

The Great Arraignment of the Jewish Nation

by Steve Gallagher

Steve Gallagher's sermon discusses God's indictment of the Jewish nation and emphasizes the need for genuine repentance and understanding of God.

Duration: 43:59

Scripture: Isaiah 1:2, Isaiah 1:18, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Jewish Nation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses Isaiah chapter 1 and focuses on the theme of the great arraignment of the Jewish nation. The sermon begins by explaining that the chapter serves as a trial of the Jewish people, showing them the consequences of their actions and offering them a chance to repent. The preacher highlights verses 2 and 4, which depict God's love for his people and their rebellion against him. The sermon suggests that this message was likely given later in Isaiah's ministry and provides reasons for this belief.

Transcript

The following message is provided by Eternal Weight of Glory. For other sermons, teachings, and articles, please visit EternalWeight.com. All right, we're going to take a look at the first chapter of Isaiah this morning. And I'll just mention that this will be, you know, a message a little more on the teaching side than some of the others will be.

The Great Arraignment of the Jewish Nation is the title I'm giving this talk. And it really is what goes on here. And I'll basically be covering verses 1 through 4 and 10 through 20.

And I'll make allusion to the other verses just to kind of keep you in the loop on what's being expressed. All right, now we know that chapters 2 through 6 occurred during Uzziah and Jotham's co-regency. Or at least that seems fairly certain.

But when was this message given? There are some people who believe that it was the first message Isaiah ever gave. That he, you know, this was his opening message as it were. And then he went into the next message, which basically covered chapters 2 through 5 and so on.

But I think that most commentators, and I certainly believe this, think that this was actually a message that was given much later. And there's a few reasons why I believe that. And I'll give you the reasons why I

think that's the case.

First of all, you'll notice in verse 1 that four kings are listed. That tells me a couple of things. For one thing, I'm almost positive that he continued his ministry on into the reign of Manasseh.

And Manasseh is not listed, but these four are. So that tells me that he gave this message during Hezekiah's reign. You see what I'm saying? Because that's where he was, you know, working his way through his life when he gave this message.

And the thought is that he had given all the messages in the first section of the book, chapters 2 through 39. He had given all these different words and prophecies and so on. And then he comes back and he gives this message, which is kind of a summation of all of them.

It's kind of like wrapping together all the different words that he had given. And then he gives this message, or maybe he just wrote it out as possible. I don't know.

But he gives this word and uses it as a preface to all his other prophecies. And there's one other thing I'll mention about that as well. It's my opinion that when he got through the first 39 chapters, that he thought that was the end of it.

And he compiled the book and laid it all aside and all that and kind of went into retirement when Manasseh came into power. So that would kind of fit in with this whole theory as well. But anyway, so that's one reason is because these four kings are listed in verse 1. I mean, it is possible that he gave the message now and later came back and listed those kings in verse 1. That's possible.

But I don't know. It just seems to make sense that he gave this later. Also, chapters 2 through 5, as I just mentioned, is one flowing prophecy.

Chapter 1 is a standalone. Chapter 6 is a standalone. 2 through 5 is a long prophecy.

So it certainly wouldn't have been a problem for this chapter to have been added in later. Also, another what we would call internal evidence would be verses 5 through 9 talk of the devastation of the country. And that certainly did not happen during Uzziah's reign.

Remember, Uzziah was the king that had caused Judah to really prosper and grow in strength and grow in fame. And no one was messing with Judah when Uzziah was king. It had been some 40 years since his father, way back when, the country had last been devastated.

So it doesn't seem like that that would be the case. But yet, when Ahaz was king, the country was devastated and actually even Hezekiah. Because when Sennacherib's armies came through Judah, they pillaged the whole country and arrived at Jerusalem was their last place.

So it very much could have happened after all of those events occurred at the latter end of Hezekiah's reign or even at the very beginning. It's possible, I thought of this, that it is possible that when Hezekiah was ushering in his great reformation, that this message was part of that reformation. And that would make sense as well.

So anyway, it's my guess that this happened sometime during Hezekiah's reign. And those are the reasons why. So, let's look here at a couple of verses.

The vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Okay, so it's limited in scope. Which he saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth, for the Lord speaks. Now, I want to stop there for a second because that is big. That is language that is, it's not new.

It's happened before. In fact, let me just give you some references. Psalm 50, verses 4 and 6. The psalmist said this, And now, I don't know when this psalm was written.

It could have been written at this very time. I don't know. But it doesn't matter.

It's still a thought that comes forth in Scripture. Micah was a minor prophet who prophesied at the same time Isaiah was prophesying. Remember, Isaiah was with the upper class.

