Volume 2 No. 3 Anthony Buzzard, editor December, 1999

Immortality and Our Need to Obtain It

The doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul **⊥** — the notion that a human being survives consciously at death — is a pagan addition to Christianity. This fact is so widely recognized by scholars of all denominations that it is puzzling that a radical reformation on this issue has not swept the land. The problem is that churchgoers are not generally searching for truth on the great questions of life and death. They seem content to abide by "what we have always believed." This attitude invites deception. If they were to survey the readily available literature on the subject, as well as the Bible, it would become obvious that survival in a post-mortem condition as a disembodied spirit in heaven or hell is a fiction needing to be rooted out of our thinking. Jesus did not believe it; neither then should his followers.

The problem is that the pagan notion that man is inherently immortal, by virtue of his "immortal soul/spirit," is deeply entrenched in popular church culture. It is confirmed repeatedly when congregations assemble at funeral services. After all, it is comforting to imagine that our loved ones who have died have really just moved into a different sphere of life and consciousness.

The Evangelical Alliance was founded at an enthusiastic meeting in London in 1846. Assembled were 800 members of various denominations: Presbyterians, Independents, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Reformed, Moravians, and others. A ninepoint doctrinal statement was agreed upon. Number 8 read as follows: "[We believe in] the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body."

It is a remarkable fact that this body of churchgoers thus committed themselves to belief in a non-biblical concept. Equally noteworthy are the constant objections of evangelical scholars of various denominations in regard to the question of man's immortality. They fully know that the doctrine of the "natural immortality of the soul" has no basis in Scripture. It is merely a man-made tradition.

Evidently evangelicals have not listened to some of those eminent scholars who have complained that the immortality of the soul and man's uninterrupted life at the moment of death are without support in the Bible. **Philip Schaff**, the famous church historian (1819-1893), expressed his conviction that it was time to take up the unfinished business of the Reformation and bring it to completion. Schaff called attention to the necessity of reforming and correcting the prevalent and popular teaching of the survival of the soul in the "middle state," prior to the resurrection when Jesus returns. He wrote:

"While the Reformers rooted out the medieval [Roman Catholic] doctrine of purgatory, they failed to substitute a better theory of the "middle state" [the intermediate state] and left it for our day to reconsider this whole question and to reach positive results...The old Protestant theologians nearly identify the pre-resurrection state of the righteous and the wicked [what happens at the point of death] with their post-resurrection state, except that the former is a disembodied state of perfect bliss [heaven at death] or perfect misery [hell]. By this confusion the resurrection and the general judgment are reduced to an empty formality."

William Tyndale (c. 1490-1536), who was martyred for his faith, had earlier made exactly the same point against the Roman Catholics. "In putting souls in heaven and hell [at death] you destroy the arguments with which Paul proved the resurrection."

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The same objection applied also to his Protestant colleagues.

Evangelicals, indeed nearly all Protestants, have taken on, with the immortality of the soul, a Roman Catholic doctrine, without protest. It is surely time for this mistake to be seen for what it is — a significant denial of a central Bible teaching — that the dead go nowhere at the moment of death, other than to the grave. Echoing the protest of Professor Schaff, **Dr. Charles Briggs**, editor of *The Presbyterian Review* and writing in a book entitled *Whither? A Theological Question for the Times* (1889) said:

"All the faults of Traditionalism converge at this point, i.e., in eschatology [teaching about the Christian future, at death and at the resurrection and Kingdom of God]. Here we find extra-confessional errors, intra-confessional errors and the entire Church is in a condition of great perplexity." But has this confusion been cleared up?

