Unit 4, Session 5

God Frees His People

Summary and Goal
In this session, we will look on as Moses confronts Pharaoh as part of God’s mission to deliver the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage. In Pharaoh’s response to Moses, we will learn that we have more in common with him than we might care to admit: We too are prone to question the character and authority of God. We will also look at the ten plagues of Egypt, from God turning water into blood to the death of the firstborn sons in the land. We will see that these plagues were not only about God’s judgment but also about God proving Himself to be the one true God, and only His ways lead to life. Finally, we will see in the Passover the goodness of God revealed in a surprising way: through the shedding of blood.

Session Outline
1. God frees His people by confronting false gods (Ex. 7:14-18).
2. God frees His people by providing a perfect sacrifice (Ex. 12:3-8, 12-13).
3. God frees His people by preserving life in the midst of judgment (Ex. 12:29-32).

Session in a Sentence
The Lord is the one true God who frees His people by confronting those who oppose Him and providing life for those who trust in Him.

Christ Connection
Just as a spotless lamb was sacrificed to spare God’s people from His judgment in Egypt, so also Jesus Christ is the Passover Lamb who was sacrificed to protect us from God’s wrath.

Missional Application
Because God has spared us from judgment and freed us from sin through His Son, we warn others of the coming judgment and offer the good news of salvation through Jesus, the substitute Lamb, to everyone around us.
Group Time

Introduction

READ the following paragraph in the DDG (p. 56).

When we read the Book of Exodus, we typically identify with the Israelites, and that is good and right. As the people of God in Christ, we should relate to the people of God in the Old Testament. But there is someone else in this account we should identify with, someone who might surprise you—Pharaoh, who asked, “Who is the Lord, and what authority does He have over me?”

EXPLAIN: Point out that several times in the exodus narrative, Moses tells Pharaoh that God has commanded him to let His people go, but Pharaoh responds with the refrain “Who is the Lord?” Show how Pharaoh’s response accords with the thinking in today’s culture, and sometimes our own.

• The Oxford Dictionaries’ word of the year for 2016 was “post-truth.” It is telling that our society needed to create a word to embody humanity’s perspective of the world. A world where objective facts have given way to emotions and personal beliefs in shaping public opinion. A world where absolute, external authority is rejected. A world quite comfortable with Pharaoh’s response to Moses.

• Yet while most Christians reject the premise of “post-truth,” many of us live it out, at least to a degree, each day. On the outside, we dismiss such thinking, but on the inside, we entertain it. If we’re honest, most of us are pretty good with God, as long as He doesn’t ask us to do what we don’t want to do. But if He does, we are prone to say, “Who is the Lord, and what authority does He have over me?”

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

What are some ways God’s people question who God is and His authority over them? (they choose to sin; they refuse to obey what God has commanded; they try to rationalize actions that are clearly contrary to God’s Word)

SUMMARIZE: In this session, we will look on as Moses confronts Pharaoh as part of God’s mission to deliver the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage.

For additional teaching options and other resources, please visit www.GospelProject.com/additional-resources.
**Point 1:** God frees His people by confronting false gods (Ex. 7:14-18).

**SAY:** God sent Aaron to join Moses, and they went and assembled the elders of the Israelites and performed the signs God had given them. The people believed God had sent them and they worshiped. Then Moses and Aaron took the Lord’s message to Pharaoh, but he refused to let God’s people go and made the people’s work more difficult. This turn of events discouraged Moses and the Israelites, but God’s rescue mission was far from over.

**READ** Exodus 7:14-18 (DDG p. 57).

14 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is hard: He refuses to let the people go. 15 Go to Pharaoh in the morning. When you see him walking out to the water, stand ready to meet him by the bank of the Nile. Take in your hand the staff that turned into a snake. 16 Tell him: The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to tell you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness, but so far you have not listened. 17 This is what the Lord says: Here is how you will know that I am the Lord. Watch. I am about to strike the water in the Nile with the staff in my hand, and it will turn to blood. 18 The fish in the Nile will die, the river will stink, and the Egyptians will be unable to drink water from it.”

**PACK ITEM 6: I AM THE LORD:** Use this poster and the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 57) to introduce the plagues God sent upon Egypt because Pharaoh refused to obey and let God’s people go from their slavery. Through the plagues, God judged the various false gods of Egypt to prove that He alone is the Lord, the one true God.