He was the prophet who would go in and confront the king. Who was in power at the time. He was ministering from that kind of a realm.

Well, Micah was a minor prophet. And he was out with the normal, average people. The poor people and so on.

But they were prophesying at the same time. And this is what he said. Micah 6, verses 1 and 2. So, you know, that same thought coming forth around the same time period for sure.

And then later, Jeremiah said in chapter 2. He said, And, you know, he goes on to give a message there. But it's the same kind of a feeling. So this is where people first get the idea of this being a great trial of the Jewish people being presented here in the first chapter.

And I think also it's a glimpse into the future. That the Lord is basically saying, Look, you know, He's putting them on trial. But He's showing that there's still time to repent.

There's still time to turn it around. It doesn't have to end up being this way. But one day, if you don't repent and change your ways and do what you're supposed to do, this is what you're going to be facing in the great white throne judgment.

This is what you will face in the hereafter. And then there will be no getting out of it. You know, so to me, it's an act of mercy on God's part that He's giving them a glimpse of what they can expect.

And, you know, it's always God's heart to see people repent. All right, so if this is a trial being laid out here before us, then God is operating not only as the district attorney or the prosecuting attorney, however you want to call Him. He's being represented as that, as the district attorney, and He's also the judge.

So He's both in this case. The jury is heaven and earth. They're the ones that are sitting back watching all this unfold, and they're kind of like the assessors of everything that God is saying.

Isaiah is a witness that is brought forth by the district attorney to present what he has seen and witnessed and so on to give his testimony. And obviously the defendants are the people of Judah. You know, the high, the low, the rich, the poor, the powerful, the weak, all the people of Judah are being brought forth in this trial.

And the defendants, the Jewish people, they never say anything in here. It's unspoken, but it's there. It's inferred that their plea is innocence.

Their plea is, listen, we have been faithful to bring our sacrifices to the temple. We have been faithful to do everything that God has asked us to do. Well, and we'll see here in a few minutes that God just decimates their argument because their argument is all based on outward activity.

It's not based in reality. They weren't doing it from their heart and so on. And we'll get to that in a few minutes.

And the conclusion of the trial really comes at verse 18. One translator said it this way. The NAS says, Come now and let us reason together, says the Lord.

And this man says, Come now, let us bring our reasoning to a close. And it's like the final arguments in a trial. And it's that sort of a thing that you get the sense there.

And then the Lord goes on to not only offer a full pardon if they'll repent and so on, but He also goes on to say some other hopeful things. So that's kind of a layout of the chapter on the whole, kind of what's going on here in chapter 1. Let's get back to verse 2. Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth, for the Lord speaks. Sons I have reared and brought up, but they have revolted against Me.

Now this is a reference to God's great love for His people. In fact, Alexander McLaren said this. He said, It might rather be called a father's lament than an indictment.

The forsaken father is, as it were, sadly brooding over his erring child's sins, which are his father's sorrows and his own miseries. And so you get the sense there of the prodigal son and the father who's looking for him to return and come back and so on. And there is always that case with the Lord.

Whenever God is dealing with His people, no matter how strong, how harsh, whatever it may be, He's always hoping for repentance. He's always looking for that erring son to amend his ways and to get his life right. And how many times, you know, years ago when I was much more involved in the live-in program here, and we would bring some guy in.

He's been nothing but trouble. He's not doing the things he's supposed to do, and he's just causing problems with the other men and so on. And we'd bring him into my office, and basically I would tell him, Listen, it's not working out for you to be here.

You're going to have to leave. And I've done that a number of times in those early days, but in my heart was always the hope, Come on, man. You know, and obviously I'm not going to tell him this because I'm not looking for a performance, but in my heart it was like, Please repent.

Please tell me, No, please, Pastor Steve, don't send me out of here. This is my only hope, you know. That was always in my heart.

It was that way with Jeff, and it's that way with Brad now, that when they have to dismiss a man, and they are hoping that the guy will just basically, at least in his heart, fall on his knees and plead for mercy. That's what we want to see because that's our heart. That's what this ministry is all about is to see people who have gone astray to get their hearts right with God.

And I believe that's the Lord's heart. Even as he's laying out this case against his people, in his heart he's saying, Please repent. All right.

Well, anyway, it goes on, and it's very sad. You just feel God's heartache as he's saying these things. Verse 3, An ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master's manger.

But Israel does not know. My people do not understand. There's two terms here I want to touch on.

The one is Israel does not know. And that word know is yada. It's a word that's used a lot in the Old Testament, some 900 times almost, and 79 times just in the book of Isaiah.

