

# END-TIMES ISSUES



**#55** Commandment #2 –  
The obligations it represents.

AND  
BEYOND!

## THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

Exodus 20:4-6 (NIV); also Deuteronomy 5:8-10.

Some people combine this with the first commandment. Why?

- It has been suggested that people downplay this command, because they are guilty of violating it. But even if this is true for *some*, it doesn't apply to *everyone*.
- These two commandments are so interrelated that they can easily get blurred together. Here's one reason why: →

<p>⇒ <b>Commandment #1</b> – "No other gods."</p> <p>☞ This has to do with <b>IDOLATRY</b>.</p>	<p>⇒ <b>Commandment #2</b> – "No images/idols."</p> <p>☞ This has to do with <b>IDOLS</b>.</p>
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☞ We often connect these two concepts. ☞  
After all, "idolatry" is something we do with "idols"!

>> SO WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE? <<

<p>⇒ <b>Commandment #1</b> – This involves <u>who</u> your God/god is, whether the true God, or a false one (= idolatry).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Do you <i>replace</i> the true God with another?</li> <li>✓ Do you consider him to be just one of many gods that coexist?</li> </ul>	<p>⇒ <b>Commandment #2</b> – This involves <u>how</u> you represent your God/god (physically or mentally).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Have you made an image to represent a false god?</li> <li>✓ Have you made an image to represent the true God? (Or is your <i>concept</i> of the true God a <i>misrepresentation</i> of who he is?)</li> </ul>
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⇒ Sometimes, the distinction may be blurry... or it may involve both.

(Concerning the following example: In O.T. Hebrew, the *plural* form of the word "god" (= "gods") often refers to the *one* God of Israel. So sometimes it's difficult to know whether to translate the word as "gods" or "God.")

When Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people said to Aaron:

"Come, make us **gods** who will go before us."

Exodus 32:1b (BSB)

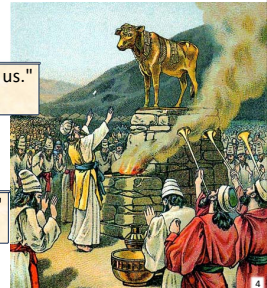
(= A violation of Commandment #1?)

After making *one* golden calf, Aaron said:

"Tomorrow shall be a feast to **the LORD**."

Exodus 32:5b (BSB)

(= A violation of Commandment #2?)



>> IDOLATRY <<  
(this is related to the First Commandment.)

After this, we will look at the Second Commandment, which focuses on idols/images.

- We will use the Heidelberg Catechism as a guide, as we did before.
- As always, we emphasize that catechisms are *not inspired*. They can point us toward Scripture issues, help us to organize our thoughts, and be a starting point for further exploration. But they are NOT Scripture, and could accidentally omit something or get something wrong.

**Q. What is idolatry?**

A. Idolatry is having or inventing something in which one trusts in place of or alongside of the only true God, who has revealed himself in the Word.

Idolatry is having or inventing something ...

- Regardless of the source. It doesn't matter *how* you get it. If it's *not* the true God, it violates the first commandment.

... something in which one trusts ...

- Last time, we pointed out that *trust* has a significant role in the "positive" aspects of the First Commandment.
- Below is what we observed. If we trust something else, we are *guilty of idolatry*.


trust him [the true God] alone ...

- This is a trust that is based on a knowledge of the truth.
- We must rely on him ALONE. No substitute or "crutch."

... in place of or alongside of the only true God, ...

- When examining the *first* commandment, we saw the emphasis on the "*only* true God." We are *not* to turn to a *substitute* for this God. Nor are we to view *anything* as being on the same level as the true God – coexisting or competing with him.

This bumper sticker may represent a popular view, but it is idolatry.



- From last week (about the only true God):

That I rightly know the only true God,

- Both "factual" and "practical" knowledge of this God – i.e., knowledge applied to life. Also Jesus Christ; etc.

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... [God] who has revealed himself in the Word.

- God's Word is *God's* revelation of *himself*, and of his relationship to creation. This is the standard that shows us how to distinguish between the true God and idolatry.

What does Scripture say?

- The Scripture passages we saw last week apply here. The following verses are a few of the many ways that idolatry can express itself.

