

## JOHN 10:27-30

### CAN A CHRISTIAN BE LOST AGAIN?

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”<sup>1</sup>

**T**he verses of our text have frequently served as a soft pillow for a weary head. Early in my life as a follower of the Master, I struggled with the thought that God could accept me. I had lived a hard life in my early years, gaining the unenviable reputation as a hard-living man. When I came to faith, I was conscious of my past choices and the will of God. Frankly, I was overwhelmed by the grace of God; I was unable to comprehend the mercy that was extended to me. I struggled so much that I questioned whether I had truly believed. Surely, I thought, God could not have accepted me. I reasoned I had made a mistake.

Gradually, the Master’s gracious words of acceptance conquered my doubts and raised my gaze from my sin to His majestic grace. Multiple passages in the Word comforted me and quieted my fears. I read the words which the Master spoke to some who sought to kill Him on one occasion. “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” [JOHN 5:24]. I was particularly consoled by the tense of the words. He who hears His word and believes Him who sent Jesus now has eternal life—it is a present reality. Moreover, that one will not be brought into judgement. The reason is that he has already passed from death and into life.

I read the comforting promise, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned” [JOHN 3:18]. And I noted that this promise is iterated soon after the first pronouncement when God promises, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” [JOHN 3:36].

Were the words spoken by the Master somehow insufficient to comfort my frightened soul, I also discovered the promise written in the Apostle’s encyclical. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” [EPHESIANS 1:3-14].

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I was greatly relieved by the promise Paul penned when writing the Roman Christians. “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10]. You know quite well that he concludes by quoting Joel. “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:13].

However, time-after-time my mind would return to the words of our text for this day. The Master spoke so powerfully when He was challenged by the religious leadership of the day. You will recall that it was during the Feast of Dedication during the winter of his final year. Jesus was walking in the Temple, in the colonnade of Solomon when the Jews gathered around Him. “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly,” they challenged. The Master stripped the pretence from their query. “I told you, and you do not believe.” How His words must have stung these pious frauds. Jesus said, “The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep” [JOHN 10:24-26].

Then, the Master spoke the words of our text. Listen to them once again. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one” [JOHN 10:27-30].

**RESPONSE** — “My sheep hear my voice ... and they follow Me.” This truth of itself is comforting to the child of God! Jesus had spoken the truth, and those who were not His sheep could not understand what He was saying. Nothing has changed in the ensuing two millennia; Jesus speaks today through His Word, and the lost cannot understand what He says. This is the basis for the Apostle Paul’s stern pronouncement in the First Letter to the Christians of Corinth. “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ‘For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ” [1 CORINTHIANS 2:14-16].

When you came to faith, the Spirit of God took up residence in your life. As one who is born from above, the Spirit of God lives in you. You may recall Jesus’ promise concerning the Spirit that was given to His disciples. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you” [JOHN 14:15-17].

Because you are a believer in the Living Christ, because you have been born from above, His Spirit prompts you to hear what He says through His Word. You are disposed by the presence of the Spirit of Christ to be obedient to all that He commands. If you are merely religious, treating service before the Master as a matter of duty without concern for what the Word of God says or without concern to obey His teaching, it is effective evidence that no relationship exists between you and the Risen Saviour.

This truth is emphasised again when John writes in his first missive of pretenders to the Faith. “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us” [1 JOHN 2:19]. John was referring to those who claimed to follow Christ, though they had no relationship to Him. He called them antichrists!

He would continue by noting that those belonging to Christ listen to Him, heeding His commands and testing the message delivered by those claiming to speak for the Master. “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error” [1 JOHN 4:1-6].

As much as false teaching irritates me, I am convinced on the basis of this passage that the Spirit of God is at work among His people protecting them from error. Nevertheless, the people of God are charged to consider the message they receive from those professing to be preachers of the Word. Though I am concerned for the spiritual welfare of the flock, I confess that I am as greatly disturbed by the impact of errant teaching on the casual attendee or religious individual who is not saved! If the one proclaiming himself a divine spokesman delivers an errant message, the eternal well-being of all who listen is jeopardised, but it is assuredly true that some who are lost will be confirmed in eternal condemnation!

