

The **Bible** Unpacked

Comprehensive Study Series

The Bible's teaching presented
for Bible students

Paul Mallison

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The Bible's teaching presented
for Bible students

2. God's Character

Paul Mallison

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A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are 40 booklets in the series, based on the 40 chapters of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Comprehensive Edition*. Each booklet has two sections, which can be used for two or more studies.

See *Topics in This Series* towards the end of this booklet for a full listing of all the topics. Note that studying booklets alternatively from the two major sections (*What to Know* and *What to Do*) would add variety.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net.

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse's context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God and/or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?

If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

I. Holy Characteristics

A good understanding of God requires a balanced understanding of his character, including the fundamental attribute of holiness. To obtain such an understanding, we must “take to heart” all aspects of his character. As well as the many characteristics that we find consoling, we also need to appreciate those that inspire godly fear.

a) Holiness

God's holiness involves his moral purity. It concerns God's separateness from and his intolerance of that which is morally impure. Holiness is basic to the other characteristics that follow in the first half of this chapter.

God is holy . . .

ISA 6:3 And one [angelic being] called to another and said: "*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!*" ESV

. . . There is nothing bad in God – and he cannot tolerate evil

Ps 92:15B ... the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and *there is no unrighteousness in him.* ESV

HAB 1:13A [HABAKKUK, TO GOD:] *You are too just to tolerate evil; you are unable to condone wrongdoing.* NET

There is no one holy like God

1SAM 2:2 *No one is holy like the LORD!* There is no one other than you! There is no rock like our God! NET

God shows himself to be holy by what he does

ISA 5:16 The LORD All-Powerful will receive glory by judging fairly; *the holy God will show himself holy by doing what is right.* NCV™

Places where God dwells are also holy . . .

2CHR 30:27 The priests and Levites [of Israel] got up and pronounced blessings on the people. The LORD responded favorably to them as their prayers reached *his holy dwelling place in heaven.* NET

Ps 65:4B [DAVID, TO GOD:] We are filled with good things in *your house, your holy Temple.* NCV™

Places must be holy for God in his holiness to dwell in them. God is primarily spoken of as dwelling in: heaven (cf. 2Chr 30:27 ↑); places containing the Ark of the Covenant, i.e. the tabernacle and then the temple (cf. Ps 65:4 ↑); and his people.

. . . and God only dwells with those who are holy

EZEK 37:27-28 [GOD:] *The place where I live will be with them. I will be their God, and they will be my people.* ²⁸*When my Temple is among them forever, the nations will know that I, the LORD, make Israel holy.*

NCV™

This passage demonstrates that those who God dwells with are holy and it can be inferred from it that he only dwells with those who are holy.

Things of God are likewise holy

ISA 52:10A The LORD will show *his holy power* to all the nations. NCV™

JER 23:9B And because of *His holy words*. NKJV

Note: God and his ways are perfect

MATT 5:48 So then, be perfect, *as your heavenly Father is perfect*. NET

PS 18:30A *God's way is perfect!* GW

What does holiness involve?

What are the implications of God's holiness for us?

If God only dwells with those who are holy, how then can we be holy for him to live with us?

Pray for persecuted Christians

b) Righteousness and Justice

God is righteous and just

ISA 5:16 But *the LORD of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness.* ESV

God's righteousness and justice are great – and everlasting

Ps 36:6A [DAVID, TO GOD:] *Your righteousness is towering like the mountains; your justice is like the depths of the sea.* GNT

Ps 111:3 [A PSALMIST, SPEAKING OF GOD:] *Splendid and glorious are his awesome deeds, and his righteousness endures forever.* ISV

Thus, God's ways are right and just

Hos 14:9 Who is wise? Let him discern these things! Who is discerning? Let him understand them! For *the ways of the LORD are right*; the godly walk in them, but in them the rebellious stumble.

NET

REV 15:3B [Believers in heaven, to God:] *Just and true are your ways, King over the nations!* NET

In fact, all God does is right and just . . .

