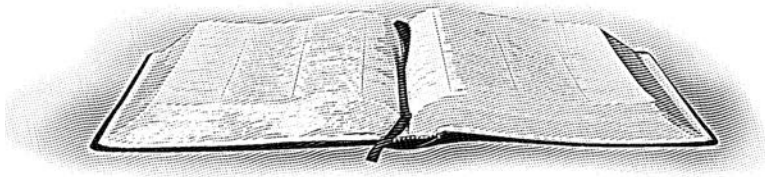


# The Uniqueness *of the* Bible



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Deut. 32:45–47; Gen. 49:8–12; Isa. 53:3–7; 1 Cor. 15:3–5, 51–55; Rom. 12:2.*

**Memory Text:** “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (*Psalm 119:105, NKJV*).

Composed of 66 books, and written over 1,500 years on three continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe) by more than forty authors, the Bible is unique. There is no other book, sacred or religious, like it. And no wonder. After all, it is the Word of God.

There are more than 24,600 extant New Testament manuscripts from the first four centuries after Christ. Of Plato's original manuscripts, there are seven, Herodotus eight, and Homer's *Iliad* slightly more with 263 surviving copies. Hence, we have powerful confirming evidence of the integrity of the New Testament text.

The Bible was the first book known to be translated, the first book in the West published on the printing press, and the first book to be so widely distributed in so many languages that it can be read by 95 percent of the earth's population today.

The Bible also is unique in its content and message, which focuses on God's redemptive acts in history. That history is intertwined with prophecy, as it foretells the future of God's plans and His eternal kingdom. It is the *living* Word of God, because the same Spirit of God through which Scripture was inspired (*2 Tim. 3:16, 17*) is promised to believers today to guide us into all truth as we study the Word (*John 14:16, 17; John 15:26; John 16:13*).

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 4.

## The Living Word of God

The most important words spoken are often the last words a person utters. Moses, the writer of the first five foundational books of the Bible, sings a song to the people just before his death (*Deut. 31:30–32:43*).

**Read Deuteronomy 32:45–47. How does Moses describe the Word of God and its power in the lives of the Hebrews on the verge of entering the Promised Land?**

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Among the last words of Moses is a strong exhortation. By setting their hearts on the words that God has spoken to them through him, Moses wanted to stress to the people that their focus should remain on God and His will for their lives. By teaching these words to their children, each generation would pass on God’s covenant plan of salvation. Notice that they were not to pick and choose which words, but were to observe or obey “all the words of this law” (*Deut. 32:46*).

At the end of earth’s history, God will have a people who remain faithful to all of Scripture, which means keeping the commandments of God and having the faith of Jesus (*Rev. 14:12*). These people will remain faithful to the teaching of the Bible, for it not only ensures a richer life on earth but an eternal destiny in the home Jesus prepares for us (*John 14:1–3*).

**Read John 1:1–5, 14 and John 14:6. What do these texts teach us about Jesus and eternal life? How does the Word made flesh relate to the revelation and inspiration of Scripture?**

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Jesus is the focus and aim of all Scripture. His coming in the flesh as the Messiah was a fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. Because He lived, died, and lives again, we have not only the Scriptures confirmed but, even better, the great promise of eternal life in a whole new existence.

**Read again Deuteronomy 32:47. How have you experienced for yourself the truth about how obedience to God’s Word is “not a vain thing” for you? Why is faith in God and obedience to His Word never in vain?**

## Who Wrote the Bible, and Where?

The variety of authors, their locations, and their backgrounds provide a unique testimony that God works to communicate history and His message to people as culturally diverse as its intended audience.

**What** do the following texts tell us about the biblical writers and their backgrounds? (*Exod. 2:10, Amos 7:14, Jer. 1:1–6, Dan. 6:1–5, Matt. 9:9, Phil. 3:3–6, Rev. 1:9*).

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The Bible was written by people from many different kinds of backgrounds and in various circumstances. Some were writing from palaces, others from prisons, some in exile, and still others during their missionary journeys to share the gospel. These men had different education and occupations. Some, like Moses, were destined to be kings or, like Daniel, to serve in high positions. Others were simple shepherds. Some were very young and others quite old. Despite these differences, they all had one thing in common: they were called by God and inspired by the Holy Spirit to write messages for His people, no matter when or where they lived.

Also, some of the writers were eyewitnesses to the events they recounted. Others made careful personal investigation of events or careful use of existing documents (*Josh. 10:13, Luke 1:1–3*). But all parts of the Bible are inspired (*2 Tim. 3:16*). This is the reason why Paul states that “whatever was written . . . was written for our instruction, so that through . . . the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (*Rom. 15:4, NASB*). The God who created human language enables chosen people to communicate inspired thought in a trustworthy and reliable manner in human words.