Through the ten plagues, beginning with turning the water of the Nile into blood, the Lord revealed the false gods of Egypt for what they were and proved their inability to bring about fullness of life. At the same time, God established Himself as the one true God, the only source of life, joy, and peace.

**PACK ITEM 7: THE PLAGUES HANDOUT:** Use this handout to help group members understand the relationship between the plagues and the Egyptian gods.

- The first plague brought death to the Nile River, the life-blood of Egyptian culture. Hapi was the god of the annual flood of the Nile, which sustained life in Egypt, but Hapi and all the gods associated with the Nile were shown to be powerless before the plague that turned the water of the Nile River to blood.
- The ninth plague demonstrated God’s power over Amon-Re, the Egyptian god of the sun, who was represented by Pharaoh himself. With a lasting darkness, God was saying: “Your god is a fraud! As the Creator of all things, I created the sun. The sun answers to Me.”
INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

What are some lies and false beliefs present in the culture today? (there is no God; there are many paths to God; some people are not worth my respect and attention; I have ultimate authority over my own life; you should follow your heart; I’ll go to heaven if I’m a good person)

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 57).

God Is One: In both Old and New Testament times, the advocacy of monotheism (belief in one God) was contrary to the surrounding culture. The people of God knew, based upon God’s self-revelation, that Yahweh, the Lord, is the only one true God.

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 57) to show how God exposes our rebellion out of His mercy so we will repent and turn to Jesus.

Like He did with the Egyptian gods through the plagues, God will reveal and expose our false gods for what they are. God, in His great love and mercy, reveals to us where we’re chasing after things that are false, things that won’t satisfy us. When that happens, when the Word of God shows us how we’ve put other gods before Jesus, when our brothers and sisters are loving enough to point out the idols in our lives, we have a choice to make: We can repent and turn to Jesus or, like Pharaoh, we can continue in our sin, hardening our hearts toward God and His mercy.

Commentary: We tend to think of the mercy of God solely as His kind and tender provision in our lives. But it is often the mercy of God that wounds us, that reveals where we have chosen to chase after the wrong gods. God’s mercy is a wake-up call that is often less than pleasant. We have to recognize this for what it really is: It’s not yet His wrath; for now it is His kindness calling you to repent (Rom. 2:4).

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

What have you believed would provide you with comfort and contentment only to discover it failed you? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)
**Point 2:** God frees His people by providing a perfect sacrifice (Ex. 12:3-8,12-13).

**SAY:** God had unleashed a series of nine plagues, yet Pharaoh remained unmoved. The Israelites were still slaves, and their situation had actually gotten worse. Any hope they may have felt at first had surely evaporated. Only God could provide the exodus they needed. And that is exactly what He wanted them to understand. But God was not done. He would bring one more plague that would secure His people’s freedom at last.

**READ** Exodus 12:3-8,12-13 (DDG p. 58).

3 Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month they must each select an animal of the flock according to their fathers’ families, one animal per family. 4 If the household is too small for a whole animal, that person and the neighbor nearest his house are to select one based on the combined number of people; you should apportion the animal according to what each will eat. 5 You must have an unblemished animal, a year-old male; you may take it from either the sheep or the goats. 6 You are to keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembly of the community of Israel will slaughter the animals at twilight. 7 They must take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses where they eat them. 8 They are to eat the meat that night; they should eat it, roasted over the fire along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

12 “I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night and strike every firstborn male in the land of Egypt, both people and animals. I am the LORD; I will execute judgments against all the gods of Egypt. 13 The blood on the houses where you are staying will be a distinguishing mark for you; when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No plague will be among you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

**EXPLAIN** how the tenth plague differed from the other nine. Then use the following paragraph in the DDG (p. 58) to explain the result of that night.

- Unlike the first nine plagues, the tenth plague would not be reversed, nor would the Jews be exempt from its judgment. Though the Egyptians were the oppressors and they worshiped idols, the Israelites were not blameless. They too were guilty of idol worship (see Josh. 24:14). There was only one way of escape: God prescribed a sacrifice, blood on the doorposts, and a meal.