So whatever it means, this word yada, which is to know something, it's obviously a very important part of the Jewish religion of those days. Let me just give you a couple of verses here to kind of flesh out this word a little bit. A good example of it is Psalm 139, the first four verses.

David was marveling about God's great care over his life, and this is what he said, O Lord, you have searched me and known me, yada. You know, yada, when I sit down and when I rise up. You understand, and that word understand is this other word we're going to look at, bean.

You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it all.

Okay, now what does that tell us about this word know? That it's not a superficial knowledge. It's the kind of knowledge that there's a real intense interest in finding something out. You know, for instance, when I study this book Isaiah, I'm spending hours and hours on each of these chapters.

You know, I want to know what is being expressed in these chapters. You know, I'm not just kind of breezing over it and getting this superficial understanding of it. I want to know, and I want to know as deeply as I can know what is being expressed here, and that's what the Lord is saying, that they didn't have that kind of interest.

Basically, to put it this way, they didn't care enough to search out who this God was. But let me give you a couple of other examples. Psalm 91 14, the Lord is talking about His beloved.

He says, Because He has loved me, therefore I will deliver Him. I will set Him securely on high because He has known my name. In other words, He cared enough about who I am to search out and find out about my character, who I am as a person.

That is the person that He kind of lifts up as an example to us all. And then Jeremiah 9 23-24 says this, Thus says the Lord, Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might. Let not a rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows me, Yada, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth.

For I delight in these things, declares the Lord. So that is a picture of what God is looking for from His people, that they would care enough to want to know Him. And then the second word is BEING, which is sometimes used as UNDERSTAND.

But in the King James, I like the way the King James says it. It says, My people do not consider. And I like that because, yes, UNDERSTAND is correct, but CONSIDER, that's a word that more reflects what we're seeing here, that it's a mental effort being put forth, whereas UNDERSTANDING is almost a passive thing.

But we saw David using the same imagery in Psalm 32. He said, Do not be as the horse or as the mule, which have no BEING, UNDERSTANDING, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you. And then it's used also in Proverbs 19.25, Reprove one who has BEING, and he will gain knowledge.

And 28.5, Evil men do not BEING, understand justice, but those who seek the Lord BEING, understand all things. And then Jeremiah 4.22, For my people are foolish, they do not know me, YAHDAH, they are stupid children and have no BEING, no understanding. They are shrewd to do evil, but to do good they do not, YAHDAH.

So, you know, we see these words, they're important. The reason I went through all the effort to describe these two words is because this is where everything begins, isn't it? This is the way God has arranged religion, if I could put it that way. It begins with the man's understanding, and God presents Himself to our understanding and then tries to reach our heart through our understanding.

I want to read something that the biblical expositor wrote. This man, his name was George Smith. Let me just read what he wrote.

It's very good. That God should argue at all is the magnificent truth on which our attention must fasten before we inquire what the argument is about. God reasons with man.

That is the first article of religion according to Isaiah. Religion is reasonable intercourse between one intelligent being and another. God works upon man first through conscience.

But although the people have silenced conscience and are steeped in a stupidity worse than ox or donkey, God will not leave them alone. He forces Himself upon them. He compels them to think.

God speaks to men by the reasonable words of His prophet. Before He will publish salvation or intimate disaster, He must rouse and startle conscience. An awakened conscience is His prophet's first demand.

Before religion can be prayer or sacrifice or any acceptable worship, it must be a reasoning together with God. And that is just so true. It's just an amazing thing that God will condescend down to our level to interact with us.

It's amazing when you think about it that the Lord is willing to do that, that He cares enough. All right, let's continue on. Verse 4. And again, you get the sense of a father's broken heart here.

Alas, sinful nation! People weighed down with iniquity. Offspring of evildoers. Sons who act corruptly.

They have abandoned the Lord. They have despised... They have despised the Holy One of Israel. They have turned away from Him.

Now, that is a lot. I mean, just that verse is an enormous... You know, I used to be a bailiff in the Los Angeles court system there for a while. And I would watch, you know, all the proceedings that would go on.

And when they would have an arraignment of a suspect, they would bring him into court, and the district attorney would present the indictment and all the charges against the man. And that's really what we're seeing here is all the charges are being laid forth. Here is what my grievance is towards you.

And again, you can't get away from the sense that it's God's love that's compelling this. It's not just a fault-finding thing. But I will just touch on one word out of all these terms and things that are expressed here.

I want to look at this word corruptly for a minute. The word is shechath, and it means to decay or ruin or destroy. And it's interesting because... For instance, in Genesis 6, when it's talking about Noah and the flood and all that, let me just read verses 12 and 13.

God looked on the earth, and behold, it was shechath, corrupt. For all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. Then God said to Noah, The end of all flesh has come before me.