“God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do His work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, none the less, from Heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 26.

**There were so many different writers, in so many different contexts, and yet the same God is revealed by them all. How does this amazing truth help confirm for us the veracity of God’s Word?**

## The Bible as Prophecy

The Bible is unique among other known religious works because up to 30 percent of its content comprises of prophecies and prophetic literature. The integration of prophecy and its fulfillment in time is central to the biblical worldview, for the God who acts in history also knows the future and has revealed it to His prophets (*Amos 3:7*). The Bible is not only the living Word, or the historical Word—it is the *prophetic* Word.

**How** do the following texts reveal the details of the coming Messiah?

*Gen. 49:8–12* \_\_\_\_\_

*Ps. 22:12–18* \_\_\_\_\_

*Isa. 53:3–7* \_\_\_\_\_

*Dan. 9:24–27* \_\_\_\_\_

*Mic. 5:2* \_\_\_\_\_

*Mal. 3:1* \_\_\_\_\_

*Zech. 9:9* \_\_\_\_\_

There are at least 65 direct, Messianic predictions in the Old Testament, many more if we add typology, as well (typology is the study of how Old Testament rituals, such as the sacrifices, were mini-prophecies of Jesus). These prophecies relate to such specific details as “the sceptre shall not depart from Judah” (*Gen. 49:10*); that He would be born in Bethlehem in Judah (*Mic. 5:2*); that He would be “despised and rejected of men”; beaten, falsely accused, yet not open His mouth to defend Himself (*Isa. 53:3–7*); that His hands and feet would be pierced; and that they would divide His clothes among them (*Ps. 22:12–18*).

The fact that these prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled with such precision in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus testifies to their divine inspiration and revelation. It also indicates that Jesus was who He claimed and others claimed Him to be. Jesus followed the prophets of old in predicting His death and resurrection (*Luke 9:21, 22; Matt. 17:22, 23*), the fall of Jerusalem (*Matt. 24:1, 2*), and His second coming (*John 14:1–3*). Thus, the Incarnation, death, and Resurrection are predicted by the Bible, and their fulfillment ensures its reliability.

**What are all the reasons you can think of for your belief in Jesus and His death for us? Share them in class on Sabbath and, in class, ask the question: Why is the evidence so compelling?**

## The Bible as History

The Bible is unique when compared to other “holy” books because it is constituted in history. This means that the Bible is not merely the philosophical thoughts of a human being (like Confucius or Buddha), but it records God’s acts in history as they progress toward a specific goal. In the case of the Bible, those goals are (1) the promise of a Messiah and (2) the second coming of Jesus. This progression is unique to the Judeo-Christian faith, in contrast to the cyclical view of many other world religions from ancient Egypt to modern Eastern religions.

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:3–5, 51–55; Romans 8:11; and 1 Thessalonians 4:14. What do these passages teach us about not only the historical truth of Christ’s resurrection but also what it means for us personally?**

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The testimony of the four Gospels and Paul is that Jesus died, was buried, bodily rose from the dead, and appeared to various human beings. This is corroborated by eyewitnesses who laid Him in the tomb and later saw it empty. Witnesses touched Jesus, and He ate with them. Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of Jesus), and other women saw Him as the resurrected Christ. The disciples spoke with Him on the road to Emmaus. Jesus appeared to them for the Great Commission. Paul writes that if the witness of Scripture is rejected, then our preaching and faith are in “vain” (*1 Cor. 15:14*). Other translations say “null and void” (*REB*) or “useless” (*NIV*). The disciples state, “ ‘It is true! The Lord has risen’ ” (*Luke 24:34, NIV*). The Greek term *ontos* refers to something that actually took place. It is translated, “really,” “surely,” or “indeed.” The disciples testify that “ ‘the Lord is risen indeed’ ” (*NKJV*).

Christ also is represented as the “firstfruits” (*1 Cor. 15:20*) of all those who died. The historical fact that Christ bodily rose from the dead and lives today is the guarantee that they, too, will be raised as He was raised. All the righteous “will be made alive in Christ” (*1 Cor. 15:22, NRSV*). The term here implies a future act of creation, when those “who belong to Christ,” or remain loyal to Him, will be raised “at His coming” (*1 Cor. 15:23, NKJV*) “at the last trumpet” (*1 Cor. 15:52, NKJV*).

