

Concluding Revelations and Exhortations

by John F. Walvoord

The sermon explores the final revelations in Revelation, emphasizing the eternal blessings and responsibilities of believers in the new Jerusalem.

Scripture: Revelation 22:1-4, Revelation 22:6, Revelation 22:8, Revelation 22:10, Revelation 22:12-13, Revelation 22:17-18, Revelation 22:21

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Holy Kingdom"

Description

John F. Walvoord preaches on the final chapters of Revelation, focusing on the glorious vision of the new Jerusalem and the eternal state. The pure river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God symbolizes eternal life and the outflow of the Spirit for believers. The tree of life in the midst of the city signifies eternal sustenance and healing, reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. The absence of curse in the new Jerusalem highlights the complete holiness and blessedness of the eternal kingdom. The blessedness of fellowship with God, the promise of reigning forever, and the urgency of Christ's imminent return are emphasized, urging believers to heed the prophecies and live in righteousness.

Transcript

The River of the Water of Life (22:1)

22:1 And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

As Alford notes, "The whole of the things described in the remaining portion of the book are subsequent to the general judgment, and descriptive of the consummation of the triumph and bliss of Christ's people with Him in the eternal kingdom of God."³⁶¹ As a provision for the saints and in keeping with the complete holiness and purity of the heavenly city, John sees a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. This is not to be confused with the river issuing from the millennial sanctuary (Ezek. 47:1, 12) nor with that of the living waters going forth from Jerusalem (Zech. 14:8) also in the millennial scene. These millennial streams anticipate, however, this future river which is in the new Jerusalem, which speaks of the power, purity, and eternal life manifest in the heavenly city. This river corresponds to the present believer's experience of the outflow of the Spirit and eternal life. The throne is indicated as that of both God and the Lamb; this confirms that Christ is still on the throne in the eternal state, though the throne has a different character than during His mediatorial rule over the earth.

The Tree of Life (22:2)

22:2 In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Verse 2, because of its somewhat obscure presentation, has caused some difficulty to expositors. The verse declares that the tree of life is in the midst of the street and at the same time on either side of the river. The street mentioned is clearly the street of the city, as "it" is feminine (Gr., aute,,s), referring back to the city in 21:23. The visual picture presented is that the river of life flows down through the middle of the city, and the tree is large enough to span the river, so that the river is in the midst of the street, and the tree is on both sides of the river. It would appear that the pure river of the water of life is not a broad body but a clear stream sufficiently narrow to allow for this arrangement. Swete offers a possible solution to the problem of this description by saying, "The picture presented is that of a river flowing through the broad street which intersects the city, a row of trees being on either side."³⁶² Swete interprets the word tree as a collective reference and finds a parallel situation in Ezekiel 47:12.³⁶³

The tree of life seems to have reference to a similar tree in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:22, 24). Its character is revealed in Genesis 3:22 as being such that if Adam and Eve had eaten of the tree of life, physical death would have been an impossibility. The tree in the new Jerusalem seems to have a similar quality and a similar intent, and though it is difficult to determine where the literal and the symbolic should be distinguished, the tree is represented as bearing fruit every month which apparently can be eaten, though the text does not say so, and also to provide leaves described as "for the healing of the nations." Those who believe that this is a millennial scene rather than the eternal state put much weight upon this statement as they ask the natural question, "Why should healing be necessary in eternity to come?"

The word for "healing" is therapeian, from which the English word therapeutic is derived, almost directly transliterated from the Greek. Rather than specifically meaning "healing," it should be understood as "health-giving," as the word in its root meaning has the idea of serving or ministering. In other words, the leaves of the tree promote the enjoyment of life in the new Jerusalem, and are not for correcting ills which do not exist. This, of course, is confirmed by the fact that there is no more curse as indicated in verse 3.

Erich Sauer interprets the healing of the nations as referring to full deliverance from the ills of life which characterized their state before eternity began and not to illness still present. He holds, however, that this should not be pressed to the point of universalism, that is, that all will be saved. He cites Duesterdieck:

"The expression is just as little to be pressed to mean that a then still present sickness of the nations is supposed, as we are permitted to draw the inference from Rev. 21:4 that the tears which God will wipe away from the blessed are signs of then still present pain. It much rather means that just as the tears which they had shed on account of earthly suffering will be wiped away in the eternal life, so the healing leaves of the tree of life serve for the healing of the sickness from which the nations had suffered during their earthly life, but shall never suffer again in the new earth."³⁶⁴

The word nations is to be translated "Gentiles" as in 21:24 and 21:26, or possibly "peoples," more general. The intimation of this passage is that while it is not necessary for believers in the eternal state to sustain life in any way by physical means, they can enjoy that which the tree provides.