✓ *The gods of the nations.* Before Jesus came, these tended to be represented by *physical* idols. (Today, they're often *mental* idols.)

For **all the gods of the nations** are idols, but it is **the LORD [= Yahweh]** who made the heavens.

Psalms 96:5 (BSB); also in 1 Chronicles 16:26.

"These gods, who have made neither the heavens nor the earth, will **perish** from this earth and from under these heavens."

Jeremiah 10:11b (BSB)

(MORE) →

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✓ *Anything that takes God's place* (or is treated as an equal).

GREED ... [a] **greedy** person (that is, an idolater) ...  
Ephesians 5:5b (BSB)

MOTIVATED BY PHYSICAL GRATIFICATION ... their god is their **belly** ...  
Philippians 3:19b (BSB)

The word translated "belly" – can refer to internal organs (such as stomach or womb), physical desires and appetites, or psychological desires and feelings.

CONTROLLED BY RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES ... we were enslaved under the **basic principles of the world.**  
Galatians 4:3b (BSB)

BEFORE SALVATION: "YOU WERE A SLAVE TO THESE THINGS."

AFTER SALVATION: "DON'T GO BACK TO THAT SLAVERY!"

... how is it that you are turning back to those **weak and worthless principles**? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?  
Galatians 4:9b (BSB)

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>> **COMMANDMENT #2** <<

Representing the category of commands, instructions and teachings related to images and idols. *This includes how we worship.*

"**You shall not make for yourself an image** in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below."

Exodus 20:4 (NIV); also Deuteronomy 5:8.\*

Q. What is God's will for us in the second commandment?

A. That we in no way make any image of God nor worship him in any other way than has been commanded in God's Word.

- This question focuses on making images of the *true* God.
- Images (in this context) are connected to *worship*; so worship is also related in this command.

\* (We will look at Exodus 3:5-6 at a later time.)

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That we in no way make any image of God

- The basic issue is that there is *nothing* in *creation* that can accurately represent the *Creator* God – much less an object that we have *made*.
- God has made creation to *teach* us about him; but nothing can *represent* him, as his image/idol.

What does Scripture say?

- God, as creator, is *invisible*. In the New Testament, we refer to the invisible God as "Father."

... the King eternal, immortal, and **invisible**, the only God ...  
1 Timothy 1:17b (BSB)

You saw **no form of any kind** the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire.  
Deuteronomy 4:15a (NIV)

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- God *cannot* be compared to *any image* that people might make.

To whom will you liken God?  
To what **image** will you compare Him? ...  
[A contrast between an idol and God's greatness is found here.]

... "To whom will you liken Me, or who is My equal?" asks the Holy One.  
Isaiah 40:18, 25 (BSB)

- Because God has no form (see Deuteronomy 4:15a, on the previous page), we are warned...

Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an **idol**, an **image** of any shape, ...  
Deuteronomy 4:15b-16a (NIV); examples in vs. 16b-19.

- Even so, people have rebelled against God, and chosen to *exchange* God's glory for images – Romans 1:22-23.

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⇒ **There are ways that the invisible God teaches us about himself in creation... but it's not through images!**

- **Creation** teaches us about God. It's not "this *represents* God," but rather, "this is a *reflection* of what God is like." *We learn about the God we cannot see!*

For since the creation of the world **God's invisible qualities**—his eternal power and divine nature—have been **clearly seen, being understood from what has been made**, so that people are without excuse.

Romans 1:20 (NIV)

**Jesus**, who is both God and man, *can* be seen. This is a different issue, but it's the reason for those verses that mention "seeing" God – Matthew 5:8; Exodus 24:11; etc.

The Son is **the image of the invisible** God, ...

Colossians 1:15a (BSB)

Jesus is also described as the "*exact representation*" of God (Hebrews 1:3).

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- **Humans** were created "in God's image" (Genesis 1:26-27). We were created to *reflect* God's holy moral character in the way we live, as his representatives in creation. But our "**human-ness**" **does not "define" God**. (And now, having become sinners, our lives often contradict what God created us to be.)

- Scripture also describes humans as God's "**offspring**." *God* is the one who brought us into existence and who maintains our existence.

