

The Role of the Prophet

by Steve Gallagher

The role of the prophet is to communicate God's will and purposes to his people, and to confront them in their waywardness and call them back to God.

Duration: 43:49

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 36:15-16

Topics: "Prophet"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on their personal experience of being called by God to quit watching television in 1985. Initially, they struggled to understand why God would ask them to give up something that all Christians seemed to enjoy. However, after a few months of abstaining from television, they began to see the negative spiritual influence behind it. The speaker then goes on to discuss the predictable pattern in God's dealings with His people, where initial passion and fervor for God gradually diminishes over time. They also highlight the importance of prophets living a consecrated life in order to deliver radical messages. The sermon references 2 Chronicles 36:15-16 and Stephen's words to the Sanhedrin in Acts.

Transcript

The following message is provided by Eternal Weight of Glory. For other sermons, teachings, and articles, please visit EternalWeight.com. Okay, praise the Lord. I do want to open in a word of prayer.

Lord, I thank you for this opportunity to delve into this enormous subject of the prophets. And I pray for your inspiration. I pray for your anointing.

I pray that this will be a blessing to everyone here and those listening through the website. I pray, Lord, that you would give us a greater sense about your ways, the ways that you operate, how you deal with your people. Make those things more real to us, I pray.

Bless this message and bless this series I'm asking of you, Lord. In Jesus' name and for his glory alone, amen. I want to talk about the role of the prophet before we get into the life of Isaiah.

I just felt like it would be good to touch on how prophets operated. Mostly, I'm going to be dealing with the subject of Old Testament prophets. And they definitely played a huge role in the Old Testament times.

You know, Hebrews 1, 1 said, God, after he spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways. So the prophets were, from the very beginning, God's primary vehicle to communicate

his will and purposes to his people. The subject is so enormous to try to tackle it in one message is almost ridiculous, but I'm going to do my best to give a broad view of it and kind of how they operated and so on.

But really, the history of the prophet spans the history of God's dealing with his people. You know, they played such a huge role in Old Testament times. One thing, if nothing else, is that they are responsible for writing most of the Old Testament.

I don't know if you knew that, but you know, obviously all the books of the prophets, which is a huge section in itself. David was a prophet. So you have the book of Psalms.

First and second Samuel was written by Samuel the prophet, you know, Moses was a prophet. So you have the whole Pentateuch, you know, so it's it's the prophets of God that communicated to us what we call the Old Testament today. And this office of prophet continued on into the church age.

In fact, Paul said that the church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone. That's Ephesians 2 20. He also said that Jesus Christ gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as pastors and teachers for the equipping of the Saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ.

That's Ephesians 4 11 and 12. So we see that the prophets were one of the fivefold ministerial gifts given to the church in its earliest days. And I should say that even though the role of the prophet continued and continues to this day and will continue to the end of our time on Earth.

We know that because prophets are mentioned in the book of Revelation. It is true that the role of the prophet changed in the New Testament period. Everything changed really because now instead of there just being a temple a central location where Yahweh resided and he had priests operating there in the temple and he had prophets in you know in different places through the land.

Everything changed in New Testament times because now everything's scattered all over the place all over the known world and churches were established in different cities and for each of these churches there were in operation these five gifts of the spirit and you know a proper healthy Church today should have all five of those gifts in operation and you rarely see it. I mean a lot of that is simply because of the unhealthy condition of the church in general. Also, there's a whole segment of the church who believe that the functions of the apostles and prophets went away after the first century, you know, I just can never understand how people can just take it upon themselves to erase entire sections of the New Testament arbitrarily like that.

I mean to me, it's just my opinion. It's a sign of tremendous arrogance. Paul says that they are part of the operation of the church and you know, it's just not wise to just take it upon yourself to say, well, no, it's no longer an operation today.

That's not true. But anyway, the prophets role changed in the New Testament times in the sense that it became for the most part an attachment to the local bodies of believers. Whereas in the Old Testament times, it was more of a man speaking to the entire nation.

You know, of course with the New Testament revelation of God, which was a much greater revelation than they had in the Old Testament times, the need for the prophet diminished somewhat. That doesn't mean that the office completely became extinct. It only means that the need wasn't as necessary in the church age.