Things have changed very little and business is as usual in the denominations. Sermons preached to commemorate the dead continue to falsify the biblical teaching, by reinforcing the pagan notion of survival in a disembodied form. This magazine attempts to further the unfinished work of the Reformation. We stand on the shoulders of the giants whom we quote in support of our various positions. From the various denominations the plea for a straight biblical teaching about death and the afterlife has been sounding out, but with very little response:

An Episcopal doctor of theology said:

"Never-ending existence [the immortality of the soul] is not the common heritage of all men in virtue of their having been born into this world, but is rather to be regarded as a gift bestowed on those who seek it from the Eternal Himself. The Father being the only one who possesses immortality in Himself (1 Tim 6:16), it is to Him that we must turn to obtain the immortality we need." A Baptist doctor of theology wrote "Not a single passage of Holy Writ, from Genesis to Revelation, teaches, so far as I am aware, the doctrine of man's natural immortality. On the other hand, Holy Writ emphatically declares that God only has immortality (I Tim 6:16): that is to say God only is naturally, inherently, in His own essence and nature immortal...It is amazing that a notion so thoroughly heathen as man's natural immortality was not long uprooted out of Christian theology...There is on the part of the Church itself such a belief in the doctrine of the natural immortality of all men as to amount to a virtual denial of the doctrine that immortality or eternal life is the gift of Christ alone...When we come into our pulpits, it is not to soothe our listeners with brilliant conjectures, hopeful surmises, elaborate attempts at demonstration concerning immortality — that kind of preaching we leave to heathen teachers and pagan philosophers in Christian lands. But when we come into our pulpits, it is to give to our listeners positive, divine information about the hereafter."

Amen!

What then is the origin of the noxious doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul?

A Methodist Yale Professor answers: "Having given the whole subject a careful and prayerful investigation — examining alike the strongest rational and Scriptural arguments used to support the dominant view — I am compelled to reject the current doctrine of the inherent immortality of the soul." He then gives 12 reasons, of which we have space to print just the first:

Satanic origin. "This doctrine of the immortality of the soul can be traced through the muddy channels of a corrupted Christianity, a perverted Judaism, a pagan philosophy and a superstitious idolatry, to the great instigator of mischief in the Garden of Eden. The Protestants borrowed it [the notion of immortality and immediate consciousness at death in heaven or hell] from the Roman Catholics, the Catholics from the Pharisees, the Pharisees from the Pagans and the Pagans from the Old Serpent who first preached the doctrine amid the lovely bowers of Paradise to an audience all too willing to hear and heed the new fascinating theology - 'You certainly shall not die.' Satan patched up his system by inventing the double-entity theory that man is a dual being with a material body and an immaterial soul consisting of the real man whose soul leaves his body at death and continues to exist as a conscious personality either in conscious bliss for ever or conscious misery for ever." Dr. Phelps added, "When this theory is accepted God is discredited and Satan believed."

The theory continues to be the standard fare of millions upon millions of churchgoers.

Speaking further of the insidious paganization of original Christianity, Dr. Phelps pointed out that "Satan's oily argument" was adopted by the pagans down the "stream of time." It was popular in Egypt

and led also to the concept of the transmigration of souls. For the Greek the concept of natural immortality became a philosophy. Plato was its chief proponent and he coupled the doctrine of immortality with that of preexistence.

In reaction to the doctrine of endless punishment (which follows logically from the mistaken notion that man is naturally immortal), a further error developed. The idea of endless torment was so revolting, if not inconceivable, that some rushed to the opposite but unbiblical extreme, that every human being will inevitably be saved ("Universalism").

Dr. Phelps of Yale concludes with this warning for us all: "The commingled systems of Christianity and Platonic philosophy permeated the church. This unholy leaven worked until nearly the whole lump was at last infected."

It should come as a salutary shock and wake-up call to us all that the doctrine of survival at death in heaven or hell received official authorization from the Pope in 1513. In that year Pope Leo X affirmed that the soul is immortal and decreed that those who assert otherwise are "heretics." Amazingly most of the Protestant reformers sided with the Pope and their Helvetic Confession echoed the official Roman Catholic support for the pagan doctrine of natural immortality by declaring: "We condemn all who scoff at the immortality of the soul, or bring it into doubt by subtle disputations."

It is hardly surprising that Protestants are once again joining hands with Roman Catholics. After all they have much in common! But the common ground is a crypto-paganism in regard to the nature of man and his destiny. Dr. Phelps spoke out boldly when he tried to warn his colleagues: "Think of the harvest of grievous errors such a dogma as the immortality of the soul has brought forth — Mohammedanism, Shakerism, Swendenborgianism, Spiritualism, Purgatory, the worship of Mary [who is actually not in heaven at all], Universalism...All these systems are built on the assumption that dead folks are alive."