At about midnight, the Lord brought judgment on every house in Egypt, both Jew and Egyptian. That night every household either had a dead son or a dead lamb—one or the other. For those who placed their faith in God and took shelter under the blood of the lamb, the lamb got what the son deserved. The lamb was a substitute who paid the debt of judgment instead of the firstborn. Generations of Israelites would continue to celebrate the Passover meal, remembering the salvation the Lord brought in Egypt.
INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

How does the Passover connect faith and works? (believing God’s word means acting on it; if the Israelites believed God’s word but didn’t act on it, they wouldn’t be saved from judgment; any other kind of “works” to try to preserve their firstborn sons would have failed)

EXPLAIN: The Passover pictured a greater deliverance to come. God would one day send a greater spotless Lamb, One who would introduce a greater Passover, One who would save the lives not only of the firstborn but of all who find refuge under His blood.

• Centuries later, Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with His disciples. They had celebrated the Passover meal many times before. They knew the routine. But this night’s celebration would be different. Jesus took the bread and said, “This is my body, which is given for you” (Luke 22:19). Jesus took the cup and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (22:20). With these statements, Jesus reframed the meaning of the Passover. Jesus was saying, “I am going to suffer to give you the ultimate freedom from the bondage of sin and the curse of death.” He is the true meaning of the Passover.

• The Passover brought about the rescue from Egypt, but the Passover was about more than freedom from Egypt—it foreshadowed freedom from sin. This greater salvation could not be realized through the deaths of all the lambs slaughtered that night in Egypt put together. This salvation was realized only through the death of Jesus, “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 58).

Christ as Sacrifice: There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Heb. 10:4), Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was able to permanently, “once and for all,” take away sins.

Essential Doctrine “Christ as Sacrifice”: There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Heb. 10:4), Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was able to permanently, “once and for all,” take away sins.
Point 3: God frees His people by preserving life in the midst of judgment (Ex. 12:29–32).

SAY: Some passages in Scripture are difficult or troubling. But the more we press into these hard stories and difficult truths, the more we’ll see just how beautiful and gracious our God is. This is what we encounter in the tenth plague.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Exodus 12:29-32 (DDG p. 59).

29 Now at midnight the Lord struck every firstborn male in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and every firstborn of the livestock. 30 During the night Pharaoh got up, he along with all his officials and all the Egyptians, and there was a loud wailing throughout Egypt because there wasn’t a house without someone dead. 31 He summoned Moses and Aaron during the night and said, “Get out immediately from among my people, both you and the Israelites, and go, worship the Lord as you have said. 32 Take even your flocks and your herds as you asked and leave, and also bless me.”

EXPLAIN: Acknowledge the struggle that arises with the finality of the tenth plague as aspects of the story may disturb us, but nevertheless, this plague teaches us about God’s good character and purposes.

• So much death and suffering is difficult for us to make sense of. We know God is good, kind, and faithful, but there are times like this when it is difficult for us to reconcile God’s character with His actions. So we must remember that God’s thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:8-9). This is a reminder that God is God and we are not.

• This doesn’t mean we shouldn’t try to understand God’s ways here. God invites us to step into the confusion and seek answers to our questions. That is why He has included passages like this one in Scripture. God knows that it is through our wrestling with who He is and what He has done that we will come to know Him better and love and trust Him more.

READ: the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 59), emphasizing the fact that this was Pharaoh’s tenth opportunity to repent and obey the Lord.

As difficult as it seems to reconcile the final plague with God’s good character, when we think about the whole story of the exodus and put this event in its proper context, we don’t just see divine judgment against sin; we also recognize divine grace. We see that God showed grace upon grace upon grace to Pharaoh in granting him multiple opportunities to repent. But because of Pharaoh’s hardness of heart, with the tenth plague, every family across the land suffered the anguish of losing firstborn sons.
INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

As Christians, through what lenses are we to view suffering and death? (God is sovereign over all things; God redeems and avenges the suffering of His people; suffering and death in general are the result of sin in the world; we should make sure our suffering is due to our faithful living and not the result of disobedience so we can have opportunities to share the gospel through suffering well in the name of Christ)

EXPLAIN: As God brought death to the homes of the unbelieving Egyptians, He brought life and freedom to the believing Israelites. In the story of the exodus, and in other places in Scripture, we see that God often delivers His people through judgment. The Israelites were present in the land when death fell over it. They witnessed the horror. They heard the cries. They understood exactly what God had spared them from, and they understood that their freedom would come through the terrible judgment all around them. Similarly, our salvation from sin came through Jesus bearing the judgment for our sin that we deserve.

Commentary: Noah was delivered from the flood by grace as the rain fell in judgment on the people of the earth, crushing the unfaithful but lifting up the faithful in the ark. Likewise, God spared a faithful remnant, including Daniel, during the destruction of Judah at the hands of Babylon. Judgment for their sin fell upon God’s people at the hands of their enemy, but the remnant was preserved, being exiled in chains.