Okay, so but prophets, the role of the prophet continues today. That's really what I'm trying to say. For the sake of this study, I want to focus on the prophets of the Old Testament time.

I mean, because that's really what we're going to be looking at. Actually, the books of the prophets is what I'm going to be looking at. So I just wanted to mention the New Testament role that that has continued.

All right, let me just talk for a couple of minutes about the need for the prophet. Why do we need prophets? Let me put it to you this way. The history of God's dealings with man or with his people is tragically predictable.

And what I mean by that is the things usually don't continue going along a good course. Typically, what happens is God comes upon a people group and it's either a movement or revival or renewal, whatever term you want to use or whatever the occasion is. The reality is that the people, God's people, become more passionate about drawing near to him and become more passionate about the things of God and are more concerned about their life with God.

And so you see when this sort of thing happens amongst a group of people, you'll see that their worldliness, for instance, will very much diminish and they will be more exuberant about knowing the Lord and pressing into God and that sort of thing. Well, over time, just because of the way that we are, that excitement tends to diminish. You know, it's just a slow, gradual diminishment.

And then over time, new leaders rise up and things begin to change and get watered down. Paul said to the Corinthians, he said, but I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. And that is such a picture.

He also warned the church at Ephesus that savage wolves would rise up from amongst you, you know, and try to gather disciples to themselves. There is just a way that things tend to happen. You know what's a good picture of it is denominations or organizations.

Like, for instance, and now, you know, I can get myself in trouble here, but I'll do it anyway. Let's take the Methodists, for example. They grew out of the life of John Wesley and Charles Wesley.

And there was a move of God. It was called the Great Awakening. And those brothers were a huge part of that whole movement of God, along with George Whitefield and some of the others.

And then there were other people who followed along behind them as well. But Methodism began as a movement. It really came out of the Anglican Church.

And the Anglican Church had grown stale and dead and religious and formal. And the Wesley brothers kind of brought fire back into the people of God, especially in England. And then that fire spread into America.

And you had these Methodist circuit riders that would, you know, go across the land and were preaching, you know, with a passion. And people were in a fervor. It was tremendous.

But over time, you know, it started gradually diminishing. And now Methodism is one of the most liberal denominations there are. So we see this basic tendency for God's people to drift away from the Lord.

You know, it's just the way that we are. And so what is the need for the prophet? God needs to send a man in to confront the people in their waywardness, in their tendency to backslide, in their worldliness, and

into their lack of consecration, into their sin, and so on. God needs to send a special sort of man to his people to arouse them up again, to call them back to himself, and so on.

I'll get into that a little bit more later. But I want to read a part of this, the foreword that A.W. Tozer wrote for Leonard Ravenhill's book, *Why Revival Tarries*. And it's just so well-written, and it really captures kind of the role of the prophet.

Now, he's talking a lot about Leonard Ravenhill. And, of course, this was written back in the 60s, I believe. But let me just read this.

God has always had his specialists whose chief concern has been the moral breakdown, the decline in the spiritual health of the nation or the church. Such men were Elijah, Jeremiah, Malachi, and others of their kind who appeared at critical moments in history to reprove, rebuke, and exhort in the name of God and righteousness. A thousand or 10,000 ordinary priests or pastors or teachers could labor quietly on, almost unnoticed, while the spiritual life of Israel or the church was normal.

But let the people of God go astray from the paths of truth, and immediately the specialists appeared almost out of nowhere. His instinct for trouble brought him to the help of the Lord and of Israel. Such a man was likely to be drastic, radical, possibly at times violent.

And the curious crowd that gathered to watch him work soon branded him as extreme, fanatical, negative. And in a sense, they were right. He was single-minded, severe, fearless, and these were the qualities the circumstances demanded.

He shocked some, frightened others, and alienated not a few. But he knew who had called him and what he was sent to do. His ministry was geared to the emergency.

And that fact marked him out as different, a man apart. To such men as this, the church owes a debt too heavy to pay. The curious thing is that she seldom tries to pay him while he lives.

