



Fearing a Gracious and Compassionate God Jonah Series #2

Jonah 1:4-16

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I'd like to ask you to take your Bibles this morning and turn to [Jonah 1:4-16](#)

⁴But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. ⁶So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish."

⁷And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" ⁹And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." ¹⁰Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

¹¹Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. ¹²He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you." ¹³Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. ¹⁴Therefore they called out to the LORD, "O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you." ¹⁵So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. ¹⁶Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

O God, we come to You this morning and ask that You would take Your Word and speak to us. Would You open our eyes and expose to us our rebellion? Would You rebuke us with this passage? And would You allow the gospel to saturate this message and give us hope. As we look at this passage, Lord, we come in dependence asking You to speak to us. In Jesus name, Amen.

This weekend The United States of America celebrates 235 years of independence. We call the 4th of July, "Independence Day." We are a people who love to celebrate our freedom. We love liberty. We love our independence. This morning we can praise God that we have freedom to meet in a room like this to openly and publicly worship our God. That is a freedom that is not known to everyone in this world.

But I think some of our desires for freedom and independence are far less noble. For instance, about four weeks ago I was being pulled over to the side of the road. The police officer came up to my window and said, "Do you know you were going 35 miles per hour when the speed limit was 20?" At that moment my sinful, rebellious heart was longing for more freedom and less authority. As the authority was pressing down on me, my heart was saying, "I don't need the government telling me that I have to go 20 when I can very safely go 35 on this road." I was longing for more freedom and my rebellion was exposing itself.

Teens and children long for freedom and independence from the rules of Mom and Dad. It doesn't get much better for adults because we still despise micromanagement and complain about the requirements at work. We long for freedom. This world is filled with people who long for independence from God, people who rebel against God's authority and flee from God.

That is just where we left Jonah last week as we looked at [Jonah 1:1-3](#) which says that the word of the Lord came to Jonah telling him to go to Nineveh. And verse two says "*but Jonah rose to flee.*" At the end of verse three it says that Jonah was running "*from the presence of the Lord.*" He was fleeing God rather than fearing God.

I think we can meet in a room like this today and say, "Yep, that describes all of those people out there enjoying their holiday or sleeping off their enjoyment from last night's celebration. It is all of those people out there who are running from God and rebelling against God." But if we are honest, we would have to admit that this is also filled with rebels. Every one of us is prone to run and hide and rebel against God.

There may be some here this morning whose entire lives are characterized by this kind of running and rebelling against God. There has never been a time when you have turned in faith to God. You may be here out of obligation or to try to make yourself feel better, but in your heart you know that you are running hard from God. Then others in the room know there has been a time that we have been rescued by God from this kind of running. We believe in Him and belong to Him, but there are still moments, hours, days or seasons when we choose our way in rebellion against God's way. So every one of us needs this passage and we are praying that God would speak to us through this passage to expose our rebellion and give us hope out of our rebellion.

I want to look at two main themes this morning. First, we will look at God's response to rebels. Then, we look at rebels' response to God. That will give us a structure here this morning.

1. God's Response to Rebels

Look at [verse 4](#) again. Verse 4 says, "*But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up.*" In this verse we see God's response to rebels. We are going to see three things here about God's response. Three things in this verse about how God responds to rebels.

A. The first thing we see is a **display of divine omnipresence**. That comes mostly because we see what Jonah just said in verse three. Jonah says he is fleeing from the presence of the LORD. Jonah gets on the boat and goes in the opposite direction from where God told him to go. He is trying to flee from the presence of the LORD. When he gets on the boat, we see that God is right there in the sea. Jonah learns—like we said last week—that if he ascends up into heaven, God is there. If he makes his bed in Sheol, God is there. If he takes the wings of the morning, God is there. If he dwells in the uttermost parts of the sea, God is there! ([Psalm 139:7-9](#)) And that's exactly what Jonah does. He boards a boat to the uttermost part of the sea and God is right there in the sea.

We are tempted at this point in the story to look at Jonah and think he is just a silly, foolish prophet. And yes, what he is doing is foolish, but I don't think it's because he did not understand that God was everywhere. I think if he were quizzed on the doctrine of omnipresence, Jonah would probably ace it. But in our sin, sometimes we show that our lives don't always live out our theology.

We do the same thing. We make choices that show that in our sin we think we can hide from God. We make choices that show in the moment of sin, we aren't actively believing and embracing God's presence. If we believed that God were present with us this week and He sees all things, would it have changed our actions this week? Would it have changed the things we did in forms of entertainment? The things we watched? I think our lives sometimes show that we think we can hide.