" 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' "

As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' "

"Therefore since we are **God's offspring**, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an **image** made by human design and skill." "

Acts 17:28-29 (NIV)

- This fact, by itself, is sufficient to show the stupidity of making a created "image" to define who God is! We are inferior to God ... images we might make are even *more* inferior... *less* like God!

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... nor worship him in any other way than has been commanded in God's Word.

- The God who created us is *worthy* of worship – but *only in the manner that he has told us is appropriate*. We, sinners, are not to invent our own methods of worship that go contrary to what God has revealed in Scripture.

#### ✚ What does Scripture say?

- We need to make it our goal to worship God "in spirit and truth."

"... the true **worshippers** will **worship** the Father **in spirit and truth**, for the Father is seeking such people to **worship** him. God is spirit, and those who **worship** him must **worship in spirit and truth**."

John 4:23b-24 (ESV)

- The issue *isn't* the specific location or procedure. "Spirit" has to do with the attitude of one's heart (= controlled by the Holy Spirit); "truth" has to do with what God has revealed in his Word. (It's the truth that the Spirit works with.)

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⇒ **The Old Testament teaches us about worship and the attitude we should have, when approaching God.** As Paul said, these things are written down as examples to teach us (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11).

- If we choose to do "religious activities," yet live in *disobedience* to God, God will not accept it. As King Saul was told:

"Does the Lord delight in **burnt offerings and sacrifices** as much as in **obeying** the Lord?"

To **obey** is better than **sacrifice**, and to **heed** is better than **the fat of rams**.

For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of **idolatry**."

1 Samuel 15:22b-23a (NIV)

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- Under the Old Covenant, God's glory was present in the tabernacle (later, the temple). God gave the Levite priests specific instructions about how to approach God, so that they would not die. (Death would occur, if a sinful human tried to approach the holy God in any other way.)
- Nadab and Abihu (two of Aaron's sons) did not follow God's instructions and were consumed by fire. As Moses said to Aaron...

Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke of when he said:

" 'Among those who approach me

**I will be proved holy;**  
in the sight of all the people  
**I will be honored.**' "

Leviticus 10:3a (NIV)

- Today, we don't have to follow the Old Covenant *practices*, but the right *attitude* toward God (which is illustrated by the O.T. practices) remains necessary.

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#### Q. May we then not make any image at all?

A. God can not and may not be visibly portrayed in any way.

Although creatures may be portrayed, yet God forbids making or having such images if one's intention is to worship them or to serve God through them.

⇒ **We are referring to the infinite God, the creator, in all his glory.**

- When God came down at Mount Sinai, people could see the brightness of his glory; but they could not see a *form* of any kind – Deuteronomy 4:15a (quoted on a previous page).

We are *not* referring to the times that this infinite God has revealed himself (to a limited extent) in a visible form – at limited times in the O.T., and now forever, as Jesus Christ. This is a separate issue.

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God can not and may not be visibly portrayed in any way.

#### What does Scripture say?

- **It cannot be done. It's not possible!** God, in all his fullness, is *not* a part of creation. He can reveal himself in creation, but only to a limited degree. Yet even this *limited* expression of his presence is *overwhelming beyond what people can survive*.

God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in **unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.**

1 Timothy 6:15b-16a (NIV)

- The only *visible* expression – **image** – of God is Jesus Christ, also called "the Son of God." *He is the one who can be seen.*

The Son is the **image** of the invisible God,  
The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact  
representation of His nature,

Colossians 1:15a; Hebrews 1:3a (BSB)

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- **It must not be done. Don't even try!** Attempting to "image" God, in all his fullness, can only result in a corrupt distortion. It is not only *impossible*, but is a violation of this second commandment – and leaves us in danger of being *consumed*.

Be careful not to forget the covenant of the LORD your God that he made with you; **do not make for yourselves an idol** in the form of anything the LORD your God has forbidden. **For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.**

Deuteronomy 4:23-24 (NIV)

- An "idol" (Deuteronomy 4:23) is a means by which a god is *worshipped*. The warning (in v. 24) is quoted in Hebrews, where the author points out the connection to *worship* – *and it applies to us*.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so **worship God acceptably** with reverence and awe, **for our "God is a consuming fire."**

Hebrews 12:28-29 (NIV)

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#### QUESTION:

↳ Aren't *people* called God's "sons"? Aren't they created in God's "image"? Then how is Jesus different, when he is described the same way?