The Throne of God (22:3)

22:3 And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it and his servants shall serve him:

To emphasize the blessedness of the new situation, verse 3 states that there is no more curse. In the millennial scene, there is a lifting of the curse upon the earth, but not a total deliverance from the world's travail brought in by sin, for in the millennium, it is still possible for a "sinner" to be "accursed" (Isa. 65:20) with resulting physical death. In the new heaven and the new earth, there will be no curse at all and no possibility or need of such divine punishment. This broad statement is justified by the fact that the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in the new Jerusalem, and His servants will give themselves to serve Him unceasingly. To argue as Smith does that the saints will not be servants but sons in eternity is ignoring the natural explanation that they will be both.³⁶⁵ What greater privilege can saints have in the eternal state than being servants of the Lord? Who would want to be perpetuated in eternal idleness and uselessness? Even if the new Jerusalem were viewed here in its millennial state, those who are in the new Jerusalem are either resurrected or translated saints; and if it is fitting for them to be servants in such a situation in time, it is also fitting that they can be servants in eternity. This is a picture of blessedness in service rather than of arduous toil.

The Blessedness of Fellowship (22:4-5)

22:4-5 And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

The blessedness of the servants' state is further declared in verse 4 in the fact that "they shall see his face." Immediate access to the glory of God will characterize the saints in the eternal state. Further, His name is declared to be in their foreheads indicating that they belong to Him (cf. 7:3; 14:1; also 2:17; 3:12). The fact that they shall see His face demonstrates beyond question that these are glorified saints (1 John 3:2).

Once again in verse 5, John repeats the fact that there will be no night there and no need of a candle, that is, a lamp, nor the light of the sun, for God is the light of the city. Those who are His servants have the blessed privilege of reigning forever. The eternal character of the reign of these who are described as servants is another indication that this is the eternal state. The concept that the reign of Christ must cease at the millennium, based on 1 Corinthians 15:24-25, is a misunderstanding. It is the character of His reign that changes. Christ continues for all eternity as King of kings and Lord of lords even though the scene of His mediatorial and millennial rule over the earth is changed to the new heaven and the new earth. There is no contradiction, therefore, in calling these saints servants and at the same time recognizing them as those who will reign with Christ.

The Certainty of the Blessed Hope (22:6-7)

22:6-7 And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.

In reinforcement of the wonderful revelation given, the angel now states to John, "These sayings are faithful and true." The comment of A. T. Pierson as cited with variations by Smith, in summary of the wonderful blessing of verses 3-5, brings out clearly the marvelous and comprehensive character of the

gracious divine provision of the saints:

And there shall be no more curse--perfect restoration. But the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it--perfect administration. His servants shall serve him--perfect subordination. And they shall see his face--perfect transformation. And his name shall be in their foreheads--perfect identification. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord giveth them light--perfect illumination. And they shall reign forever and ever--perfect exultation.³⁶⁶

Wilbur M. Smith summarizes the state of blessedness in the holy city in these words:

All the glorious purposes of God, ordained from the foundation of the world, have now been attained. The rebellion of angels and mankind is all and finally subdued, as the King of kings assumes his rightful sovereignty. Absolute and unchangeable holiness characterizes all within the universal Kingdom of God. The redeemed, made so by the blood of the Lamb, are in resurrection and eternal glory. Life is everywhere--and death will never intrude again. The earth and the heavens both are renewed. Light, beauty, holiness, joy, the presence of God, the worship of God, service to Christ, likeness to Christ--all are now abiding realities. The vocabulary of man, made for life here, is incapable of truly and adequately depicting what God has prepared for those that love him.³⁶⁷

The angel goes on to remind John, in words similar to Revelation 1:1, that the God of the holy prophets has sent His angel to show His servants through the Apostle John the events which will shortly occur. The descriptive phrase "shortly be done" literally translated is "what it is necessary to do quickly." Here the noun is used. In verse 7, the adverb of the same root is translated "quickly." The thought seems to be that when the action comes, it will be sudden. Also it is to be regarded as impending as if it is meant to be fulfilled at any time. In either case, it constitutes a message of warning that those who believe should be alert. From the standpoint of the age-long divine program, the events of the age were impending even at the time John wrote this message though some of them were thousands of years future.