We think some part of our lives is separate from God or that there are so many people that God isn't concerned with us. So we have this lie we believe that God is not right here. Would it have changed the way we spoke to the waitress who brought us water without lemon when we very specifically said water with lemon? We made it very clear to her that she was incompetent as a waitress and our speech and language that we used was harsh. Or maybe the language we used with our family? Would we have made the same choices this week if we actively believed in God's omnipresence?

B. It's not just that God was there. It isn't just a display of omnipresence. Next we see God's response in **an act of sovereign power**. It's not just that He is present in the sea but that He is sovereignly working there. If we step back a minute here in this story of Jonah, we see God's sovereignty on full display in this book. God sovereignly chose to show grace to the people of Nineveh. They were not God's normal Old Covenant people, but God chose to show grace to them.

We see God's sovereignty over the individual of Jonah where He is pursuing Jonah here. We see His sovereignty over all creation through the storm here in this verse. This is the same word that is used when [King Saul hurled the spear at David](#). God is directing this storm at Jonah's boat. We see His sovereignty later on in the story with the fish that swallows and then vomits Jonah. We see it with the plant that grows and the worm that eats it.

Throughout this story, God is not simply standing back and watching these events unfold. Even as I say, "God's response to rebels," it's not as though God doesn't know what Jonah is going to do and as he makes choices, God responds to them. No. His sovereignty is working here and He is ordaining these events and accomplishing His purpose in Jonah's life. These first two responses are really the backdrop that shows us the heart of God's response.

C. The third thing that we see here about God's response is a **pursuit of merciful love**. If this verse were all that we had here, it seems like God tells Jonah to go; Jonah says no; and God in His anger sends this storm. Jonah is going to get what is coming to him here. But if we know God and we know this story, we know that is not what is taking place. This is not God's anger and punishment toward Jonah. This is God's mercy and love where He is pursuing Jonah and He is going to bring Jonah back. This is God in His mercy pursuing Jonah.

I think if it were me making these choices, I probably would not have done it the same way. I probably would have seen this prophet rebelling against me and running from me and in my sovereign power, I might have been tempted to crush him and find another prophet. But God does not give up on the people of Nineveh so easily and God does not give up on Jonah so easily. God's grace is stubborn. In His love, He mercifully pursues. His love is relentless. It does not give in so easily.

I have a friend who writes hymns and he is a pastor in Ohio. His name is [Chris Anderson](#), and we sing one of his hymns here called [My Jesus Fair](#). He recently wrote

another hymn called [Relentless Love](#) that beautifully describes what is going on here with Jonah.

“Relentless love pursued my heart, though I would hide
Love unreturned, yet undeterred by pride
Till by a grace unsought, my rebel soul was caught
Redeemed by love that would not be denied
Unbounded love, unfailing love
Love raised upon a tree
Unending love, prevailing love
My Savior’s sovereign love for me”

God’s pursuit of Jonah is painful and unpleasant but this is not God’s punishment; this is God’s merciful pursuit. Imagine for a moment what would have happened if God would have let Jonah succeed. Jonah says, “I’m running from the presence of God.” He is hiding from God and seeking separation from God. If God lets Jonah succeed, there is only one place where true separation from God exists and it is called Hell and the Lake of Fire. It is described as eternal death and eternal separation from God. That’s where Jonah is running. That’s the direction that Jonah wants to go, but in God’s mercy He said, “No.”

“But as I ran my hell-bound race
Indifferent to the cost
You looked upon my helpless state
And led me to the cross.
And I beheld God’s love displayed
You suffered in my place
You bore the wrath reserved for me
Now all I know is grace.”

[All I Have is Christ by Jordan Kauflin](#)

That’s what Jonah is experiencing here. Jesus bore the wrath of God for those who belong to Him. Now, all you know is grace. If you are trusting in Jesus alone for salvation, all you know is grace. There will be seasons in our lives when we experience the discipline of the Lord. Hebrews 12 describes this as God treating us like sons. This is not punishment for our sins but God coming and bringing us back to Him.

The devil would love for us to be enslaved by guilt to the degree that it causes us to doubt the work of Christ on the cross and to doubt the promise in [Romans 8:1](#) that says, “*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” Satan loves it when a husband and wife look at their trial of infertility as God’s anger and punishment toward them for sins of their youth. Or when parents see a wayward child running and

rebellious and they view that as a purgatory here on earth to pay off their sins of imperfect parenting. Or when God brings a trial of unemployment or financial struggle and we see that as God's anger at us. We think we are here paying for our sins because we are now trying to appease the wrath of God.