READ the following paragraph in the DDG (p. 59).

God is a gracious Savior, but He is also a just Judge. If we want to experience the salvation He offers, we will not find it through our good works or religion. Instead, like the Israelites during the Passover, the only way we will experience God’s deliverance is through faith—our full surrender to Jesus as our Lord and Savior. That is the choice we must all make. Will we be like Pharaoh and harden our hearts to the Lord despite seeing His grace and goodness, or will we be like the Israelites, trusting God and seeking the Lord’s salvation and finding life through faith in the blood of the spotless Lamb of God?

Voices from the Church

“The power of sin was broken at the foot of the cross. We couldn’t break it ourselves any more than the children of Israel could negotiate their own liberation pact. The only way they were getting loose from Egypt was for their deliverer to come ... In the Old Testament, Yahweh sent Moses to usher His people into free living. And in the New, He sent His Son Jesus to offer it to us.”

—Priscilla Shirer
**EXPLAIN** the overlap between Egypt at the time of the exodus and our culture today. Also compare our mission with the response of the Israelites.

- Egypt was a multicultural, pluralistic society where it wasn't offensive for the Israelites to worship their God, as long as they kept in their place and didn't force that God upon anyone else. The same is true today. Many in our culture are fine with God, as long as Christians keep Him confined to their homes and places of worship. But when, like Moses, believers today proclaim God’s authority and declare the exclusivity of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone, problems arise.

- As followers of Christ, we are not called to fight against those around us any more than God called on the Israelites to lead a rebellion against their Egyptian oppressors. Our enemies are not flesh and blood (Eph. 6:12). Instead, we are to warn those around us of God’s coming judgment, remembering that God has spared us from judgment and freed us from sin through His Son, Jesus Christ.

**READ** the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 60), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because God has spared us from judgment and freed us from sin through His Son, we warn others of the coming judgment and offer the good news of salvation through Jesus, the substitute Lamb, to everyone around us.

- **How will you respond in faith to the good news that God has given His Son as the substitute Lamb for the judgment we rightly deserve?**

- **What false gods are common in your community, and how can your group confront those with the gospel?**

- **This week, how will you help a family member, friend, coworker, or neighbor see that he or she is trusting in false gods?**

**CLOSE IN PRAYER:** Father, You are the one true God, and You made this known with the power and might by which You freed Your people from bondage in Egypt. Thank You for sparing us from Your judgment against Your enemies by protecting and preserving us through Your Son’s sacrifice. Help us to point others to Jesus Christ, the true Passover Lamb, with the good news of how they can escape the coming judgment. Amen.

**INSTRUCT:** As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 61-63), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 64) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 61-63) will help group members get into God’s Word and study it for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 64) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 61-63) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 3 as a part of point 2 in the session: God is holy and powerful and we deserve judgment, yet God is loving and merciful, which is why He withholds His judgment from us and has placed it on His Son instead for those who believe in Him.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- Day 1: “We are not like Pharaoh—we know God. And yet, even in our knowing, we continue to defy Him.”
- Day 4: “Our salvation did not come from a random person but was provided by the spotless Lamb of God whom we know and love.”

Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member’s DDG (p. 64) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

- Encourage group members to remind one another that the one true God alone can save us from bondage and satisfy our hearts.
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
Additional Commentary

Point 1: God frees His people by confronting false gods (Ex. 7:14-18).

“Then the LORD said to Moses. This phrase heads the narrative of each plague (see 8:1,16,20; 9:1,8,13; 10:1,21; 11:1). It not only indicates the sequence of the plagues but also signifies that the events are governed by the word of the Lord spoken to Moses. Pharaoh’s heart is hardened. Even before the first plague, the Lord said he would harden Pharaoh’s heart (4:21; 7:3), and in response to the sign of Aaron’s staff, Pharaoh signified the state of his heart by refusing to listen (7:13).”

“The scenario for each of these plagues plays out the same way: Moses and Aaron demand that Pharaoh allow the people to leave, Pharaoh refuses, God responds to the refusal with a plague, Pharaoh repents, God stops the plague, and Pharaoh changes his mind. The situation escalates from minor demonstrations of God’s power that affect everyone in the land (the first three plagues), to plagues that fall only on the Egyptians and spare the Israelites, to the manifestation of God’s power of life and death when he causes all the firstborn males to die. It is only then that Pharaoh yields.”