**Why is the promise of the resurrection so central to our faith, especially since we understand that the dead are asleep? Without it, why is our faith indeed in “vain”?**

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## The Transforming Power of the Word

**Read** 2 Kings 22:3–20. What causes King Josiah to tear his clothes? How does his discovery change not only him but also the entire nation of Judah?

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In 621 B.C., when Josiah was about 25 years old, Hilkiah, the high priest, discovered “the book of the law,” which may have been the first five books of Moses or, specifically, the book of Deuteronomy. During the reign of his father Amon, and his most wicked grandfather Manasseh, this scroll had been lost in the midst of the worship of Baal, Asherah, and “all the host of heaven” (2 Kings 21:3–9). As Josiah hears the conditions of the covenant, he tears his clothes in utter distress, for he realizes how far he and his people have come from worshiping the true God. He immediately begins a reformation throughout the land, tearing down the high places and destroying images to foreign gods. When he is finished, there is only one place left to worship in Judah: the temple of God in Jerusalem. The discovery of the Word of God leads to conviction, repentance, and the power to change. This change begins with Josiah and eventually spreads to the rest of Judah.

**How** does the Bible assure us that it has the power to change our lives and show us the way to salvation? Read John 16:13, John 17:17, Hebrews 4:12, and Romans 12:2.

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One of the most powerful testimonies of the power of the Bible is the changed life of a person. It is the Word that cuts through human sin and depravity and reveals our true human nature and our need for a Savior.

Such a unique book as the Bible, constituted in history, imbued with prophecy, and with the power to transform the life, also must be interpreted in a unique way. It cannot be interpreted like any other book, for the *living* Word of God must be understood in the light of a *living* Christ who promised to send His Spirit to lead us “into all truth” (John 16:13). The Bible, then, as a revelation of God’s truth, must contain its own internal principles of interpretation. These principles can be found in studying how the writers of Scripture used Scripture and were guided by it as they allowed Scripture to interpret itself.

**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Scriptures a Safeguard,” pp. 593–602, in *The Great Controversy*; “Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,” pp. 662–680, in *The Desire of Ages*.

Many have died for upholding and remaining faithful to the Word of God. One such man was Dr. Rowland Taylor, an English Parish minister, who resisted the imposition of the Catholic mass during the reign of Bloody Mary in his Hadley, England parish. After being cast out of the church and derided for his adherence to Scripture, he appealed in person to the bishop of Winchester, the Lord Chancellor of England, but he had him cast into prison and eventually sent him to the stake. Just before his death in 1555, he spoke these words:

“ ‘Good people! I have taught you nothing but God’s holy Word, and those lessons that I have taken out of God’s blessed book, the holy Bible. I have come here this day to seal it with my blood.’ ”—John Foxe, *The New Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, rewritten and updated by Harold J. Chadwick (North Brunswick, N.J.: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1997), p. 193. Dr. Taylor was heard repeating Psalm 51 just before the fire was lit, and he gave up his life.

The question we need to ask ourselves now is: Would we remain as faithful to upholding the truths in God’s Word? Sooner or later, in the final conflict, that test will come. The time to prepare for it, of course, is now.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 In what way does prophecy confirm the Bible’s divine origin? How can these fulfilled prophecies affirm us in our faith?
- 2 In reference to the question at the end of Tuesday’s study, why is the evidence for Jesus as the Messiah so powerful?
- 3 Jesus and the apostles demonstrated unwavering faith in the trustworthiness and divine authority of Holy Scripture. For example, how many times did Jesus Himself refer to the Scriptures and the fact that (often in reference to Himself) the Scriptures must be “fulfilled”? (See, for instance, Matt. 26:54, 56; Mark 14:49; Luke 4:21; John 13:18; John 17:12.) Thus, if Jesus Himself took Scripture (in His case, the Old Testament) so seriously, especially in terms of prophecy being fulfilled, what then should our attitude be, as well, toward the Bible?

## A Grain of Prayer

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Yolanda Malla learned about the power of prayer from a rice field.

Malla found work, planting and cultivating rice, in a field in her native Philippines after her husband divorced her, leaving her with two baby boys. The landowner gave her permission to work in his rice field under the condition that she give half of the harvest to him. The field was located beside a field owned by a relative.

Malla worked hard and, when the crop started to grow, she saw that the harvest was likely to be first-class rice.

“Lord, I don’t want any disaster to destroy this rice,” she prayed. “I need it to feed my children.”

Two weeks later, a powerful storm struck the region. Malla listened as the wind and rain pounded against her home.

Suddenly she remembered the rice.