If the only time Jesus spoke of His flock listening to His voice was found in our text, it would be enough to console the child of God. However, the Master is developing a theme and His words recorded in the text iterate what He had already said concerning His own sheep. “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice” [JOHN 10:1-4].

This affirmation anticipated what the Master would say soon afterward. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me” [JOHN 10:11-14].

The truth I want you to seize from these first words of our text is that when the Master speaks, His sheep hear His voice; His flock responds to His voice! You will know those who are redeemed by their relationship to the Great Shepherd. They run from a stranger; and even when the stranger sounds plausible, they are leery. The one who is born from above is disposed to obey what the Master commands. They want to know His will, and they heed what He says. Christ’s flock responds to His voice!

**RECOGNITION** — “I know [My sheep].” While the flock responds to the voice of the Master, it is even more vital for us to realise that He knows His sheep! Christ the Lord knows His own! One of the many exciting passages from the Prophet Isaiah is that in which God responds to the pitiful feelings expressed by Zion. Zion, the people of God, were feeling sorry for themselves. They appear to have been moaning that God had forgotten them. Of course, none of us have ever had that problem, have we? God, through His prophet, gave one of the multiplied comforting statements of His concern for His people.

“Zion said, ‘The LORD has forsaken me;  
my Lord has forgotten me.’

“‘Can a woman forget her nursing child,  
that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?  
Even these may forget,  
yet I will not forget you.  
Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;  
your walls are continually before me.’”

[ISAIAH 49:14-16]

God says of His own, “I will not forget you. I have engraved you on the palms of My hands!” What He said of His ancient people, the Master iterates for His people in this Age of Grace. The Living God recognises His own people.

Another instance when this truth is emphasised is found in Paul’s Letter to the Churches of Galatia. Paul is expressing his exasperation over the tendency of these Galatian believers to transmogrify the Faith into a touchy-feely religious experience. “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain” [GALATIANS 4:8-11]. Take special note that the basis for his plea to remember who they are is based less on the fact that they know God than on the truth that they are known by God!

Paul’s plea to Galatian Christians anticipated something that he would write in later years to the Corinthian Christians: “If anyone loves God, he is known by God” [1 CORINTHIANS 8:3]. Those who love God, obey Him. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” [JOHN 14:15]. This truth is iterated and emphasised as the Master continued preparing His disciples for His exodus. He said, “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me” [JOHN 14:21]. Again, Jesus said, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” [JOHN 14:23]. This truth the Apostle of Love repeated until the end of his life. In the first of the letters bearing his name and included in the canon of Scripture, the aged Apostle has written, “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” [1 JOHN 5:3]. So, those who love God, obey God; and those who are obedient to the Word of God and to His will, are known by God.

When Moses pleaded for Israel, it is significant to note the manner in which the LORD responded to his pleas. “The LORD said to Moses, ‘This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name’” [EXODUS 33:17]. The LORD knew Moses, and He knows His people in this day as well. We may be confident that He will hear the pleas of His own dear child and that He will answer His child.

It is similar to God’s call to Jeremiah, when the LORD said,

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
and before you were born I consecrated you;  
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

[JEREMIAH 1:5]

The Lord knew Jeremiah, and we may be confident that He knows His own in this day.

For a moment, child of God, think of this precious truth. God knew you before you were born, and He prepared for your salvation though you had not yet received your existence. Peter speaks of this glorious preparation when he opens his first letter to “elect exiles of the Dispersion” [see **1 PETER 1:1, 2**]. Before ever He created mankind, the Triune God prepared for man’s salvation. This means that God created man, knowing that he would rebel and plunge the entire creation into ruin. Yet, God prepared for redemption of His fallen creature by designating His own Son as a sacrifice from sinful man!

Peter presents this stunning truth in this way. “Preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’ And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” [**1 PETER 1:13-21**].

One can only marvel at the grace of God when reading a passage such as that found in Paul’s Letter to Roman Christians. “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified” [**ROMANS 8:28-30**].