Readers will find a compendium of information on the corruption of Christianity by paganism in The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers by Froom (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1965). We are indebted to this work in the article above.

Bible Study: Fitting the Pieces Together into a Harmonious Whole

During forty years involvement in the field of biblical studies and teaching, I have noticed that many Christians do not follow the fine example set by the Bereans in Acts 17:11: "They searched the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul was saying was true; so many of them became Christians." Many today, however, simply believe what they have been told.

Take the issue of what happens when we die. Ask a typical churchgoer and he will quote the words of Jesus to the thief: "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). This is supposed to settle the question with finality.

But the problem is this: Luke 23:43 is a fraction of the total biblical evidence available for study. Nevertheless many will settle for an easy "solution." That verse obviously proves, they think, that Jesus and the thief departed at the moment of death into the presence of the Father in heaven. On that basis, churchgoers are exhorted to believe that they too will survive death as "souls" and pass on to celestial regions.

Imagine a conversation between a child and her mother: "Mommy, where did Jesus go the day he died?" "Well, to heaven to be with God, dear. Do you remember he said that he and the thief would be together that day in Paradise?"

"But wait, Mommy, do you remember that Jesus earlier said that he would 'be three days in the heart of the earth'? If he was in the heart of the earth, how can he have been with the Father in heaven?"

"Well, dear, perhaps Jesus' spirit was with the Father while his body was in the heart of the earth."

"But how can that be, Mommy? Three days after the day Jesus died he said to his friends: 'I (Jesus) have *not yet* ascended to the Father.' How could he possibly have gone to heaven to the Father, if three days later he said he had *not yet* ascended to the Father?"

Mommy's attempt to answer the difficulty includes an immense and unproven assumption: *that in the Bible a person can go on existing consciously as a "spirit" or "soul" separated from their body*. For Mommy's "solution" to be true that assumption

must be biblically demonstrated. But the "departed soul" concept owes its origin to Platonic philosophy and not to the Bible at all. *The Interpreter's Bible Dictionary* says correctly: "No biblical text authorizes the idea that the soul separates from the body at death" (Vol. 1, p. 802).

So what is the solution to our question about what happens when we die? First we must lay out the facts:

- 1) Jesus apparently said that he would be *on the day of his death* with the thief in the presence of the Father (Luke 23:43).
- 2) Jesus said with complete clarity that he would be in the heart of the earth when he died and *remain there for three days* (Matt. 12:40).
- 3) Peter confirms this by saying that God did not *leave* Jesus in the world of the dead, Hades¹ (Acts 2:31). This proves that Jesus did indeed go to the world of the dead. But God did not leave him there. He brought him out of the tomb by resurrection three days after he died.
- 4) When the women arrived at the tomb, the angel said, "He is not here. He has risen from the dead" (Matt. 28:6). This proves that Jesus had indeed been in the tomb until he was resurrected.
- 5) On the Sunday after his death, Jesus expressly said: "I have not yet ascended to my Father" (John 20:17). So he could not possibly have been to heaven before the resurrection Sunday.

Here is what the evidence presents:

Points 2-5 demonstrate that Jesus went to the grave at his death and that he did not go to the Father in heaven the day he died.

Point 1 alone (the very point which most rely on almost instinctively) appears to contradict the evidence of points 2-5.

How shall we resolve the problem?

The Bible does not contradict itself. If Jesus was in the heart of the earth he cannot have been with the Father in Paradise (the text does not say, as many assume, "heaven").

Here is the solution which resolves the apparent contradiction.

What Jesus actually said to the thief on the Friday of their crucifixion was: "Truly I tell you *today*, you will be with me in Paradise." Punctuating the sentence that way — putting the comma after

"today" — makes sense of the immediate context and brings the statement into line with Jesus' other clear statements that he did not go anywhere other than to the grave that day — the day of his and the thief's death.

Now we are ready to follow the whole of Jesus' conversation with the thief:

The thief, in a repentant frame of mind, begs Jesus: "Lord, remember me when you come [in the future] bringing in your Kingdom." His request was to be remembered on the **future** day of the arrival of Jesus to set up the Kingdom of God, the Christian hope. The thief demonstrated faith in the Gospel: firstly, that the Kingdom of God is coming and secondly that Jesus was the Messiah.