“I can’t do anything, Lord,” she said. “Please remember my prayer.”

Several days later, after the flooding subsided, she managed to leave her home and travel to the rice field to survey the damage.

To her surprise, her rice was brown and ripe. There was no sign that the fierce storm had ever happened.

Then Malla looked over at the surrounding fields. They were completely ruined. Even her relative’s crop was destroyed.

The field’s owner was amazed at harvesttime.

“This is the first time that this rice field has produced first-class rice,” he said, surprise ringing in his voice. “Rats ate the crop of the farmer who borrowed this field to grow rice last year.”

The rodents had eaten so much of the rice that the previous farmer was able to harvest the entire crop on his own. Malla, however, needed 17 people to help her harvest the rice.

Looking at the bountiful crop, Malla remembered her prayer on the night of the storm.

“A small prayer is a powerful prayer,” she said in an interview in

Cyprus, where she works as a domestic helper. “A small grain of prayer produced a million grains of rice. We couldn’t even count the rice.”




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*Read next week about how MALLA, pictured, became a Seventh-day Adventist in Cyprus and led two friends to Jesus. Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help construct a new church building and community center in Nicosia, Cyprus.*



**Key Texts:** *Deut. 32:45–47; Gen. 49:8–12; Isa. 53:3–7; 1 Cor. 15:3–5, 51–55; Rom. 12:2.*

## ***Part I: Overview***

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In a world of media overload, we are increasingly being bombarded by ideas that compete for our attention and promise the newest trends to guide our lives. It has become more difficult in this environment of overstimulation to find quiet time with the Word of God. Some may even begin to wonder whether the Bible is still relevant in today's fast-paced world. We need to be reminded of the injunction to "be still, and know that I am God" (*Ps. 46:10*) as a way to help us recognize that the Bible is still God's greatest gift to communicate His plan of Redemption. There is no other book like it anywhere in the world.

A number of important elements make the Bible unique when compared to other religious books. Four elements, in particular, stand out in stark contrast to the philosophical and esoteric thoughts of the likes of Confucius, the Quran, and the Hindu sacred writings: (1) the Bible comprises up to 30 percent prophecy and prophetic literature; (2) the Bible is constituted in history, that is, it speaks of a God who acts in history; (3) the Bible events are placed in a spatial dimension of real geographical places, and (4) the Bible has the power to transform lives because of the God who speaks to us through His living Word. Is it any wonder, then, that for centuries it has inspired the greatest works of music, art, and literature? This week we will study why the Bible is unique and unrivaled and remains so, even with the fast growth of technology and knowledge in the twenty-first century.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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### **Illustration**

The great pyramids of Egypt tower over the modern city of Cairo. Excavations have revealed that they were built during the Old Kingdom by a sophisticated technology and knowledge of building that assumed mathematics and astronomy that was not thought to have existed before the Greeks. Until the Eiffel Tower was completed in Paris in 1889, the Great Pyramid was the tallest building ever built. Today, archaeologists still grapple with the logistics and enormity of this accomplishment. Moses arrived in ancient Egypt hundreds of years after the Great Pyramid was

erected and was educated to be the future king of this greatest of empires. Yet, “by faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter” (*Heb. 11:24, NKJV*).

### Scripture

The last words of Moses to the people he led to the Promised Land were these: “ ‘Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law’ ” (*Deut. 32:46, NKJV*). *Setting to heart* is an expression used in the Bible to describe the internalization and *depositing* of God’s Word within the heart. Moses emphasizes this idea when he instructs that children especially should be commanded to follow the instructions or law of God. This law is more important than anything, for “it is your life” (*Deut. 32:47*).

Discuss with your class how they deal with the distractions all around them and maintain a living relationship with Christ through His Word. Ask the class to assess how much time they spend on certain activities every day (answering emails, texting, social media, television, work, family, devotions). Observe that those activities that we spend most of our time on are often those that are most important in our lives. What intentional steps are your class members taking to pass on their Christian experience to their children? Why is this living legacy so important in the time in which we live?

### Scripture

The Bible is filled with places wherein God revealed Himself. Among some of the more memorable spots are Mount Moriah when Abraham was about to slay Isaac (*Gen. 22:2*), the burning bush on Mount Horeb in Sinai (*Exod. 3:1–4*), the Red Sea through which Israel escaped on dry land (*Exod. 14:1–30*), and Capernaum where so many of the healing miracles of Jesus occurred. This pattern of incorporating a spatial dimension into the events described actually sets the Bible apart from most other holy writings (the entire Quran, for example, contains fewer geographical designations than those found in Genesis 1–20 alone). The Bible contains references to hundreds of cities and lands, including references to specific mountains, bodies of water, deserts and wildernesses, regions, and states. There are times when the geography is a crucial element that gives added meaning and dimension to an event.