But the next generation builds his sepulcher and writes his biography, as if instinctively and awkwardly to discharge an obligation the previous generation, to a large extent, ignored. Skipping ahead. Towards such men as Leonard Ravenhill, it is impossible to be neutral.

His acquaintances are divided pretty neatly into two classes, those who love and admire him out of all proportion, and those who hate him with perfect hatred. And that is so true, you know. And that is such a great picture of what prophets are like.

Now, I want to go over five characteristics and functions of the prophet. Let me just go over these and just kind of share a few thoughts on each of these. Number one is that the prophet lives an exceptionally consecrated life.

You know, to be a person that brings a drastic and radical message, the prophet has to live with a drastic and radical lifestyle, if I could put it that way. And if you look in the lives of the different prophets from what we can see from their lives, like John the Baptist, for instance, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, you know, when you start really looking at the way that they lived their lives, you see that, you know, they were very strong with themselves before they ever were. In a position to be strong with others.

You know, I could say this, and I've said this before, that the difference between having a discerning spirit and having a critical spirit is brokenness. And that is one of the characteristics of all true prophets, is they understand what it means to be dealt with by God. They allow themselves to be dealt with by the Lord.

They are far more confronting with themselves than they, you know, are towards other people. And so typically, by the way that God works in people's lives, they have been broken of much of the self-life, the pride, and so on, so that by the time the Lord begins to use them, they can bring a pure word, or at least a word that has been largely purified, of self-motivations, or self-righteousness, or any other form of pride. So the prophet typically is very much what we would call unworldly.

You know, like Elijah living out in the deserts, and John the Baptist. They're both good examples of that kind of austere lifestyle. It's not that God expects that of everyone.

He doesn't. The prophet has a specific kind of role, and to be prepared for that role, he often had to be put in a position of living that kind of very tight discipline, if I could put it that way, or just a very disciplined life. I like what Leonard Ravenhill said.

The Lord spoke this to him at some point in his life, probably early on. He said, others can, you cannot. And what the Lord meant by that was, you know, don't compare yourself to pastors, and teachers, and evangelists out there, and around you, and so on.

Maybe I'm allowing them to live a little bit looser, or not so disciplined life as I'm requiring of you, but that's because I have a specific type of call on your life. And Leonard Ravenhill really was a classic example of a New Testament prophet. You know, because he began as a revivalist, and somewhere along the line, that changed over to where he became a voice to God's people.

And he called people back, especially in the late 60s through the 70s and 80s. He called God's people back to holy living. And that's what a prophet does.

But anyway, I'm getting ahead of myself. This man must live a consecrated life. Number two, the prophet is keenly aware of the spiritual climate of his day.

You know, another word that they were called in the Old Testament times was a seer. S-E-E-R, a seer. In other words, someone who could see.

And see things that normal people couldn't see, if I could put it that way. They had remarkable powers of perception into the spiritual realm, and into the inner workings of people's hearts. Because of the way that they had allowed God to deal with them first, made them keenly aware of the atmosphere around them.

Let me put it to you this way, and I've used this analogy regarding television before. When God called us to quit watching television in 1985, you know, at first I was like, I could not understand. It seemed so weird that the Lord would lay that on us.

Everyone watched television that I knew, all the Christians, I mean. All Christians watched television. Why was God requiring us to give up television? It didn't make sense to me.

But we quit, we knew the Lord was speaking to us. But after a few months of not watching television, when I would get around television, then I could see what was going on, on the television set. And I'm not talking about, you know, scantily clad girls, or vulgar language, and sexual innuendo.

I'm talking about on a deeper level than that. Just seeing the spirit behind television. I could begin to see it now.

Why? Because I had gotten away from it. And the analogy I've used with this is the cigarette smoker. When he's a smoker, he could walk into a smoke-filled room and not even notice it.

But after he quits smoking, goes into that same room, now all of a sudden he smells it for what it is. It's a contaminant to his lungs. And it's that way spiritually for the prophet, that he, when God has been able to extract out of him different forms of worldliness, he is able to see it for what it is.

He can see it from God's perspective. And it completely changes his viewpoint. Psalm 12 is one of those psalms that's really a prophetic type psalm, not in the sense of foretelling the future events, but in the sense of seeing what society was like.