In verse 7 the wonderful hope of the coming of Christ, especially as it relates to the believer in the present age, is stated: "Behold, I come quickly." Here John seems to be referring to Christ's coming for the church rather than His second coming to the earth, though both are in the larger context. The blessing of God is especially pronounced on the one who keeps the sayings of the prophecies of this book, a special promise repeated from Revelation 1:3, where also the note of imminency is emphasized in the expression "for the time is at hand." This verse contains the sixth of the seven beatitudes found in the book of Revelation. How ironical it is that this final book of the Bible, more neglected and misinterpreted than any other book, should carry these special notes of promised blessing to those who properly regard its promises and divine revelation. Basically, the reason is not that this book contains more or varied revelations but rather that this book above all others honors and exalts the Lord Jesus Christ.

John Worships Before the Angel (22:8-9)

22:8-9 And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.

The tremendous impression given to John by these transcending revelations finally overwhelms him, and he records, "And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to

worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things." John's response is natural, but he is rebuked by the angel who informs him, as he did on previous occasions, that he is John's fellow servant who should be classified with the prophets, John's brethren, and with others who keep the sayings of the book (cf. 19:10). It should be noted here as in 19:10 that the one speaking, though an angel, is declared to be a fellow servant and related to human servants of the Lord. The angel's command is direct and to the point: "Worship God" (aorist imperative); in all acts of worship, worship God only.

Command to Proclaim the Prophecy (22:10-11)

22:10-11 And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

Since there is blessing for the one who keeps the sayings of the prophecies given (22:7), John is commanded not to seal the sayings of the prophecies but rather to proclaim them. The justification for this urgent command is that the time is at hand. The word for "seal" (Gr., sphragise,,s) is in the aorist subjunctive with me,, the negative, meaning "do not seal" or "do not begin to seal" the prophecy. As the prophecy of the book of Revelation was unfolded, it was intended to be revealed; now at its end John is especially commanded not to seal the sayings of the prophecy because the time (Gr., kairos), or proper season, is at hand (Gr., eggys), or near. The time period in which the tremendous consummation of the ages is to take place, according to John's instruction, is near. The indeterminate period assigned to the church is the last dispensation before end-time events and, in John's day as in ours, the end is always impending because of the imminent return of Christ at the rapture with the ordered sequence of events to follow.

In view of this, in verse 11a seemingly strange command is given which has proved to be an enigma to some, namely, that John states, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still." In effect, he advocates status quo for both the wicked and the righteous. By this he does not mean that men should remain unmoved by the prophecies of this book, but rather that if the prophecies are rejected, there is no other message that will work. If the warnings of the book are not sufficient, there is no more that God has to say. The wicked must continue in their wicked way and be judged by the Lord when He comes. The same rule, however, applies to the righteous. Their reaction to the prophecy, of course, will be different, but the exhortation in their case is to continue in righteousness and holiness. It is an either/or proposition with no neutrality possible. There is a sense also in which present choices fix character; a time is coming when change will be impossible. Present choices will become permanent in character.

The Blessed Hope and Assurance of Reward (22:12)

22:12 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

The second announcement alerting the reader concerning the coming of the Lord is found in verse 12 (cf. 22:7) again introduced by the word behold and the same expression, "I come quickly," with the verb in the present tense connoting futuristic but impending action. Added here, but not in verse 7, is the promise that the Lord is bringing His reward when He comes, that is, that believers will be rewarded at that time. This verse has in view the judgment seat of Christ as it relates to the Christian (2 Cor. 5:10-11). The same standard is established for reward here as in 2 Corinthians 5:11, namely, that of works. It is noteworthy, however, that all final judgments relate to works whether they are in connection with Christians who are

being rewarded or unsaved who are being punished. God, the righteous judge, will deal with all men's works in the proper time and order.

The Majesty of the Eternal Christ (22:13-16)

22:13-16 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

Though the means of communication seems to be the angel, it is Christ who is speaking, and here as in 22:7 and 12, the first person pronoun is used. Christ again repeats that He is the Alpha and Omega (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet) which is interpreted as meaning the beginning and the end, the first and the last. For various combinations of these phrases, see 1:8, 11, 17; 2:8; 21:6. When the One who exists from all eternity states, "Behold, I come quickly," it means that from the divine point of view, end-time events are impending. The three pairs of titles given in verse 13 all connote the same truth, that Christ is the beginning and source of all things as well as the goal and consummation of all, in a word, the eternal God.

