - God's day. "And the evening and the morning were the sixth day" - God's day. You and I are living in the seventh day, the Sabbath of the world, the day of Gospel redemption, the grandest day of all the week in which each day may have been made up of thousands of years. Can you tell me how a man can get his mind and soul into such a blasphemous twist as to scoff at that first chapter of Genesis, its verses billows of light surging up from sapphire seas of glory! Come now and let Mr. Ingersoll laugh at the fact that the world is made out of nothing. He rings his charges on that word nothing. He has gone all through the cities telling what every man, woman, and child of common sense knows is a misrepresentation. There is as much difference between Mr. Ingersoll's statement and the truth as between nothing and omnipotence. Now I will take Mr. Ingersoll's first misrepresentation, and I nail it so high that North, South, East, and West may see it and remember it. Wilful misrepresentation! I repeat, there is as much difference between his statement and the Bible statement as between nothing and omnipotence. Now I demand, gentlemen of the jury, that you throw overboard his entire testimony. False in part, false in all - all that he has testified to in the past, all that he will testify to in the future - all overboard, by the common rules of evidence.

I take a step further in the impeachment of this witness. One would have thought that after misrepresenting the first passage he would have rested from his labors and given us some honest exposition. Oh, no! He rolls from side to side with laughter. He runs up and down the whole gamut of cachination. He can hardly contain his mirthfulness. He swoops upon the third and fourth verses of the same chapter in caricature and says: "Ha, ha! the Bible represents that light was created on Monday, and the sun was not created until Thursday. Just think of it! a book declaring that light was created three days before the sun shone!" Here Mr. Ingersoll shows his geological and chemical and astronomical ignorance. If Mr. Ingersoll had asked any school boy on his way home from one of our high schools, "My lad, can there be any light without the shining of the sun?" the lad would have said, "Yes, sir - heat and electricity emit light independent of the sun. Beside that, when the earth was in process of condensation, it was surrounded by thick vapors and the discharge of many volcanoes in the primary period, and all this obscuration may have hindered the light of the sun from falling on the earth until that Thursday morning." Beside that, he would say: "Mr. Ingersoll, don't you know that David Brewster and Herschel, the astronomer, and all the modern men of their class, agree in the fact that the sun is not light, that it is an opaque mass, that it is only the candlestick that holds the light, a phosphorescent atmosphere floating around it, changing and changing, so it is not to be at all wondered at that not until that Thursday morning its light fell on the earth? Beside that, Mr. Ingersoll," the lad of the high school would say, "the rocks in

crystalization emit light. There is light from a thousand surfaces, the alkalis, for instance." The lad would have gone on to say "The metallic bases emit light." The lad would have gone on still further to say: "Mr. Ingersoll, don't you know there was a time in the history of the world when there were thousands of miles of liquid granite flaming with light?" The lad would have gone on and told Mr. Ingersoll that by observation it has been found that there are burned out volcanoes in other worlds which, when they were in explosion and activity, must have cast forth an insufferable light, throwing a glare all over our earth. And the boy would have asked him also if he had ever heard of the Aurora Borealis or the Aurora Anchalis. And then the boy would have unbuckled the strap from his bundle of books, and read from one, entitled "Connection of the Physical Sciences," this paragraph:

"Captain Bonnycastle, coming up the Gulf of St. Lawrence on the 17th of September, 1826, was aroused by the mate of the vessel in great alarm from an unusual appearance. It was a star light night, when suddenly the sky became overcast. In the direction of the high land of Cornwallis County an instantaneous and intensely vivid light, resembling the aurora, shot out on the hitherto gloomy and dark sea, on the lee bow that was so brilliant, it lighted everything distinctly, even to the masthead. The light spread over the whole sea between the two shores, and the waves, which before had been tranquil, became agitated. Captain Bonnycastle describes the scene as that of a blazing sheet of awful and most brilliant light - a long and vivid line of light that showed the face of the high frowning land abreast. The sky became lowering and more intensely obscure. Long, tortuous lines of light showed immense numbers of large fish darting about as if in consternation. The topsail yard and mizzen boom were lighted by the glare as if gas lights had been burned directly below them, and until just before day break, at four o'clock, the most minute objects were distinctly visible."

Mr. Ingersoll has only to go to one of our high schools to learn there are ten thousand sources of light besides the light of the sun. But if he had been in one of the classes in our high schools, a class in astronomy, or geology, or chemistry, the impatient teacher would have said to him: "Robert, go down to the foot and be in disgrace - be in disgrace for your stupidity!" This is not wilful misrepresentation in this case on the part of Mr. Ingersoll. He does not know any better. It is the most profound and most disgusting ignorance ever exhibited on a lecturer's platform in America when he says there cannot be any light, or implies there cannot be any light, except that which comes from the sun.

In the first case which I showed you it was wilful misrepresentation. In this case it is ignorance, geological, and astronomical, and chemical. But whether wilful or ignorant misrepresentation, either and both will impeach Robert G. Ingersoll as incompetent to give testimony in this case between Infidelity, the plaintiff, and Christianity, the defendant. I nail on the top of the temple of scepticism this misrepresentation by the champion blasphemer of America. He misrepresented in the first case. He has misrepresented in the second case. Now I demand, gentlemen of the jury, that you throw overboard his testimony. "False in part, false in all."