We think He is punishing us here for our sins and that is a lie from Hell that denies the gospel. It is a lie from Hell that creeps in and lodges into our hearts to make us think that what Jesus did on the cross was not good enough. We need to remind ourselves and preach to ourselves and remember that what Jesus did on the cross was drink the cup of God's wrath and there is not a drop left in that cup. There is not a drop of God's wrath left in the cup for those who are in Christ. What God is doing in our lives is not His punishment. What God is doing in Jonah's life is not His angry wrath but His merciful pursuit, His relentless love. That's God's response to rebels. God says, "Go." Jonah says, "No," and he runs, then God chases him with the storm in His love.

2. Rebels' Response to God

Now we are going to see the rebels' response to God. [Verse 5](#) says, "*Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them.*" What we see in the sailors' response is that this is not a normal kind of storm. These sailors would have been accustomed to storms at sea but this is not a normal storm. There is something so fierce about this storm that it causes terror in their hearts and they are desperately seeking relief from this in any way possible. These men, who were probably not normally very religious, instantly became quite religious and begin praying out to all kinds of gods.

A. They were **seeking relief** from any god. It says they each pray to their own god. The captain of the ship is going around and telling people to wake up to pray to their gods so that perhaps one of these gods will think of them. They are hoping to appease one of the angry gods. So they cry out to their gods. Then they also seek relief in their own efforts. They start looking for all of the cargo in the ship and they are throwing it overboard trying to find their own way out of the storm. We see that the first response of rebels is **to seek relief in vain**.

There are people all over the Fox Valley who are seeking relief in vain. They are calling out to their gods. They are calling out to Allah or to their other religions or their good works or their self righteousness. They are calling out to their pursuits of pleasure in

drunkenness and entertainment and immorality. They are calling out to their success and their work and their money and prestige and power. They are crying out to all these things because they just want some relief. They just want some satisfaction. And these gods don't answer back. These gods don't bring lasting relief or lasting joy. They call out in vain because humans were created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. But that true joy only exists in fellowship with God in His presence and sin came into this world and severed that fellowship. Every human who has ever lived on this world has been born with a hunger and desire for something more. It is a desire for joy, a desire for happiness, a desire for satisfaction and we seek it in all the wrong ways.

You may be here this morning and this description of the sailors lines up very closely with your life. You are seeking joy in all these other things but none of the gods you are crying out to are answering. There is no relief in the things in which you are seeking. And to you Jesus says, "[Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.](#)" True peace only comes and true joy only comes when we stop fleeing *from* God and we start fleeing *to* God in faith. We must cling to the only Savior of the world and in faith cling to Him Who said, "[whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.](#)" And so we see that rebels respond to God by **seeking relief in vain.**

B. The next thing we see is in Jonah's response which was to **purposefully ignore God's pursuit.** In [verse 5](#) we see that the mariners are afraid and praying and throwing out their cargo. And then we come to Jonah. Jonah goes into the inner part of the ship and lies down and is fast asleep. Jonah's conscience does not seem to be troubled. Jonah's soul is not tortured. For whatever reason, Jonah has peace enough to be fast asleep in this ship.

It doesn't seem like he is anticipating in any way for God to come and pursue him. It doesn't seem like he's bracing himself in any way for God to be coming for him. Jonah is on this ship and he is very peaceful and fast asleep. [Verse 6](#) says, "*So the captain came and said to him, 'What do you mean, you sleeper?'*" How can you be asleep in this? And Jonah says, "*Arise, call out to your god!*" I think here again we see God's sovereignty working in this story. God's sovereignty is working in these events even in the language that God has this captain use.

I can imagine that the captain's words at least throw up some kind of alert in Jonah's mind. Remember back in [verse 2](#), when God speaks to Jonah and says, "*Arise, go to Nineveh, and call out.*" This command to Jonah is to "*arise*" and "*call out.*" Now on this ship this pagan sailor is telling Jonah to "*arise*" and "*call out.*" It had to have triggered in

Jonah's mind that God is pursuing him. Jonah has this pagan sailor telling him to pray to the God that Jonah is running from. And there is no indication in the story that Jonah prays at that time. He is still choosing to **purposefully ignore God's pursuit**.