It was actually Psalm 11 and 12 kind of go together. And I'm pretty sure it was David that wrote them. But seeing what the culture, what the people were like, what was going on around them.

But Alexander McLaren said this. Let me just read this. One penalty of living near God is keen pain from low lives.

The ears that hear God's word cannot but be stunned and hurt by the babble of empty speech. The psalmist is not sad for himself, but sick of the clatter of godless tongues, in which he discerns the outcome of godless lives. It is better to be too sensitive to evils than to be contented with them.

Heroes and reformers have all begun with, quote-unquote, exaggerated estimates of corruption. And that also is just very well put, describing a prophet. All right, number three.

The prophet hears from God. And how does that come about that he can hear more clearly? Well, it's partly from what we've already been describing because this process that's gone on inside his own life. But it also reflects someone who knows what it means to get alone with God.

You know, there is something about just getting off by yourself with God that I don't know how to describe it. I remember times that I would go, like, to the cabin by myself or be in situations where I was away from Kathy and everyone and there was just a loneliness that I didn't like. And yet it also made me somehow more, I don't know, open to the Lord in a way.

But you really see it in Palestine. You know, let me put it this way. The wilderness areas of Palestine, I believe, played a significant part in the history of God's dealings with his people.

Because it was out in the desert that God spoke to Moses and David and Elijah and John the Baptist and others, you know. It was out in the lonely regions away from people that they learned how to hear the voice of God, how to listen to God. And this ability to hear from God and to receive direction, communication from God, that is one of the characteristics of all prophets.

Amos said, Surely the Lord God does nothing unless he reveals his secret counsel to his servants, the prophets. And that's very true, you know, because every time God is going to deal with his people in some way, he first sends that word to his prophets. And his prophets then usually come in in different fashions, which I'll talk about here in a minute, to bring that communication from the Lord.

Well, how exactly did they hear from the Lord? Now, I'm focusing mainly now on the Old Testament prophets. There is a term that is used 255 times, a phrase. It's called the Word of the Lord.

And almost all of those usages of that phrase are in the Old Testament. The Word of the Lord came to Amos. The Word of the Lord came to Zechariah.

The Word of the Lord came to Ezekiel. You know, over and over you see that being described. Well, what does that mean, the Word of the Lord? And they never really describe it.

You just get little hints here and there. They don't really describe it very well, but God communicated to his prophets in different ways. So let me just give you four.

One would be an audible voice. Now, like, for instance, the time that God spoke to Samuel when he was a little boy, that was definitely an audible voice. And I believe there's other occasions.

I just, you know, I think that when we're hearing about the Word of the Lord, the Word of the Lord came to Ezekiel or whatever. I think it was an audible voice. But if it wasn't an audible voice, and this would be number two, then it's definitely an impression that comes upon the person's mind so strongly that he knows it's from the Holy Spirit and that it's from outside of himself.

So it's one or the other or both. With the New Testament prophets, and I think this is true and continues to be true today, that you get the sense of God speaking. For instance, I can tell you that I have gotten senses or sights into future events, if I could put it that way.

I'm trying to say it in a way that, because I don't want it to be exaggerated or taken wrongly. I say a sense or I say how the Lord has given me a sight in future events. What it is, it's almost like a snapshot that's just real vague in your mind.

And if I was a prophet of a little more stature, maybe I would see and hear more clearly. But anyway, whatever the case is, I know that there's a difference between the clear-cut word from the Lord that the Old Testament prophets received and wrote down word for word. You know, you don't get more clear than that.

Whereas today it tends to be more of a vague sense, like you've heard Pastor Jeff give a word of prophecy here before. Well, I don't necessarily think it's a word-for-word clear-cut thing. It's more of a strong anointing... No, not anointing.

A strong impression that just comes on you and just you get in a flow and the words are flowing out of you. You know, it's strong, it's the Lord, but it wouldn't have carried as much weight as what they received in Old Testament times. I hope I didn't just totally confuse everything, but that's the way I see it.

The third thing is that, in fact, God Himself spoke to Miriam and Aaron and said, when the Lord speaks to prophets, He speaks through visions and dreams. And that's true, you know, that that's often the way that the Lord would speak to His prophets. For instance, and I think it's the first sentence in Isaiah or maybe the second sentence, it said, the vision the Lord gave to Isaiah.