Bethlehem is one example of how the Bible’s geography is important to our understanding of biblical history. In Hebrew, Bethlehem means “the house of bread.” It was in Bethlehem that Ruth and Boaz met and were married. There, they had a son named Obed, who had a son

named Jesse. Jesse became the father of David, who would later establish a dynasty of kings that would rule in Jerusalem for hundreds of years until the destruction of the temple (*Ruth 4:13–17; Matt. 1:5, 6*). When Samuel came to anoint a new king, he came to Bethlehem where God directed him to anoint David. Then, 700 years before the birth of Jesus, Micah 5:2 predicts that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem, which is in Judea. So, it should not surprise us that God sends Jesus, “the bread of life” (*John 6:33–51*) to be born in Bethlehem, the house of bread. Born of the Holy Spirit to Mary, Jesus brings the fullness of the gospel to the world over which He will one day reign as King of kings forever.

Ask the class what other significant insights can be gained from understanding the geography and place names of surrounding historical events in the Bible. For example, what was the relationship between Abraham’s encounter with God on Mount Moriah and Christ’s death in the same vicinity nearly two thousand years later?

### **Illustration**

Jose grew up in the inner city of Detroit, Michigan. At the age of 11, he already was getting involved in a local gang. He walked the walk and talked the talk. His parents were worried about where he was heading. One day they received an advertisement for a vegetarian cooking school. Jose’s father was a cook in a local restaurant and began to attend with his wife. In one of the meetings, a Vacation Bible School was announced, and Jose and his sisters began to attend. Jose had never heard much about the Bible. He was very intrigued by the story of Joshua and his conquest of Canaan under God’s leadership. He learned that God was a powerful God and could overcome the enemies of His people. Jose wanted to know more and began to read the Bible. Soon he was enrolled in the local Pathfinder club. His parents noticed major changes. Jose’s language changed. His clothing changed. Even the way he walked changed. Six months later, Jose requested baptism. His family was amazed at the change in Jose’s life. They wanted what Jose was experiencing. After studying the Bible together with the pastor, the whole family was baptized on a Sabbath morning. The power of God’s Word had transformed their lives.

### **Scripture**

Josiah was eight years old when he became king of Judah. The Bible says that his grandfather Manasseh served the Canaanite gods, engaging in spiritualism and its associated sexual perversions, along with

astrology. Manasseh even sacrificed his own son. He led his people into terrible apostasy, for he “seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the children of Israel” (*2 Kings 21:9*). From Josiah’s genes and upbringing, we might expect that Judah would be doomed to the same fate as when under King Manasseh, but instead, the Bible says that Josiah “did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left” (*2 Kings 22:2*). What made the difference?—the discovery and reading of God’s Word, Josiah’s deep repentance, and his actions to restore all of Israel to the right worship of God. Excavations in Judah covering this time period have revealed a temple at Arad with two altars and standing stones in the Most Holy Place that represented more than one deity. This temple was destroyed at the end of the seventh century, which many scholars have attributed to the work of Josiah. Because of this great reformation, God spared Judah and Jerusalem for a time and withheld His judgment until some 35 years later. God promised, “Thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place” (*2 Kings 22:20*). After reading *2 Kings 21:2–9*, ask the class how this description of Judah compares with the challenges of evil in this world today. How can Scripture transform our lives so that we, too, can overcome?

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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The Bible is God’s inspired Word for all time. It is not limited to either the time or cultures in which it was written. Thus, it still has power to transform lives today. As you prepare for this lesson in your specific culture, reflect on the impact of the Bible in your part of the world today. Ask the class to share an experience in which they have been transformed by God’s Word and have recognized its life-changing power in their lives. Here are some other questions that elaborate more specifically on these themes.

- 1. How do the prophecies of Scripture provide us with hope for the future, even in the context of last-day events? In what ways do these prophecies give us assurances of the promises of God and His ability to see His plan through to the end?**

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2. Share an experience from your life or a friend's that testifies to the power of God's Word to change the life of a person. In what ways did these changes take place, and how did others see the Holy Spirit's power in action?

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3. In what ways can you be the continuing witness of God's power to transform your family, your neighborhood, or your town or city today? How can you share the Word of God in an effective way to cause change and prepare others to meet Jesus when He comes? Remember that we are His hands and feet, and what we communicate in actions and words will reflect on how others perceive God.

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*Notes*

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