I take a step further in impeaching this witness against Christianity. He sharpens all his witticisms to destroy our belief in the ancient deluge and Noah's Ark. He says that from the account there, it must have rained eight hundred feet of water each day in order that it might be fifteen cubits above the hills. He says that the Ark could not have been large enough to contain "two of every sort," for there would have been hundreds of thousands and hundreds of thousands of creatures! He says that these creatures would have come from all lands and all zones! He says there was only one small window in the Ark, and that would not have given fresh air to keep the animals inside the Ark from suffocation! Then he winds up that part of the story by saying that the Ark finally landed on a mountain seventeen thousand feet high. He says he does

not believe the story. Neither do I! There is no such story in the Bible. I will tell you what the Bible story is. I must say that I have changed my mind in regard to some matters which once were to me very mysterious. They are no more mysterious. This is the key to the facts. This is the story of an eye witness, Noah, his story incorporated afterward by Moses in the account. Noah described the scene just as it appeared to him. He saw the flood and he fathomed its depth. As far as eye could reach everything was covered up, from horizon to horizon, or as it says, "under the whole Heaven." He did not refer to the Sierra Nevadas, or to Mount Washington, for America had not been discovered, or, if it had been discovered, he could not have seen so far off. He is giving the testimony of an eyewitness. God speaks after the manner of men when He says everything went under, and Noah speaks after the manner of men when he says everything did go under. An eye witness. There is no need of thinking that the kangaroo leaped the ocean, or that the polar bear came down from the ice.

Why did the deluge come? It came for the purpose of destroying the outrageous inhabitants of the then thinly populated earth, nearly all the population probably very near the Ark before it was launched. What would have been the use of submerging North and South America, or Europe, or Africa when they were not inhabited? Mr. Ingersoll most grossly misrepresents, when he says that in order to have that depth of water it must have rained eight hundred feet every day. The Bible distinctly declares that the most of the flood rose instead of falling. Before the account where it says "the windows of Heaven were opened," it says, "all the fountains of the great deep were broken up." All geologists agree in saying that there are caverns in the earth filled with water, and they rushed forth, and all the lakes and rivers forsook their bed. What am I to think, and what are you to think of a man who, ignoring this earthquake spoken of in the Bible as preceding the falling of the rain, and for the purpose of making a laugh at the Bible, will say it must have rained over eight hundred feet every day? Taking the last half instead of the first half. The fountains of the great deep were broken up, and then the windows of Heaven were opened. Is it a strange thing that we should be asked to believe in this flood of the Bible, when geologists tell us that again and again and again the dry earth has been drowned out? Just open your geology, and you will read of twenty floods. Is it not a strange thing that the infidel scientist writing us to believe in the twenty floods of geological discovery, should, as soon as we believe in the one flood of the Bible, pronounce us asinine and non compos mentis?

Well, then, another thing, in regard to the size of the Ark. Instead of being a mud scow, as some of these infidels would have us understand, it was a magnificent ship, nearly as large as our Great Eastern, three times the size of an ordinary man-of-war. At the time in the world when shipbuilding was unknown, God had this vessel constructed, which turned out to be almost in the same proportions as our stanchest modern vessels. After thousands of years of experimenting in naval architecture and in ship carpentry, we have at last got up to Noah's Ark, that ship leading all the fleets of the world on all the oceans. Well, Noah saw the animal creation going into this Ark. He gave the accounts of an eye witness. They were the animals from the region where he lived; for the most part they were animals useful to man, and if noxious insects or poisonous reptiles went in, it was only to discipline the patience and to keep alert the generations after the flood. He saw them going in. There were a great number of them, and he gives the account of an eye witness. They went in two and two of all flesh.

Two or three years ago I was on a steamer on the river Tay, and I came to Perth, Scotland. I got off, and I saw the most wonderful agricultural show that I had ever witnessed. There were horses and cattle such as Rosa Bonbetir never sketched, and there were dogs such as the loving pencil of Edwin Landseer never portrayed, and there were sheep and fowl and creatures of all sorts. Suppose that "two and two" of all the

creatures of that agricultural show were put upon the Tay steamer to be transported to Dundee, and the next day I should be writing home to America and giving an account of the occurrence, I would have used the same general phraseology that Noah used in regard to the embarkation of the brute creation in the Ark - I would have said that they went in two and two of every sort. I would not have meant six hundred thousand. A common sense man myself, I would suppose that the people who read the letter were common sense people.