Jesus graciously gave the thief more than he asked. He said: "Truly I assure you *today* [you don't have to wait to be remembered in the future], you will indeed be with me in the future Paradise [of the Kingdom of God on earth]." Paradise is the restored garden of Eden in the renewed earth of the Kingdom which Jesus will bring at his second coming (Rev. 2:7). Jesus equated **Paradise**, which he promised the thief, with the **Kingdom of God** in which the thief requested a place.

Jesus did not go to heaven at death. No one in the Bible goes to heaven at death. Everyone goes to the grave, the world of the dead (Hades), to await the resurrection which will occur when Jesus comes back to establish his Kingdom. As I Corinthians 15:23 says so beautifully: "Those who belong to Christ will be resurrected at his coming." Until then they remain in the grave (Hades), the residence of all the dead, including Jesus when he died, until they are called out of Hades as Jesus was three days after his death. Only Jesus has so far emerged from Hades into immortality. He did this on the third day, the day of his resurrection.

Now back to the "problem" of Luke 23:43, so often quoted as a supposed proof of an immediate presence of the soul in heaven, in contradiction to the plain statements that Jesus did not go to the Father the day he died.

In many New Testament Greek manuscripts the words are written without gaps and without punctuation. So Luke 23:43 would look like this: TRULYISAYTOYOUTODAYYOUWILLBEWITH MEINPARADISE.

Where shall we put the comma?

¹ Wrongly translated in the KJV as "hell." Modern translations have happily corrected the error.

1) After "today" and read: "Truly I say to you *today*, you will be with me in Paradise."

2) After "to you" and read: "Truly I say to you, *today* you will be with me in Paradise."

In some very early manuscripts of the Bible there is some indication of punctuation, as we shall explain.

We must investigate all the evidence before making up our minds on a biblical teaching. The Truth sets us free (John 8:32). Christians are those who believe what is true.

There are examples of the phrase "I say to you *today...*" elsewhere in the Bible. The phrase is used to convey solemn emphasis. In Deuteronomy 30:16, 18, 19 we read:

"I command you this day...."

"I declare to you this day...."

"I call heaven and earth to witness to you this day...."

And in the New Testament Acts 20:26 provides a parallel: "I solemnly witness to you *this very day....*" Further examples will be found in Deut. 4:26, 39, 40; 6:6; 7:11; 8:1, 11, 19; 9:3; 10:13; 11:2, 8, 13, 26, 27, 28, 32; 13:18; 15:5; 19:9; 26:3, 16, 18; 27:1, 4, 10; 28:1, 13, 14, 15; 29:12; 30:2, 8, 11, 15, 16, 18, 19; 32:46. Observe also Gen. 25:33: "Swear to me today..." Gen. 22:14: "that they might say today..." Gen. 41:9: "I today remember..." Deut. 9:6: "Today you will know..." Deut. 29:10: "Today you all stand..." Deut. 30:6: "I announce to you today...."

Detailed punctuation in the Bible has been added by translators and it can drastically affect the meaning of the text. Hebrews 10:12 is an example of erroneous punctuation in the King James Version; i.e., the comma should follow "sins" not "ever." It is only reasonable to repunctuate Luke 23:43 in a way which makes it harmonize with everything else the Bible says about death and Resurrection. Daniel 12:2 and John 5:28, 29 remain as solemn testimonies to the fact that the dead are not in heaven, but that they rise from the ground or their tombs on the future great Resurrection day:

"Many of those who are sleeping in the dust of the ground shall arise...to everlasting life..."

"The hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice, those who have done good to a resurrection of life..."

Nothing should be allowed to disturb the central biblical doctrine of the future Resurrection of all the faithful *from the sleep of death to life in the*

Kingdom of God. This stupendous event will occur when Jesus returns (1 Cor. 15:23).