DAN 4:37A Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, for *all his deeds are right and his ways are just.* NET

. . . God does no wrong

ZEPH 3:5A But the LORD is good, and he is there in that city [Jerusalem]. *He does no wrong.* Every morning he governs the people fairly; every day he can be trusted. NCV™

As such, God is truthful . . .

ISA 45:19B [GOD:] *I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right.* ESV

. . . and God does not show favoritism

ROM 2:11 For *there is no partiality with God.* NET

Note: God loves righteousness and justice

Ps 33:5 *He loves righteousness and justice; the world is filled with the gracious love of the LORD.* ISV

How should God's righteousness and justice affect the way we relate to him?

What are some aspects of God's righteousness and justice that we can emulate? Is there any aspect that you would like to emulate more? (Do not limit your answers to only what is mentioned in the study.)

Why is there so much injustice in the world when God is righteous and just?

c) Faithfulness

God is faithful

DEUT 7:9 [MOSES, TO ISRAEL:] Remember that the LORD your God is the only God and that *he is faithful. He will keep his covenant and show his constant love to a thousand generations* of those who love him and obey his commands ... GNT

HEB 10:23 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for *he who promised is faithful.* ESV

God's faithfulness is great

LAM 3:22–23 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; ²³they are new every morning; *great is your faithfulness.* ESV

God's faithfulness lasts forever

PS 117:2 For great is his steadfast love toward us, and *the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.* Praise the LORD! ESV

God never abandons nor fails

PS 9:10 [DAVID, TO GOD:] Your loyal followers trust in you, for you, LORD, *do not abandon those who seek your help.* NET

1CHR 28:20 David also said to his son Solomon, “Be strong and brave, and do the work. Don’t be afraid or discouraged, because the LORD God, my God, is with you. *He will not fail you or leave you until all the work for the Temple of the LORD is finished.* NCV™

God does not lie nor change his mind – he keeps his promises

NUM 23:19 *God is no mere human! He doesn't tell lies or change his mind. God always keeps his promises.* CEV

How has God shown his faithfulness to you? (If it helps, in answering you could use part of a verse in this section that you can particularly relate to.)

Why is it important to remember that God is faithful (cf. Deut 7:9)?

Is there a situation that you face for which you need to bear in mind that God "will not fail you or leave you" (1Chr 28:20)?

Pray for persecuted Christians

d) Anger

Although we usually view anger in a negative light, this is not how the Bible depicts God's anger, or wrath. God's anger is always justified and righteous, consistent with his holiness. Moreover, it arises in response to that which is contrary to his holiness. Unlike human anger, God's anger is never uncontrolled, wayward or spasmodic – and is tempered by his mercy, notably where his own people are concerned.

God's anger and its consequences are awesome . . .

Ps 90:11 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *Who can really fathom the intensity of your anger? Your raging fury causes people to fear you.* NET

ISA 5:25 Therefore [due to their evil] *the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people, and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them, and the mountains quaked; and their corpses were as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still.* ESV

. . . This will be evident upon all nations and the whole earth

ISA 13:9 The day of the LORD is coming—that cruel day of his fierce anger and fury. *The earth will be made a wilderness, and every sinner will be destroyed.* GNT

ZEPH 3:8 Therefore you must wait patiently for me,” says the LORD, “for the day when I attack and take plunder. *I have decided to gather nations together and assemble kingdoms, so I can pour out my fury on them – all my raging anger. For the whole earth will be consumed by my fiery anger.* NET

God's anger cannot be quenched, . . .

JER 21:12 Family of David, this is what the LORD says: You must judge people fairly every morning. Save the person who has been robbed from the power of his attacker. If you don't, I will become very angry. *My anger will be like a fire that no one can put out, because you have done evil things.* NCV™

... nor can God's anger be withstood

NAH 1:6 *No one can withstand his indignation! No one can resist his fierce anger! His wrath is poured out like volcanic fire, boulders are broken up as he approaches.* NET

But, God is slow to anger and often holds it back . . .