Here is the seventh and last beatitude of the book of Revelation. (For previous beatitudes cf. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7.) The final beatitude is obscured by a debate on text, some of the best manuscripts differing from the Authorized Version which has the phrase "that do his commandments" in place of "that wash their robes." Good authorities can be cited for both readings. Walter Scott much prefers the reading for verse 14 "Blessed are they that wash their robes," rather than "Blessed are they that do his commandments." Scott observes, "Every critical scholar of note rejects the reading in our English Bibles. Obedience to commandments is not the ground on which eternal life is bestowed. It is God's gift to all who believe (John 5:24)."368

In either reading, the reference is to those who qualify for entrance, and the resultant meaning is much the same. In one case, attention is being directed to the keeping of the commandments, which is characteristic of believers, and in the other case to their cleansing by the blood of Christ with its emphasis upon the grace of God. On the basis of both facts, believers have access to the tree of life and the right to enter through the gates of the city. J. B. Smith, because of his assumption that only the church has the right to enter the city, argues against the revised reading on the ground that it would put tribulation saints in the city.³⁶⁹ This is hardly sufficient, however, to determine the textual reading, and scholars will continue to differ. The right to the tree of life and the right to enter through the gates of the city are one and the same as the right to eternal salvation.

By contrast, unbelievers are characterized as being excluded and are described as "dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." This is the third description of unsaved people in this general passage (cf. 21:8, 27). The main emphasis in each of them is on the deceitfulness and lying of those who are unsaved. The reference to dogs refers not to the animal but to men of low character (cf. Phil. 3:2). As in the former description of the unsaved, the issue is not that they have at some time committed sins of this character but rather that these are the settled characteristics of their lives from which they were never delivered although the grace of God made possible that deliverance.

In verse sixteen the unusual term "I Jesus" is used to indicate that the Lord Jesus Christ had sent His angel to testify the truth of this book to John and to deliver the book to the churches. Seiss comments on the phrase "I Jesus":

Thus the very God of all inspiration, and of all inspired men, reiterates and affirms the highest authority for all that is herein written. Either, then, this Book is nothing but a base and blasphemous forgery, unworthy of the slightest respect of men, and specially unworthy of a place in the Sacred Canon; or it is one of the most directly inspired and authoritative writings ever given.³⁷⁰

Additional titles ascribed to Christ are "the root and offspring of David" (cf. Isa. 11:1) and "the bright and morning star" (cf. Num. 24:17; Rev. 2:28). Christ, as the morning star, heralds the coming day in His role of the One who comes for the church in the rapture. It is, of course, also true that His coming precedes the millennial kingdom. The reference to the churches of Asia is also significant. Wilbur Smith points out, "This is the first time the word church (ekkle,sia) has occurred since the letters to the seven churches."³⁷¹

Seiss observes how similar the conclusion of the book is to the beginning:

Its derivation from God, the signifying of it by the angel, the seeing, hearing, and writing of it by John, the blessing upon those who give due attention to it, the nearness of the time for fulfillment of what is described, the solemn authentication from Christ, the titles by which he describes himself, and even the personal expressions of John, recur in the Epilogue, almost the same as in the Prologue.³⁷²

The Invitation of the Spirit and the Bride (22:17)

22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

As the book of Revelation comes toward its close, a special invitation is given by the Spirit and the bride. This refers to the Holy Spirit and the church. John is now reverting to the relevance and practical meaning of his prophecy for the age of which he is a part. In the light of the prophetic word, the invitation to all is given: "Come." The threefold invitation is then enforced, addressed first to the one that hears, then to the one who is thirsty, then to anyone who will. For all willing to accept the invitation, there is a proffer of the water of life without cost. A similar invitation is extended in Isaiah 55:1. The invitation to come is an urgent command, for the day will arrive when it is too late to come. Now is the day of grace. The hour of judgment is impending.

The Final Testimony of Christ (22:18-20)

22:18-20 For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

The urgency of the final command is supported by the solemn testimony of Christ Himself in verse 18 concerning the sacred character of the prophecy which has been given. Warning is extended that if any man add to these things, God will inflict upon him the plagues written in the book, and if any man take away from the prophecy of the book, God will take away his part out of the book of life and from the things written in the book including the holy city. Though frequently in the Bible there are other warnings against

tampering with the Word of God, this is among the most solemn (cf. Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 1:3). No one can dare add to the Word of God except in blatant unbelief and denial that the Word is indeed God's own message to man. Likewise, no one should dare take away from the words of the Book, since to do so is to do despite to the inspired Word of God. What a solemn warning this is to critics who have tampered with this book and other portions of Scripture in arrogant self-confidence that they are equipped intellectually and spiritually to determine what is true and what is not true in the Word of God. Though not stated in detail, the point of these two verses is that a child of God who reveres Him will recognize at once that this is the Word of God.