"But how could you get them into the Ark?" says Mr. Ingersoll with a great sneer. "How could they be induced to go into the Ark? He would have to pick them out and drive them in, and coax them in." Could not the same God who gave instinct to the animal inspire that instinct to seek for shelter from the storm? However, nothing more than ordinary animal instinct was necessary. Have you never been in the country when an August thunder storm was coming up and heard the cattle moan at the bars to get in? and seen the alighted fowl go upon the perch at noonday, and heard the affrighted dog and cat calling at the door, supplicating entrance? And are you surprised that in that age of the world, when there were fewer places of shelter for dumb beasts, at the muttering and rumbling and flashing and quaking and darkening of an approaching deluge, the animal creation came moaning and bleating to the sloping embankment reaching up to the ancient Great Eastern, and passed in? I have owned horses and cattle and sheep and dogs, but I never had a horse, or a cow, or a sheep, or a dog that was so stupid it did not know enough to come in when it rained! Yet Mr. Ingersoll cannot understand how they could get in. It is amazing to him. And then, that one window in the Ark which afforded such poor ventilation to the creatures there assembled - that small window in the Ark which excites so much mirthfulness on the part of the great infidel. If he had known as much Hebrew as you could put on your little finger nail, he would have known that the word translated window there means window course, a whole range of lights. This ignorant infidel does not know a window pane from twenty windows. So, if there is any criticism of the Ark, there seems to be too much window for such a long storm. If he had studied Hebrew two weeks he would have been saved the display of that appalling ignorance, that most disgraceful ignorance, when he scoffs and scoffs and scoffs, and chuckles and chuckles and chuckles over the small window in the Ark. This infidel says that during the long storm the window must have been kept shut, and hence no air. There are people in this house today who, all the way from Liverpool to Barnegat lighthouse, and for two weeks, were kept under deck, the hatches battened down because of the storm. Some of you, in the old time sailing vessels, were kept nearly a month with the hatches down because of some long storm.

For the tenth or the fifteenth misrepresentation by Mr. Ingersoll, he says that the Ark landed on a mountain seventeen thousand feet high, and that, of course, as soon as the animals came forth they would all be frozen in the ice! Here comes in Mr. Ingersoll's geographical ignorance. He does not seem to know that Ararat is not merely the name for a mountain, but for a hilly district, and that it may have been a hill one hundred feet high, or five hundred, or a thousand feet high on which the Ark alighted. Noah measured the depth of the water above the hill, and it is fifteen cubits or twenty-seven feet. But in order to raise a laugh against the Holy Scriptures, Mr. Ingersoll lifts the Ark seventeen thousand feet high, showing an ignorance of just that altitude!

Ah! my friends, this story of the Ark is no more incredible than if you should say to me: "Last summer I was among the hills of New England, and there came on the most terrific storm I ever saw, and the whole country was flooded. The waters came up over the hills, and to save our lives we got in a boat on the river, and even the dumb creatures were so affrighted, they came moaning and bleating until we let them in the same boat." The flood that Ingersoll describes is not Noah's flood; it is Ingersoll's flood of hatred against

God. It is not Noah's Ark that Ingersoll describes; it is Ingersoll's Ark with a whole flock of hooting owls of the midnight of Infidelity, whole nests of viperine and adderine venom against God, whole lairs of panthers which, with spotted claw, if they could, would maul the eternal God to pieces. And there is only one small window in that Ark, and it opens into the blackness of darkness described by my text, "having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them." The first misrepresentation of Mr. Ingersoll was wilful, the second was geological and astronomical ignorance, the third was geographical ignorance.

We are not dependent on the Bible for the story of the flood, entirely. All ages and all literatures have traditions, broken traditions, indistinct traditions, but still traditions. The old books of the Persians tell about the flood at the time of Ahriman, who so polluted the earth that it had to be washed by a great storm. The traditions of the Chaldeans say that in the time when Xisuthrus was king there was a great flood, and he put his family and his friends in a large vessel and all out side of them were destroyed, and after a while the birds went forth and they came back and their claws were tinged with mud. Lucian and Ovid, celebrated writers, who had never seen the Bible, describe a flood in the time of Deucalion. He took his friends into a boat, and the animals came running to him in pairs. So, all lands, and all ages, and all literatures, seem to have a broken and indistinct tradition of a calamity which Moses, here incorporating Noah's account, so grandly, so beautifully, so accurately, so solemnly records.

But I must halt in this argument, as in a great trial sometimes an attorney will stop for lack of time to finish, and I must on other Sabbath mornings take up this subject. I have only opened the door of a subject it will take me other Sabbath mornings to explore. I have impeached Robert G. Ingersoll for having misrepresented once, twice, thrice. I demand that you put into execution the principle of every court room, gentlemen of the jury, and throw overboard his entire testimony. "False in part, false in all." I have this morning only discussed the cleanest part of Mr. Ingersoll's infidelity - the best part of Mr. Ingersoll's infidelity. There are depths below depths, and I shall go on and say all I have to say on this subject.

My prayer is that the God who created the world, not out of nothing, but out of His own omnipotence, may create us anew in Christ Jesus; and that the God who made light three days before the sun shone, may kindle in our souls a light that will burn on long after the sun has expired, and that the God who ordered the Ark built and kept open more than one hundred years that the antediluvians might enter it for shelter, may graciously incline us to accept the invitation which this morning rolls in music from the Throne, saying: "Come thou and all thy house into the Ark."

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