- Jesus is *uncreated deity*, coexisting with the Father from eternity. In the Old Testament, Father, Son (Jesus) and Holy Spirit are all referred to as "LORD" – Yahweh or Jehovah, in some translations.
- People are *created*. We are called God's "offspring" (Acts 17:29), in the sense that we owe our existence to God. People who repent and trust God for salvation are viewed as being "in Christ," and are called "sons" through *adoption* (Ephesians 1:5; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; etc.).
- As for "image," we are the *created* "image" of God; Jesus is *uncreated*. Our "image" is marred by sin; it can be restored, *but only in Jesus*.

21

Although creatures may be portrayed, yet God forbids making or having such images if one's intention is to worship them or to serve God through them.

#### What does Scripture say?

- **Can created things be portrayed?** YES. God showed this when he told Moses to make a bronze snake.
- When the Israelites turned against God, who had delivered them out of slavery, he sent venomous snakes as a judgment. But he also provided a means of surviving the judgment, for all who would be willing to accept it.

The Lord said to Moses, "**Make a snake** and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live."

So **Moses made a bronze snake** and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

Numbers 21:8-9 (NIV)

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- Jesus and Paul both used this event, to teach us about judgment and *eternal* salvation.

Just as Moses lifted up the **snake in the wilderness**, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.

John 3:14-15 (BSB)

We should not test Christ, as some of them did, and were killed by **snakes**.

1 Corinthians 10:9 (BSB)

↳ Later, people started worshipping the **bronze snake**, so it had to be destroyed.

[King Hezekiah] did what was right in the eyes of the Lord ... [One example...] **He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made**, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it.

2 Kings 18:3a, 4b (NIV)

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↳ **We also see this prohibition** ① in God's *commands* to destroy images/idols, as well as, ② in the *examples* of people obeying God's command.

- The idols of the nations. (Note also the connection to worship.)

Rather, you must **tear down** their **altars**, **smash** their **sacred stones**, and **chop down** their **Asherah poles**. For you must not **worship** any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

Exodus 34:13-14 (BSB)

- Idols in Israel... NO!

**"Do not make any idols."**

Exodus 34:17 (NIV)

- In addition to destroying the bronze snake...

[King Hezekiah] He **removed** the **high places**, **smashed** the **sacred stones** and **cut down** the **Asherah poles**.

2 Kings 18:4a (NIV)

24



**Q. But may not images be permitted in churches in place of books for the unlearned?**

A. No, we should not try to be wiser than God.

God wants the Christian community instructed by the living preaching of his Word—not by idols that cannot even talk.

- ⇒ At the time this catechism was written, many churches contained images that people, in theory, could *learn* from. But the people *also* often *prayed* to them – and prayer is an act of *worship*.
- ⇒ The issue of "unlearned" people – i.e., people who can't read – is not a new issue.
  - Throughout Scripture, leaders were instructed to *read* the Bible to the people – and (when needed) to explain it.
  - In this way, those among the people who didn't know how to read would still be able to learn about God and his will.

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No, we should not try to be wiser than God.

What does Scripture say?

- God's ways are **wiser** than ours. Even his "foolishness" is wiser than the best of human "wisdom."

For the foolishness of God is **wiser** than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is **stronger** than human strength.

1 Corinthians 1:25 (NIV)

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways are **higher** than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."

Isaiah 55:9 (BSB)

- This being the case, shouldn't we find out what God says about this issue... and then *do* what he says?

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• Does God tell us to use images to *teach*? NO!

But neither is there a *prohibition* (for the purpose of teaching).



(This could include pictures, statues, stained glass windows...)



- Whatever we may decide on this issue,



we should not *downplay* or *omit* doing the things that God *has* told us to do!

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God wants the Christian community instructed by the living preaching of his Word

What does Scripture say?

- God tells us to pay attention to his Word... and to share it with others.

We also have **the prophetic message** as something **completely reliable**, and **you will do well to pay attention to it**, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

... prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:19, 21b (NIV)

- "Hearing" the Word is how God has chosen to save people.