Well, why were they called seers? Because they were seeing things. They were seeing, receiving visions. And again, it's an impression that comes upon their minds.

And as we start going through the book of Isaiah, we'll see different sections where He is obviously clearly seeing things unfold, you know, getting scenes would unfold in His mind. And He's just frantically writing this stuff down. We'll get into that more as we start going through the book.

But what's the difference between a vision and a dream? Consciousness. That's the difference. In a dream, you're unconscious, and God speaks or brings a vision.

That's all it is, is a vision while you're asleep. And it comes on very strongly. Obviously, a vision when you're awake, you're still fully in control of your faculties, but you get this sight in your mind's eye of things.

And so that's the difference between visions and dreams. But that's another way that God would communicate to His prophets. And number four would be epiphanies or angelic visitations.

You know, an epiphany is the Lord Himself appearing, and that happened in a number of different occasions I won't go into, but, you know, or angelic visitations like Daniel received, for instance, and Ezekiel and so on. So those are some of the ways that prophets would hear from God in the Old Testament times. All right, number four, let's talk a little bit about the role of the prophet or get a little more specific about exactly what they were called to do.

The primary role of the prophet is to communicate the mind and the heart and the will and the purposes of God to His people. And notice that I say to His people because the prophet isn't typically going out and speaking to the heathen world. You know, it's not that they never did it.

For instance, Jonah did. He went to Nineveh. He was actually a prophet to the northern tribes of Israel, but he went, God called him and, you know, sent him to Nineveh to preach repentance.

So in that sense, he became a revivalist, an Old Testament revivalist. But generally speaking, almost always, the role of the prophet is geared to God's people. The evangelist is called to the heathen.

He takes God's Word out to the unsaved and tries to win them to the Lord. But the prophet, his main function is to speak to God's people. And again, as I've already shared, it's in response to a need because God's people have drifted away from him.

Now let me just mention, you know, three ways that the prophet would operate. Number one primarily, and this is what I've already touched on, his role was to confront the waywardness of God's people and call them back to the Lord. And there are some prophets who only functioned in this way.

In other words, they never functioned in the role of foretelling future events. In fact, yeah, of all these that I'm going to mention to you, none of them even wrote down prophecies and so on. Samuel and Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah, and even John the Baptist.

You know, all of those guys and there's others too. There's actually quite a few if you start reading through the books of 1 and 2 Kings. You see them interspersed.

There may be one little sentence. They may not even tell the guy's name, but he was a prophet. He was operating in the role of a prophet.

Who knows how he lived his life, how the Lord used him outside of that. I mean, the guy lives until he's 70 years old or whatever for years. You know, he's operating as a prophet in some capacity, I'm sure.

But all of a sudden the Lord calls him, go to King Zedekiah or whoever, you know, and all of a sudden this nobody shows up and speaks a word to the king. And because he's dealing with the king of Israel or Judah, the event is recorded in Scripture. But he has a whole long lifetime of dealing with God's people in this way.

Maybe he has a circuit or an area where he's known, like Samuel had a circuit where he would go around to different towns and judge the people and so on. But anyway, their main function was primarily to bring a message of repentance. Well, why repentance? Because what is repentance all about? It's to turn away from your waywardness and to turn back to God.

You know, that is what repentance is. And so for someone to bring a message of repentance, he's got to confront the sin. He's got to point out the sin of the people and call them to leave that sin and turn back to God.

And I want to say to you counselors here at Pure Life that you are to some degree operating in the role of a prophet because your job is to deal with these men who you are disciplining week in, week out, and they obviously have a problem. If we just took the whole big picture of the prophet, God's people, and bring it down to one person who you are dealing with, it's the same dynamic. They have gone astray.

They have things in their life that aren't right. You're the man that God uses to speak into their life. You have to point out in a spirit of love and compassion where they have gone astray, and your job is to lead them back to the Lord.

So you are functioning as a prophet, really, in that sense. So that's the main thing. Secondly, the Lord would use prophets to warn of impending judgment.