To use these verses, however, as a proof that a child of God once saved and born into the family of God can lose his salvation is, of course, applying this passage out of context. This passage assumes that a child of God will not tamper with these scriptures. It is the contrast of unbelief with faith, the blinded, fallen intellect of man in contrast to the enlightened Spirit-taught believer. Although the true child of God may not comprehend the meaning of the entire book of Revelation, he will recognize in it a declaration of his hope and that which has been assured to him in grace by his salvation in Christ.

The final testimony of the book is yet another repetition of the promise of Christ's soon return: "Surely I come quickly." In contrast to the other announcement in this chapter (vv. 7, 12) this announcement adds the word surely (Gr., *nai*) a particle used to enforce an affirmation. It is followed by the word amen (Gr., *amen*) often translated "verily." The announcement "I come quickly" is therefore buttressed before and after by words used to emphasize the certainty of it. With the word amen, however, John begins his own prayer of response to this announcement: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Though the book of Revelation concerns itself with a broad expanse of divine dealing with men including the time of tribulation, the millennium, and the eternal state, for John the important event is the coming of the Lord for him at the rapture of the church. For this his heart longs, not only because he is on the bleak Island of Patmos in suffering and exile but because of the glorious prospect which his eyes have beheld and his ears have heard.

Seiss pictures the church as a young lady waiting for her lover to return:

Fiction has painted the picture of a maiden whose lover left her for a voyage to the Holy Land, promising on his return to make her his beloved bride. Many told her that she would never see him again. But she believed his word, and evening by evening she went down to the lonely shore, and kindled there a beacon-light in sight of the roaring waves, to hail and welcome the returning ship which was to bring again her betrothed. And by that watchfire she took her stand each night, praying to the winds to hasten on the sluggish sails, that he who was everything to her might come. Even so that blessed Lord, who has loved us unto death, has gone away to the mysterious Holy Land of heaven, promising on his return to make us his happy and eternal Bride. Some say that he has gone forever, and that here we shall never see him more. But his last word was, "Yea, I come quickly." And on the dark and misty beach sloping out into the eternal sea, each true believer stands by the love-lit fire, looking, and waiting, and praying and hoping for the fulfillment of his work, in nothing gladder than in his pledge and promise, and calling ever from the soul of sacred love, "EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS." And some of these nights, while the world is busy with its gay frivolities, and laughing at the maiden on the shore, a form shall rise over the surging waves, as once on Galilee, to vindicate forever all this watching and devotion, and bring to the faithful and constant heart a joy, and glory, and triumph which nevermore shall end.³⁷³

Benediction (22:21)

22:21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

As John closes this remarkable book of which he is the human author, he uses the phrase so familiar in Paul's epistles, a benediction that the grace of the Lord will be upon his readers. The expression "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all" is probably rendered more accurately, according to the best manuscripts, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints." Nothing is clearer in the book of Revelation than that God's blessing is on the saints but not on the wicked. Some manuscripts also omit the "Amen."

This final book of the Scriptures which began with the revelation of Jesus Christ ends with a prayer that His grace might be with those who have witnessed the scene through John's pen. Probably no book in the Bible presents in more stark contrast the grace of God as seen in the lives and destinies of the saints as compared to the righteous judgment of God on the wicked. In no other book are the issues made more specific. The book of Revelation is the presentation in the Word of God of what the saints will witness and experience in the glorious consummation of the ages. With John we can pray, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

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361 Henry Alford, *The Greek New Testament*, IV, 736.

362 Henry B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 299.

363 *Ibid.*

364 *The Triumph of the Crucified*, p. 199, quoting Friedrich Duesterdieck.

365 J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 295.

366 *Ibid.*, pp. 295-96.

367 "Revelation," *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1524.

368 Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 446.

369 J. B. Smith, p. 303.

370 Joesph A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, p. 513.

371 W. Smith, p. 1525.

372 Seiss, p. 521.

373 *Ibid.*, pp. 528-29.

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