Many of the Greek manuscripts of the Bible do not have punctuation. However, some very early manuscripts do have some marks of punctuation. In the Vatican Codex (4th century) there is evidence of a comma *after* the word "today." And in the Curetonian version of the Syriac translation of Luke (5th century), we read "Amen, I say to you today, that with me you will be in the Garden of Eden."

A German translation of the Bible, published in 1934 by Wilhelm Michaelis (Kroner Verlag, Leipzig) renders Luke 23:43 as follows: "Truly I give you my assurance today: You will one day be with me in Paradise." The author adds this comment in a footnote: "Jesus does not wait until the last day, but promises the thief even now ('today' should probably be attached to the first part of the sentence) that his request will be granted. Paradise occurs in the NT only in 2 Cor. 12:4 and Rev. 2:7 and is the equivalent of everlasting life or Kingdom of God" (translation from the German mine). The Rotherham Bible (1895, reprinted in 1974) reads as follows: "Verily I say unto thee this day: With me shalt thou be in Paradise." The official translation of the Roman Catholics, the Latin Vulgate, does not place a comma anywhere in this verse. It thus avoids the false impression that Jesus was in heaven on the day of his death.

The celebrated *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 5, p. 385, says: "Paradise, as used in Luke 23:43..., *is evidently not heaven* (John 20:17, Acts 2:31)." In other words John 20:17 and Acts 2:31 show that Jesus could not have gone to the Father in heaven on the day of his death. And similarly, no Christian goes immediately to heaven at death.

This fact has not prevented popular preaching of Luke 23:43 as a guarantee of "heaven at death" for the believer.

As with all "restorationist" movements our purpose is to alert our fellow Bible readers to the paganism which has crept into the faith. We cannot think that serious Christians will be satisfied with the status quo once they are informed of doctrines which masquerade as truth, however popular. Popular phrases such as "so and so has passed on, gone home, gone to be with Jesus in heaven" do not reflect the teaching of Jesus at all. They have more in common with spiritism and illicit raising of the dead

and are condemned in Scripture as worthless and dangerous.

We ask only for a fair examination of the facts and there is a vast quantity of additional evidence available. $\mbox{\ensuremath{\square}}$

A Popular Misunderstanding about God Corrected by a "State of the Art" Authority on Biblical Information

↑ t the core of true religion and the love of God There is a confession of faith: God is One Lord. This creed goes back to the revelation given to Israel and enshrined in the famous Shema: "Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4). Jesus publicly confirmed this central dogma of Judaism and thus made it the great confession of Christianity (Mark 12:28ff.). Paul confirmed his master's teaching with the words, "There is One God, the Father" (1 Cor 8:6). (Paul recognized Jesus as the Lord Messiah.) Observe carefully that the heart of biblical revelation is not a statement about a Triune God. The statement of faith which appears often in churches that "there is One God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit" is alien to the Bible. The creed of the Bible and of Jesus, as is well known by scholars everywhere, especially those engaged in the teaching of the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament), does not declare that God is three. It declares that He is One. The Jewish people, schooled in the Torah, have always known that God is One and not Three. The Trinitarian formula, on which so many churchgoers depend without much careful investigation, is a postbiblical alteration of the creed taught by Jesus. The Dictionary of New Testament Theology represents the finest in modern scholarship and contains the following thought-provoking comment on who God is in the Bible.

GOD

"Yahweh is the individual personal name of God (Vol. 2, p. 67ff.)...Elohim, though plural in form, is seldom used in the OT as such. Even a single heathen God can be designated with the plural Elohim (Jud. 11:24; I Kings 11:5; 2 Kings 1:2). *In Israel* the plural is understood as the plural of fullness...

"The One God. Theos is the most frequent designation of God in the NT. Belief in the one, only

and unique God (Mat. 23:9; Rom. 3:30; I Cor 8:4, 6; Gal. 3:20; I Tim. 2:5; James 2:19) is an established part of primitive Christian tradition. Jesus himself made the fundamental confession of Judaism his own and expressly quoted the Shema (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:28ff.; Matt. 22:37; Luke 10:27). This guaranteed continuity between the Old and the New Covenant. For the God whom Christians worship is the God of the Fathers (Acts 3:13; 5:30; 22:14), the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...The confession of the One God appears in an expanded form in Eph. 4:6: 'One God and Father of us all who is above all and through and in all'.... Jesus Christ does not usurp the place of God. His oneness with the Father does not mean absolute identity of being... After the completion of his work on earth he has indeed been raised to the right hand of God, but he is still not made equal to God. Although completely coordinated with God he remains subordinate to him (I Cor. 15:28). He represents us before God, but this is not to say that Christ is equal with God. In Revelation a distinction is always made between God and the Lamb.