And much of the books of the prophets are taken up with this subject. Like, for instance, the book of Isaiah, much of the book of Isaiah, at least most of the first 35 chapters, is this same thing of warning the people about impending judgment and so on. Anytime God is going to send judgment, He always, always, always, always warns about it first.

He never just, you know, throws it on His people. He never just all of a sudden, without any sense of warning or whatever, all of a sudden the whole country is being invaded or something or other. They were always warned that judgment was coming.

And it was the prophet who the Lord used to fulfill that function. Many of the prophets were used by the Lord to foretell future events, whether that's judgment or whatever. I mean, for instance, much of the second part of the book of Isaiah, and I'll get into this next week, chapters 40 through 66, much of that section is really bringing a word of comfort to God's people.

It's a word of promise. It's full of hope and encouragement. So it wasn't always foretelling doom.

Much of it was talking about the coming Messiah, and we'll get into that. But anyway, the Lord would use prophets. That's who He used to operate in the gift of prophecy.

Wouldn't that make sense? Okay, lastly, number five, just a characteristic of prophets is that they inevitably suffer. When God would raise up a prophet to confront the sins of His day, there was always a reaction. There just has to be a reaction.

And it's kind of like what happens here at Pure Life. Men come into this place, and God's presence is strong in this place, and God starts dealing with them either through their counselors or through sermons or books or whatever, but everywhere they turn, they're being dealt with by the Lord. And you guys see this happen, you counselors especially.

They'll try to keep themselves cool for a time, but eventually it comes boiling out in one fashion or another. And people tend to react either positively or negatively. Generally speaking, out there in the church world, it's going to be a negative response.

In this place, these guys have come to us for help, so we have better odds here. Actually, the majority respond in the right way here. But when people corporately have backslidden, and we are in a state of apostasy right now, but when the church corporately backslides, the spirit that everyone is in is, leave me alone, look, everyone's this way, this is the way it's supposed to be, because they're all looking at each other, comparing themselves to each other.

They're all backslidden, and they're all in the same mindset that, well, everyone else is doing it, so it must be right, and that mindset. So you have one guy standing out in stark contrast, saying to all of these people, you're wrong. Well, there's going to be a reaction.

Look at Luther. He did that. I mean, he was called a reformer, but you could just as easily call him a prophet, because he was the person that God used to launch the Reformation, to point out with his 95 theses the 95 corruptions that had come into the church.

And it's that same kind of thing. And there was a violent reaction. They would have taken him and just tortured him mercilessly if they could have got their hands on him.

But it tends to be that way. It's almost like a chemical reaction. You know, you have two chemicals.

When they're by themselves, it's fine, but you throw them together, and there's an explosive reaction. Well, that's what happens when people have gotten away from God, and God's prophet is sent to rebuke them. There's typically a violent reaction.

Joseph Parker said this, The man whose little sermon is, quote, unquote, repent, sets himself against the age, and will for the time being be battered mercilessly by the age whose moral tone he challenges. There is but one end for such a man, off with his head. You had better not try to preach repentance until you have pledged your head to heaven.

That's true. Another person said, Anyone who preaches the cross is going to end up on the cross. And that's true.

You know, it's the same basic truth of what we're describing. Let me just read, I'm wrapping it up now, but let me just read a few verses just to give you a sense about what happened with the prophets. This is 2 Chronicles 36, 15 and 16.

This is kind of an overview of the Lord trying to deal with his people before they were carried off to Babylon. So this is what Ezra wrote, The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they continually mocked the messengers of God despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people until there was no remedy.

So that really is a concise overview of the whole Old Testament period. Stephen said this to the Sanhedrin, Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become. Well, that's pretty courageous talk for a man standing in front of 70 leaders of the country.

And Jesus, of course, said, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. So we see this long-standing tendency of the Jewish people that the Lord continually tried to reach out to them when they resisted or when they started corporately sliding away. He would faithfully send prophets to try to correct their backslidings, to try to get them back on track, get them back on the narrow path.

And they almost always responded violently to that. All right, so I hope that you have a better sense of what a prophet's function is and was. And we will take this up more as we start going through the different books, especially through the book of Isaiah.

Okay, God bless you.

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