And how can they **hear** about him unless someone tells them?

So faith comes from **hearing**, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ.

Romans 10:14b, 17 (NLT)

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Since so many people are literate today, we could probably add "reading" to the way God saves people... *if that reading is focused on God's Word.*

And if they read it to others who *can't* read...

- God *blesses* those who read Scripture aloud, so that others can hear it and *also be blessed*!

Blessed is the one who **reads aloud** the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who **hear** and **obey** what is written in it, because the time is near.

Revelation 1:3 (BSB)

- The Word of God accomplishes these things because it is *living* and *powerful*.

For the **word of God** is **living and active**. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it **pierces** even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It **judges** the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12 (BSB)

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- **HOW POWERFUL?** God uses his Word for preparing people for every aspect of life. It saves, it protects, it blesses those who make it part of their lives.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for instruction, for conviction, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, **fully equipped for every good work**.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (BSB)

I'm not ashamed of the **Good News**. It is **God's power** to **save** everyone who **believes**, ...

Romans 1:16a (GW)

**Blessed** is the one ... whose delight is in **the law of the Lord**, and who **meditates on his law** day and night.

Psalms 1:1a, 2 (NIV)

I have **hidden Your word in my heart** that I might **not sin** against You.

Psalms 119:11 (BSB)

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God wants the Christian community instructed  
... not by idols that cannot even talk.

- This applies, whether the image is said to represent the true God, or a false god. *ALL such things are lifeless in every way.* Worse yet, people who rely on these objects tend to *become like them!*

#### What does Scripture say?

SEE ALSO:  
HABAKKUK 2:18-20.  
ISAIAH 40:18; ETC.

SEE ALSO:  
JEREMIAH 10:8;  
ISAIAH 6:10

[Their idols] have mouths, but cannot speak,  
eyes, but cannot see,  
ears, but cannot hear,  
noses, but cannot smell,  
hands, but cannot touch,  
feet, but cannot walk.  
They cannot even clear their throats.

Those who make them will end up like them,  
as will everyone who trusts in them.

Psalms 115:5-8 (NET)

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#### ISSUES TO CONSIDER LATER ...

##### What else does Scripture tell us about "mental images"?

- This catechism focuses mostly on *visible* images, though it does mention *worship* (which involves *mental* images). We should find out if there is more to this matter than what was briefly mentioned here. Might we be violating this command *without knowing it?*

##### What about "images" of Jesus (including pictures)?

- If we agree that images of the *invisible* God are forbidden, what about Jesus? After all, he was also a *human*. Is making images of the *human* Jesus a violation of this command?

##### If "no images" is the negative obligation, is there a positive obligation implied by the commandment?

##### We should also look at those verses about God punishing people – Exodus 20:5-6.

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## Your Mission!

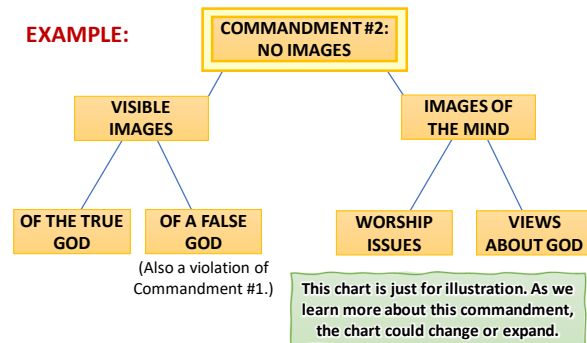
Most (or all) of us don't have idols that we consciously worship.  
Yet there are plenty of ways to be guilty of violating the second commandment. So...

- ⇒ **THINK!** Think about ways you could possibly be doing what the first two commandments *prohibit*. (You might have to focus on the "non-physical" aspects of these commandments.)
- ⇒ **REPLACE!** If you discover issues you need to deal with, try to think of some "positive" responses to replace those violations. (The goal isn't just to stop wrong conduct, but to replace it with good!)

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- ⇒ This commandment illustrates the attitude we should have with all the Ten Commandments. We should consider each commandment to *represent a category* of commands, obligations and teachings.

#### EXAMPLE:



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