Perhaps you will recall another lesser known though no less comforting reference to God’s knowledge of His own people. The passage is found in **NAHUM 1:7**.

“The LORD is good,  
a stronghold in the day of trouble;  
he knows those who take refuge in him.”

The passage serves as the foundation for an affirmation of the Faith that Paul has provided. “God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity’” [**2 TIMOTHY 2:19**]. Twin foundations are again presented—those who love God obey God, and those who obey God are known by God. This is a powerful source of confidence for the redeemed of God.

The matter before us is serious. Each church member would profess to know God, however, only the Christian can be assured that he or she is known by God. This vital issue segregates all mankind. Jesus warned, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” [**MATTHEW 7:21-23**].

On another occasion, Jesus warned those who were following Him to ensure they were known by God. “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’ In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out” [LUKE 13:24-28].

What a dreadful thing it will be for the lost to hear those stunning words, “I never knew you”; or yet again to hear the confession from the Lord, “I do not know where you come from.” These dreadful words will be spoken to people who claimed to know God, though they were not known by God. I fear that many of the churches of our land are populated with people who profess to know God, though they are not known by God. I take no joy in making this statement, but honesty compels me to warn all who will receive this message to heed the challenge of the Word. “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test” [2 CORINTHIANS 13:5]!

It is not in professing Christ that one is saved; it is in possessing Christ that one is saved. It is not knowing about Christ that secures salvation; it is knowing Christ that secures salvation. It is a decided comfort to the child of God to know that his name, or that her name, is pronounced in the precincts of Heaven before the True and Living God. This is the teaching of the Word as presented by Malachi. “Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. ‘They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him’” [MALACHI 3:16-18].

**REWARD** —“My sheep ... will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” Perhaps it is not entirely appropriate to speak of God’s gift as our reward; but in showing us great mercy, it as though we were rewarded. His mercy, the grace we received, is undeserved. We did nothing to deserve this mercy; but the cost of God was the sacrifice of His blessed Son. We who are known by God have already received the gift of life, and we shall never perish. While those living for this present life are focused on existence, the child of God is focused on living. That is as it should be, for we are made alive in God who is the Author of Life. We have been made alive in Him, just as the Apostle says. “You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses” [COLOSSIANS 2:13].

Eternal life is the present possession of the one who is born from above. Earlier, I cited the words of the Master that are recorded in JOHN 5:24. Note the tense of the verbs that He used. “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” The Master speaks of eternal life as the present possession of the one who believes God. Moreover, the Master says that this individual “does not come into judgement.” The reason for this confidence is because the one who is redeemed has already passed from death to life.

No less than forty-four times does God speak of eternal life in His Word. The righteous shall awaken to “everlasting life” [DANIEL 12:2]. The grace of God reigns in righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord [ROMANS 5:21]. Those who believe in the Son of God shall never perish, but rather they now possess eternal life [JOHN 3:16]. Those who know God now possess eternal life [JOHN 17:3]. The free gift of God is eternal life [ROMANS 6:23]. The eternal life God offers was promised before the ages began [TITUS 1:2]. God made a promise—eternal life [JOHN 2:25]. Since God speaks so frequently of eternal life, I have a question for those who doubt that we now possess this gracious and heavenly gift: If God meant to extend probationary life—life contingent on our holding onto that life—why did He speak of this gift as eternal, unending?

Few Christians doubt that Jesus warns of eternal punishment for those who live for themselves during the Great Tribulation. They acknowledge that the punishment of the lost is unending. If that punishment is unending, then of necessity the life that is given to those who are redeemed is likewise unending. This is evident when we read the words of the Master in MATTHEW 25:46: “[The damned] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” If damnation is unending, then the life of the righteous is likewise unending. Every rule of language demands that when a word is defined in one way within a sentence, if that same word is used again in the same sentence it must of necessity possess the identical meaning. Otherwise, language becomes meaningless.

In his first letter, the Apostle of Love makes a significant statement that helps clarify this matter. “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life” [1 JOHN 2:18-25]. Focus on that final affirmation. God has promised eternal life. As the Word abides in you, so you abide in the Son and in the Father. Abiding in the Son of God, you possess eternal life.