I want to step back just a minute from this story and let our minds run to a [parallel story about Jesus](#). About 750 or 800 years later there is another prophet, Jesus the Great Prophet, who boards a ship. He goes onto the sea. He goes to sleep, just like Jonah. A storm comes and everyone on the ship is in a panic except for Jesus and they come to Him and say, "How can you be sleeping?"

The details of this story are strikingly similar all the way through up to this point. I think it is important for us to see things like this in the Old Testament. This is not just some allegory or illustration God uses so He could perfectly line up these details. This is real life in which God in His sovereignty lines up details to point to His Son—to point to Jesus Christ—and show what Jesus would say later in [Matthew 12:40-41](#) exclaiming that Jesus is the greater than Jonah.

But we come back here to the [Jonah 1:7-9](#) which says, "*And they said to one another, 'Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.' So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, 'Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?' And he said to them, 'I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.'*"

If we could pull this verse out of this story, it would be a great verse. Jonah's statement here is doctrinally excellent. He is prophesying here and proclaiming the greatness of Yahweh. He says "*I fear the Lord the God of heaven Who made all of this.*" They are in the middle of the storm and Jonah is saying, "I fear the God who made the storm. I fear the God who made the land and the sea." But in the middle of this story, this verse is almost painful to read. The irony here is that Jonah is running from God and trying to get away from God. He wants to be nowhere near the God that he's claiming to fear. Jonah is running from God and he says, "I'm a Hebrew; I fear Yahweh."

You can almost see in Jonah a bit of improper nationalistic pride as he is here with the pagan sailors and says, "Look guys, I'm a Hebrew; I fear Yahweh. I'm a Hebrew; I'm fine with the Lord." I think sometimes we can be tempted on a weekend like this to think, "We are Americans and live in a Christian nation. We go to this church; we are okay." And we lull ourselves into thinking that because of our doctrinal statements we are okay.

We come to a weekend like this, and in our gratitude and thankfulness to God for our nation we should guard ourselves against a wrong kind of nationalistic pride. This weekend, do our emotions and affections rise up more while we are watching fireworks, thinking about the men who died for our freedom and singing "[I'm proud to be an American](#)" than they do when we are sitting in church, thinking about the God-man Who died for our freedom and singing "[In Christ alone my hope is found](#)"? I think we should guard ourselves against a wrong kind of nationalistic pride.

What we see overall in this section reminds us of what Jesus said in [Matthew 15:7-8](#). "*You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.'*" Jonah is not the only one who has made doctrinal statements that did not match his life. We also can be very tempted to honor God with our lips this morning and have our hearts far from Him. We honor God with our lips but our lives show rebellion against that God. We can stand here this morning and sing, "[So God we trust in You](#)" when all week long we have been trusting in ourselves. We can stand and sing "[Blessed be Your name. You give and take away. My heart will choose to say, Lord, blessed be Your name.](#)" But in the moment when God gives, we forget Him and in the moment when He takes away, we despise Him. We honor God with our lips this morning, but our hearts are prone to be far from him.

Jonah does tell these men that he's running from God at this point in the story. Start reading in [Jonah 1:10](#). "*Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, 'What is this that you have done!' For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. Then they said to him, 'What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?' For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said to them, 'Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.'*"

At this point we are still looking at Jonah's response. Jonah is **purposefully ignoring God's pursuit**. At first it seems he is not even aware that a pursuit is coming. Then he is made aware of the pursuit but it almost seems like he's still not sure that it is because of his sin. But at this point in the story it is clear that Jonah knows this storm is God coming for him. God is bringing this storm for Jonah.

At first we might think this is Jonah's repentance and the big twist in the story, but I don't think that's what's happening here. Later in [Jonah 4](#), Jonah tells why he does not want to go to the people of Nineveh. Last week we learned that these people were fierce

and brutal enemies of Israel. We might think Jonah didn't want to go there because he is afraid that he would die or be persecuted. At the very least we think Jonah is fearful of failure. Maybe he is afraid that if he goes to these people they will reject him. But that's not Jonah's fear.

Jonah says in chapter 4 that he is afraid of success. He is afraid that if he preaches this rebuke to the people of Nineveh, God in His grace will forgive them and Jonah doesn't like that call. Jonah doesn't want God's grace to go to the people of Nineveh. So knowing what Jonah knows about God's grace tells us that he knows death is not his only option here. He says to these men, "Throw me into the sea," and what Jonah seems to be saying is "I would rather die than give in to God's pursuit right now."