NUM 14:18A *The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in loyal love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty ...* NET

Ps 78:38 *Yet he is compassionate. He forgives sin and does not destroy. He often holds back his anger, and does not stir up his fury.* NET

... Additionally, God does not stay angry

Mic 7:18B *He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy.* NKJV

God's anger arises in response to sin and disobedience

1Ki 16:2B [GOD, TO BAASHA THE KING OF ISRAEL:] *Yet you followed in Jeroboam's footsteps and encouraged my people Israel to sin; their sins have made me angry.* NET

Mic 5:15 [GOD:] *I will angrily seek vengeance on the nations that do not obey me.* NET

God's anger arises in response to people turning away from him

EZRA 8:22B *"The good hand of our God is on everyone who is seeking him, but his great anger is against everyone who forsakes him."* NET

Other things that arouse God's anger

Ps 78:21–22 *When the LORD heard this [complaints, expressing doubts], he was furious. A fire broke out against Jacob, and his anger flared up against Israel, ²²because they did not have faith in God, and did not trust his ability to deliver them.* NET

ROM 2:7B–8 *But he [God] will bring ⁸anger and fury on those who, in selfish pride, refuse to believe the truth and who follow what is wrong.*

If God is good, how can anger be one of his characteristics?

What things about God's anger are exemplary for us?

Do you ever think of things you do as arousing God's anger? If so, what things?

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Loving Characteristics

God's love is one of the two primary characteristics from which his other personal characteristics emanate, the other primary one being his holiness. Comprehending and persistently being mindful of God's love and his associated characteristics provides great encouragement for believers.

a) Love

See also:

■ *God Loves His People*, Ch. 17

God is love – as epitomized in him giving his only Son, to save us

1JN 4:8–10, 16 The person who does not love does not know God, because *God is love*. ⁹*This is how God’s love was revealed among us: God sent his unique Son into the world so that we might live through him.* ¹⁰*This is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ...* ¹⁶*We have come to know and rely on the love that God has for us. God is love, and the person who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.* ^{ISV}

The phrase “God is love” (vv. 8, 16) implies that God’s nature is fundamentally love, rather than that love is simply a characteristic of God. It is also indicative of God being the sole source of love; love does not exist apart from him. This assertion is also reflected in v. 7 and v. 16b.

God’s love is great

Ex 34:6–7A The LORD passed in front of Moses and said, “I am the LORD. The LORD is a God who shows mercy, who is kind, who doesn’t become angry quickly, *who has great love* and faithfulness ⁷and is kind to thousands of people. ^{NCV™}

Ps 108:4 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *For your loyal love extends beyond the sky, and your faithfulness reaches the clouds.* ^{NET}

God’s love is steadfast . . .

Ps 36:7A *How precious is your steadfast love, O God!* ^{ESV}

. . . God’s love lasts forever

Ps 89:2 [ETHAN, TO GOD:] I know that *your love will last for all time*, that your faithfulness is as permanent as the sky. ^{GNT}

Ps 100:5 For the LORD is good; *his steadfast love endures forever*, and his faithfulness to all generations. ^{ESV}

Explain in your own words what John meant in saying: "God is love" (1Jn 4:8, 16).

What do you find particularly remarkable about God's love?

How does a person abide in love (cf. 1Jn 4:16)?

Pray for persecuted Christians

b) Mercy

God is merciful

DEUT 4:31 [MOSES, TO ISRAEL:] *The LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not abandon you, destroy you, or forget the promise to your ancestors that he swore he would keep.* GW

God's mercy is great

PS 25:6 [DAVID, TO GOD:] Because of *your great mercy*, I come to your house, LORD, and I am filled with wonder as I bow down to worship at your holy temple. CEV

Along with being merciful, God is gracious . . .