John makes this identification stronger still as he nears the conclusion of this little letter. “This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” [1 JOHN 5:6-12]. Notice that the issue is whether we reside in the Son or whether we are outside of the Son; for if we are in the Son we now have eternal life. Outside of the Son, there cannot be life. In the Son—life. Outside the Son—death. This brings us back to our text.

Jesus claims that He holds those who are His sheep—they are secure in Him and His love. His precise words are, “No one will snatch them out of my hand.” Then, as if anticipating individuals who might whinge and simper, the Master made the case stronger still by saying, “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” [JOHN 10:29].

My dad was sipping a cup of coffee at my kitchen table. We had been discussing the Bible. He was pleased that I had come to faith, but he was terribly disturbed that I had adopted the position of security in the Son of God. He would present his argument, thrusting with every rhetorical device that he had gathered during a lifetime of believing that one who had received the gift of eternal life could somehow cease to be a believer. He had tried emotional arguments, stating his conviction that were he alive, my grandfather would be distressed at the thought that I accepted the teaching of security in Christ the Lord. I laughed as I deftly parried his assertion, “Dad, Granddad is rejoicing at this moment because I’m secure in Christ.” It did little to stay his assault, so he brought out his final arguments.

“Son, if I believed as you do, I’d go out that take my fill of sin,” he solemnly stated.

I replied carefully, “Dad, that is precisely the point. I’ve had my fill of sin; I don’t want to live that way any longer. I want to live for Christ.” Then, quoting the words of our text, I reminded him that Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one” [JOHN 10:27-30].

“Dad, can’t you accept that Jesus can firmly hold you?”

“Well,” he spoke with a sense of finality, “I don’t doubt that Jesus can hold onto me; but, if I wanted to, I could remove myself from His hand!”

“Well, do you want to remove yourself from His hand?” I asked.

“No,” he hesitantly said. Then, turning to his coffee, I heard him mutter under his breath, “But if I wanted to...”

That is precisely the point. It is theoretical for the most that hold to the possibility that one can cease being born again, whereas the life we now possess is experiential. We may be confident that God provides a “know so” salvation, not a “hope so” salvation. The child of God was never meant to question whether he or she was related to the True and Living God. The child of God is expected to live boldly, bravely standing firm in the face of life itself. God did not call us to live a life based on unproven theory; God appointed us to live a life that is founded on truth. This is the confidence that we have—God has given us life in His Son.

As he nears the end of the first letter we have received as First John, and aged Apostle comforts those who would read what was written. “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life” [1 JOHN 5:13]. God wants His people to know that they have eternal life. God does not expect His people to live as a giant question marks; He expects that His people will live as exclamation marks! We are to be confident, brave, bold, standing firm against the foe and for the cause of Christ the Lord.

If I accept the Word of God as authoritative, why would I doubt what He has caused to be written? Why would any believer question the veracity of God’s Word? Why would any believer exchange the certainty of the promise of God for the specious sophistries of man’s fallen imagination? What has been written was written for our comfort and for our edification. When we question what God has written, we empty the Word of its power for our lives. Live boldly!



However, if you have no faith in the Son of God, it is impossible to live boldly. Outside of Christ the Lord, there exists only an expectation of death and terror of meeting Him who gives life. However, you must know the life is now offered to all who are willing to receive it. Christ Jesus, the Son of God, died because of your sin. He was buried and was raised from the dead on the third day. Now, the life that He alone can give is offered to all who are willing to receive Him as Master. This is the promise of God. “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is my Master,’ believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free. It is with the heart that one believes and is in a right standing with the Father, while with the mouth one confesses resulting in liberty”<sup>2</sup> [ROMANS 10:9, 10].

You know that the passage concludes with a citation from the Prophet Joel. “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved,” [ROMANS 10:13]. And the salvation He gives is an eternal salvation. Believe this promise and be saved from all sin; believe Him and receive this right standing before God. Do it now. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Author's Translation