He knows that if he repents, God is a God of grace. The sailors don't know that. They see an angry God and think they probably need to kill somebody or at least do something to Jonah. They ask, "What do we do to you to stop this storm? How can we stop the anger of this God?" Jonah could have said, "My God is a God of grace. I'm running from Him and I need to bow in repentance and fear the Lord." But he doesn't. He says, "I'd rather die than submit to my God right now." So Jonah, all the way through this story, is **purposefully ignoring God's pursuit.**

C. We come finally to the last response from rebels. It is the right response. It doesn't come from Jonah, the prophet. It comes from the sailors. Look at [Jonah 1:13-16](#). Jonah had just said, "Throw me into the sea and it will stop." Verse 13 says, "*Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land.*" They don't want to throw Jonah over at first, so they are rowing hard to get back to dry land. But that doesn't work. "*They could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.*" Now look at the response of the sailors. It says, "*Therefore they called out to the LORD, 'O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you.'*" Here are these men before seeing any relief from God, and they are starting to know Who this God is. They are learning more about Jonah's God. They say, "*'You O Lord have done whatever you pleased.' So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.*"

The final response, which is the proper response to this God, is **to fear the Lord exceedingly. Fear God exceedingly.** I want us to understand "fear" by tracing the path these sailors take in this story because "fear" comes up a few times. In [verse 5](#) we see the

mariners are afraid. They don't know God; they don't even know which god; they are just calling out to lots of different gods. But they know something is happening here. They see God's power and they are terrified. They are scared.

Later they actually know what God this is. Jonah tells them it is the Lord—Yahweh, the God of heaven—that he is running from. And now they know a little bit more about Who this God is, and [verse 10](#) says they are “*exceedingly afraid*” because they still don't know anything about this God. They just know that He is big and powerful. Jonah is running from Him and they are under His wrath right now. They think they are under this fierce storm. And they are still terrified.

This isn't the same kind of fear we see coming out of them at the end of this passage. In [verse 16](#), after the storm ceases and it is calm and they know more about Who this God is, it says they “*feared the Lord exceedingly. They offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.*” This kind of fear is not simply terror. Because they know more about Who God is, their fear now turns to a reverent, awe-filled worship of the One true and living God. So we end our story here with Jonah in the sea. Jonah willingly says, “Throw me into the sea and it will stop.”

As we compare this story of Jonah with the [parallel story about Jesus](#), the difference comes at the end. Jesus didn't say, “Throw me into the sea and leave me for dead.” Jesus said, “*Peace! Be still!*” and it stopped. So Jonah is left in the sea and Jesus stays in the boat. Maybe that is the way that Jesus is better than Jonah because He could do it from the boat. No, I don't think that is the difference. [Tim Keller](#) describes this story and teaches us and illustrates for us how Jesus is greater than Jonah in this passage. [He says](#),

“These stories aren't actually different when you stand back a bit and look at it with the rest of the story of Jesus in view. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says, ‘One greater than Jonah is here,’ and He's referring to Himself: *I'm the true Jonah*. He meant this: Someday I'm going to calm all storms, still all waves. I'm going to destroy destruction, break brokenness, kill death. How can He do that? He can only do it because when He was on the cross He was thrown—willingly, like Jonah—into the ultimate storm, under the ultimate waves, the waves of sin and death. Jesus was thrown into the only storm that can actually sink us—the storm of eternal justice, of what we owe for our wrongdoing. That storm wasn't calmed—not until it swept Him away.”

[King's Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus](#), pp. 57-58 by Tim Keller

As we leave today, it is important that we don't just say, “Look at Jonah, don't be like Jonah.” We don't just say, “Look at the sailors and fear God like the sailors did.” Those are good applications but they aren't the ultimate application. We need to go deeper into this

passage to see God's merciful, relentless pursuit of sinners. Ultimately we see that relentless pursuit through the death of Christ as He was willingly thrown into the sea of God's wrath for us. The only hope for us as rebels is to flee to the gospel. The only hope for us is to see that the gospel has the power to save us and the power to change us. It is only in the gospel that we have the ability to respond like the sailors in a reverent, awe-filled worship of our God. And so this week, we look to Jesus as our hope to respond to God in fear.

Let's pray.

Father, we are prone to wander yet You, in Your love, pursue us and we thank You. Thank You *"that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* I pray that Your Word goes forth and has power to save some who are running. Draw them to Yourself this morning. All of us in our moments when we choose our way, may we see that Jesus gives us the hope that we can now fear and worship You. In Jesus name, Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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