EX 34:6B *The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ...* ESV

. . . and God is compassionate

JAMES 5:11B You have heard of Job's endurance and you have seen the Lord's purpose, that *the Lord is full of compassion and mercy.* NET

Due to his mercy and compassion: God is long-suffering; . . .

NEH 9:28–31 [LEVITES, PRAYING TO GOD AND MAKING REFERENCE TO THEIR FOREFATHERS:] Then, when they were at rest again, they went back to doing evil before you. Then you abandoned them to their enemies, and they gained dominion over them. *When they again cried out to you, in your compassion you heard from heaven and rescued them time and again.* ²⁹And you solemnly admonished them in order to return them to your law, but they behaved presumptuously and did not obey your commandments. They sinned against your ordinances – those by which an individual, if he obeys them, will live. They boldly turned from you; they rebelled and did not obey. ³⁰*You prolonged your kindness with them for many years, and you solemnly admonished them by your Spirit through your prophets. Still they paid no attention, so you delivered them into the hands of the neighboring peoples.* ³¹*However, due to your abundant mercy you did not do away with them altogether; you did not abandon them. For you are a merciful and compassionate God.* NET

. . . and God is forgiving

Mic 7:18–19 Who is a God like you? *You forgive sin and overlook the rebellion of your faithful people. You will not be angry forever, because you would rather show mercy.* ¹⁹*You will again have compassion on us. You will overcome our wrongdoing. You will throw all our sins into the deep sea.* GW

Note: God is patient – allowing people to repent

2PET 3:9B *God is patient, because he wants everyone to turn from sin and no one to be lost.* CEV

What is compassion?

How does God express his compassion and mercy? (Do not limit your answers to what is mentioned above.)

How has God shown his patience with you?

c) Benevolence

Benevolence involves showing goodness, kindness and generosity.

God is good . . .

Ps 119:68 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *You are good and you do good. Teach me your statutes!* NET

When the Bible says that God is good, arguably there are two concepts in view. God is good in that he is: (a) morally upright; and (b) generous and kind towards his people (and all his creatures). The first concept reflects God's holiness (and so is pertinent to the first half of this chapter). The latter concept is plainly indicative of his benevolence. The two concepts themselves are by no means unrelated, as God's upright character produces his generous and kind actions.

. . . God shows great goodness

Ps 145:7, 9 [DAVID:] They shall pour forth the fame of *your abundant goodness* and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. . . . ⁹*The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.* ESV

God exercises kindness

LUKE 6:35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because *he is kind to ungrateful and evil people.* NET

TITUS 3:4–5A But when *the kindness and love of God our Savior was shown*, ⁵he saved us because of his mercy. NCV™

God is generous

JAMES 1:5 But if anyone is deficient in wisdom, he should ask *God, who gives to all generously* and without reprimand, and it will be given to him. NET

The phrase "without reprimand" may be implying that God "won't correct you for asking" (CEV) or possibly that God will not use any fault in a person as a reason not to give them what they have asked. In any case, the verse points to the fact that God gives "ungrudgingly" (AMP, NRSV; cf. NLT).

God gives good gifts . . .

MATT 7:11 *If you then, although you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!* NET

. . . In fact, God is the ultimate source of all gifts

JAMES 1:17 *All generous giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or the slightest hint of change.* NET

How does God show abundant goodness to all creatures (cf. Ps 145:7, 9)?

What are the implications for us of God being the ultimate source of "every perfect gift" (cf. James 1:17)?

How has God shown kindness and generosity to you? How do you - or how should you - respond to this?

d) Jealousy

The Hebrew and Greek words translated as “jealousy” convey a very forceful passion. When used of God, “jealousy” is spoken of in a positive light, as a virtuous attribute aligned with his profound commitment to and love for his people. God’s jealousy in regard to his people is comparable to that of a husband or wife. Their jealousy is a product of their intense love for each other and evoked by anything that poses a threat to their relationship. As such God’s jealousy is expressed in action against whatever threatens his people or his relationship with them. Thus it is expressed both against hostile forces – bringing salvation to his people – and in punishing any unfaithfulness of his people, leading them back to him.