“Many people may protest against God’s judgment and wrath. This should not surprise us. Whenever people protest against God’s judgment, it is a sign that they have minimized their sin and God’s blazing holiness. R. C. Sproul says, ‘Sin is cosmic treason’ … These protestors are also minimizing God’s sovereignty. God is totally free to do as He pleases. In fact, Paul drew on Exodus in Romans 9 when he said, ‘I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion’ (Rom. 9:15). Remember also that Israel was not better than the Egyptians. They did not merit salvation. They were saved the same way we are saved: ‘by grace through faith.’ They saw the signs and believed. Egypt (at least most of them it seems) did not believe.”

Point 2: God frees His people by providing a perfect sacrifice (Ex. 12:3-8,12-13).

“The Passover lamb is not strictly speaking a sacrifice like the later Levitical sacrifices. It is also not a sin offering, for the people eat it themselves (see Lev. 6:30). Its main significance lies in the blood that is used symbolically for protection from the Lord’s judgment. By obediently putting the blood on the doorframe, the Israelites will demonstrate their faith that the Lord will save them from death (Heb. 11:28). Each family has to do this in order to appropriate God’s saving act for the entire nation.”
“The people are to celebrate in family groups (12:3b) and the animals are to be slaughtered by all the people of the community at the same time (12:6b). This is the first record we have of a sacrifice being offered by families, rather than by individuals, and of the whole community participating in a shared ritual. This had not been done in the times of the patriarchs. The references to the ‘community’ in 12:3 and 12:6 also suggest the beginnings of the idea of a people, a nation. This idea will come to full bloom with the announcement of God’s choice of the nation and his establishment of the covenant with them in chapters 19 and 20.”  

**Point 3: God frees His people by preserving life in the midst of judgment (Ex. 12:29-32).**

“The Lord’s final assault affects the whole population and targets every Egyptian home (12:29). It also judges the most powerful Egyptian gods (12:12). The pharaohs were believed to be the sons of the life-giving sun god Ra, but he is unable to protect the son of the Pharaoh. Osiris, the powerful Egyptian god of the dead, is also overcome. Thus Yahweh demonstrates that he is indeed the one true God who alone has the power over life and death. When the people of Israel cried out because of oppression and slavery, Yahweh heard and came down to deliver them. Now the tables are turned. The confident, obstinate and cruel Egyptians are wailing in the darkness, even in the palace of Pharaoh (12:30).”

“...Why does it receive no mention in Egyptian records? The probable answer is that the official Egyptian records were written by government functionaries not to provide an objective recording of historical events, but in order to support the existing political and religious powers of their day. Egyptian annals glorify the accomplishments of the Pharaohs and reinforce the prevailing Egyptian religious convictions. Any set of events that cast Egyptian gods and their Pharaoh (who was himself considered a god) in a bad light would hardly be mentioned in an official Egyptian document.”

**References**

1. Priscilla Shirer, One in a Million (Nashville: B&H, 2010) [eBook].
The Books of Genesis and Exodus are meant to be read together, providing an important clue for our approach to the rest of Scripture. The story begins in Genesis and unfolds with breathtaking speed, but then the pace slows as the rest of the book tells us the story of four generations of the one family through which God promised to bring blessing to the world.

As Genesis winds down, we encounter Joseph, one of Abraham’s great grandsons, and see that God’s promises are not always easy for His people. But through Joseph’s difficulties, we encounter the vital concept of redemption. His life was one of setbacks, frustration, and disappointment. But all the while, we see that God was at work through Joseph’s adversity, not despite it. God brought about redemption for Joseph and his family: God is always bringing glory to Himself and good to His people through their hardships, even by overriding their sins.

Then as we move from Genesis to Exodus, we pass over nearly four hundred years to a time when God’s people are enslaved. The stage is set for an even greater display of God’s desire and ability to redeem His people. When they cry out to God for deliverance from their slavery in Egypt, He provides a rescuer in Moses to free His people and to provide for them.

God’s deliverance of Joseph and the nation of Israel were the early stages of a beautiful crescendo of God’s plan to redeem His people that culminated in Christ Jesus. In Him we have experienced redemption from the slavery of sin and death. As we study these sessions, let us pray that the Holy Spirit stirs our hearts anew so that we are captivated by the love, grace, and mercy of God made known to us in our redemption through Christ so we can share Him with others.
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