"Rom. 9:5 is disputed. Even if we take the reference of God to Christ, Christ would *not be equated absolutely with God*, but only described as a being of divine nature, for the word *theos* has no article. But this ascription of majesty does not occur anywhere else in Paul. The more probable explanation is that the statement is a doxology directed to God, stemming from Jewish tradition and adopted by Paul. Overwhelmed by God's dealings with Israel Paul concludes with an ascription of praise to God. The translation would then read: 'The One who is God over all be blessed...[John 20:28 and I John 5:20] are the nearest that the NT comes to asserting the full identity of Christ with God.

"The Trinity. The NT does not contain the developed doctrine of the Trinity. 'The Bible lacks the express declaration that the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are of an equal essence and therefore in an equal sense God Himself. And the other express declaration is also lacking, that God is God thus and only thus, i.e., as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These two express declarations, which go beyond the witness of the Bible, are the twofold content of the church doctrine of the Trinity' (Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics I,1,437)...That God and Christ belong together and that they are distinct, are equally

stressed, with the precedence in every case due to God, the Father, who stands above Christ...All this underlines the point that primitive Christianity did not have an explicit doctrine of the Trinity such as was subsequently elaborated in the creeds of the early church" (J. Schneider, Prof. of Theology in Berlin, emphasis added). \mathri{I}

"The Doctrine of the Trinity is the product of reflection and not a Gospel Message. The Gospel Message is about God revealed in Christ. The doctrine of the Trinity, however, is not a biblical doctrine...The Bible does not speak about the 'Triune God'...It is therefore intelligible that it is precisely those theologians whose thinking is entirely controlled by the thought of the Bible who have had little sympathy with the doctrine of the Trinity" (Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, Westminster Press, 1950, pp. 236, 238).

An Invitation

Atlanta Bible College and the *Journal from the Radical Reformation* will host its ninth annual Theological Conference at Atlanta Bible College, Morrow, Georgia, from 2:00 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 11th, 2000 until 12:00 noon, Sunday, Feb. 13th.

For the Friday afternoon session, we have invited two distinguished authors to discuss their opposing views of the origin of the universe. Professor Marian Hillar is a professor both of chemistry and philosophy at Texas Southern University. Dr. Charles Thaxton is a well-known lecturer and author in the field of "Intelligent Design," and author of several books including the *Soul of Science*. Marian and Charles will discuss their differences in a forum

entitled "Chance, Necessity or Design: A Dialogue Between an Atheist and a Theist."

Professor Richard Hiers of the University of Florida at Gainesville will address us in a field of special interest to him: The Kingdom of God and how this central biblical topic has been obscured in much traditional theology.

Juan Baixeras will present a lecture on the historical evidence for the resurrection, and Kent Ross, Professor of Church History at Atlanta Bible College, will speak on "The Emergence of the Minority Church as a Distinct Entity in the Reformation."

We encourage all of you to return or make this your first occasion to be with us at ABC. We would so much enjoy meeting any of our new radio/website contacts, whose numbers have increased very significantly during the past year.

On the practical level, we will have a block reservation of rooms at the Red Roof Inn, 1348 South Lake Plaza Drive, I-75 and SR 54, exit 76, Morrow, GA 30260 (770-968-1483). Note that until 28th January, 2000, these rooms will be available at per night prices of: 1) Single, \$35. 2) One king-size bed, \$42.99. 3) Two king-sized beds, \$46.99. These rooms may be booked by calling (800) 843-7663 and mentioning that you are with ABC Theological Conference. You should quote the block-booking number: B114000352.

If you have any questions please call Atlanta Bible College at 1-800-347-4261.

Cost

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Early Bird(by Jan 20 th)	\$29	\$19
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