God is a jealous God

DEUT 4:24 [MOSES, TO ISRAEL:] For the LORD your God is a consuming fire; *he is a jealous God.* NET

God’s jealousy is sometimes compared to fire devouring or destroying that which has aroused it.

God’s jealousy arises in response to his people’s sin . . .

1KI 14:22 Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD. *They made him more jealous by their sins than their ancestors had done.* NET

. . . God’s jealousy arises particularly in response to unfaithfulness

DEUT 32:20–21 ‘I will no longer help them,’ he [God] said; ‘then I will see what happens to them, *those stubborn, unfaithful people.* ²¹*With their idols they have made me angry, jealous with their so-called gods, gods that are really not gods.* GNT

God is jealous for his people and their well-being . . .

ZEC 8:2–5 *Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath.* ³Thus says the LORD: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain. ⁴Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets

of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. ⁵And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.

ESV

God's jealousy for Zion (v. 2) – i.e. Jerusalem - has in view her restoration (vv. 3–5; cf. GNT) and expressing wrath towards her enemies (cf. AMP, CEV, GNT).

. . . Moreover, God is zealous in working for his people's cause

2Ki 19:30–31 *And the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward. ³¹For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD will do this.* ESV

Note that in both ancient Hebrew and ancient Greek, the word that is translated as "jealousy" is also the one which is translated as "zeal" – depending on the context. Hence God's jealousy and his zeal are related.

Note: In his zeal God punishes his enemies

ISA 59:17–18 He [God] put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; *he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak. ¹⁸According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render repayment.* ESV

How would you explain God's jealousy to a non-believer?

What things in the teaching about God's jealousy are encouraging?

Choose one of God's personality characteristics that either: (a) you greatly value; or (b) you need to be more conscious of. Why did you choose this?

Pray for persecuted Christians

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32. **Justice**
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34. **Common Relationships**
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40. **Persecution**
 - I. The Persecution of God's People
 - II. What to Do in Persecution

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There are seven editions of *The Bible Unpacked*, as shown below. Each edition is an abbreviated version of the next one. Four of the editions have studies based on them, with the same text and questions added. For more details and free downloads, go to www.thebibleunpacked.net.

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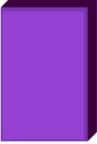
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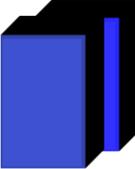
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Supporting Persecuted Christians

Over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied basic human rights solely because of their faith. (Source: World Evangelical Alliance) Every year many Christians are killed because of their faith.

Through prayer, encouragement and practical assistance we can assist and fellowship with persecuted Christians in their suffering. You can play a vital part in this through contacting one of the organizations listed below. Most produce regular news/prayer letters.

Barnabas Fund – www.barnabasfund.org

It provides material and spiritual support based on locally identified needs.

Christian Faith and Freedom – www.cffreedom.org

It advocates on behalf of and aids persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity International – www.csi-int.org

CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk

It advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Open Doors – sb.od.org; www.opendoors.org.au

It equips believers for persecution and maintaining a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin – rlprayerbulletin.blogspot.com.au

It provides weekly bulletins. Send a blank email to join-rlpb@hub.xc.org.

The Bible League – www.bibleleague.org/persecuted; www.bibleleague.com

It supplies Bibles to persecuted Christians and also provides training.

Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com; www.persecution.com.au

VOM helps persecuted Christians spread the gospel. It also gives material aid.

World Watch Monitor – www.worldwatchmonitor.org

It reports the story of Christians under pressure for their faith.

Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.' Matthew 25:40 NCV

This series of studies is based on the
Comprehensive Edition of The Bible Unpacked.

There are seven editions of *The Bible Unpacked.*
These aim to address the needs of
NON-CHRISTIANS through to MATURE CHRISTIANS,
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