For the earth is filled with violence because of them. And behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth. And that word destroy is shechath.

So they had corrupted themselves, and the judgment was that they would, in turn, receive the same thing. They were about to be destroyed. In Deuteronomy 9, verse 12, it says the same kind of thing.

This is when Moses is recounting what happened when he came down from Mount Sinai and the children of Israel had made the golden calf and all that. Then the Lord said to me, Arise, go down from here quickly, for your people whom you brought out of Egypt have acted corruptly. Shechath, and so on.

And then in verse 26, Moses said, I prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord God, do not shechath, destroy your people. Now the thing that's interesting to me about this is it's the same sense in the Greek language. In the Greek, they use the term phethora.

For instance, in Galatians 6, 8, for the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption. That's the NAS. And the NIV will reap destruction.

So it's that same kind of thing. Or 1 Corinthians 3, 17, if any man destroys the temple of God, phethora, or corrupts the temple of God, God will destroy or corrupt him. So it's the same kind of a thing.

It carries forth into the New Testament. And it really says something because with sin comes its own sentence. And we know that.

It corrupts us within. And that inner corruption is what is going to work forth into the eternal realm. The only thing that will stop that corruption is blood and the repentance that allows God to apply blood to a sinner.

But outside of that, that process of corruption will go on forever and ever in people's souls. All right. Now verses 5 through 9, let me just mention this.

I'm not going to get into this and read it, but it's a very descriptive passage about the nation of Judah being devastated by a marauding army. And at first he's using the analogy of someone who has been really just beaten down and wounds all over them and so on. And basically the whole point is, how much of this do you need before you'll repent? That's the point of verses 5 through 9. And then verse 10, he takes a different direction with his argument.

Let's start reading here. Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom. Give ear to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah.

What are your multiplied sacrifices to me, says the Lord? I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle, and I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats. When you come to appear before me, who requires of you this trampling of my courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer. Incense is an abomination to me.

New moon and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies, I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts. They have become a burden to me.

I am weary of bearing them. Now I'm just going to stop there. Wow, you just get the sense that this is an eruption from God's heart.

For years and years and years, He's been watching His people play this game, this mental game, if you will. They come in, they do all this outward stuff, religious exercises, but their hearts aren't in it. And you know what that means to the Lord, to see people act like they care about you when they don't.

Imagine being in a relationship with someone like that. I don't know if you've ever been in a relationship with a person who wants something from you, so they act like they really care about you. But you can just see through them.

You can see that they're not sincere. They're only acting this way because they're after something. And I don't know if you've ever experienced that, but I certainly have.

And it's very difficult to be around someone like that. Anyway, to me, when I was reading this, it brought a whole new light on what Jesus said to this Samaritan woman when He said, The Father seeks after those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Now, that was at the first century.

And how many years? Some 1,200 years since Moses brought the children of Israel out of Egypt. For 1,200 years, He had endured their falseness, their insincerity, all their formalism, their ritualism, all the stuff, just the outward motions. For all those years, God endured that to varying degrees.

Mostly it was that way. And so when Jesus said to that Samaritan woman that this is what God is looking for, He is looking, seeking, God being the seeker, God the seeker, looking for people who would worship Him, who would love Him for who He is, who would care enough about Him to pursue a relationship, to obey Him, to come close enough to Him to where they could comprehend His greatness and His beauty and desire to worship Him. But whatever worship comes forth, it can't just be mouthing songs on Sunday.

It's got to be something more than that. The term worship in the Old Testament and the New Testament, both of those words represent the same exact thing. It literally means to bow down before another person.

And that is in the heart of all true worshipers. It's a sense of bowing down. So to bow down before God in the spirit rather than in the flesh and to bow down before Him in truth rather than in falsehood and insincerity.

I'm going to read what the pulpit commentary said. God takes delight in our times of worship. They are the highest things that can engage human attention, the seasons in which man transcends the earthly and anticipates the hallowed occupations of heaven.

They are the times in which man ought to be the truest, the most sincere, the most himself. All cloaks, all hoods, all masks, all pride ought to be laid aside whenever we pass the threshold of God's sanctuary.

Naked, guileless, open souls alone may stand before the all-holy Lord.

That's a description of the kind of worship that God is looking for. And it's interesting to me that in thinking about this whole idea of false worship, it's interesting to me that I think that the mentality of hypocrites is that if they just will come and do these things, that somehow that gives them the latitude to do what they really want to do in life. Yeah, they can't do the real bad sins, but somehow by going to church and performing these rituals, whether it's in Judaism or Christianity, it somehow gives them license to do what they really want to do, which is to live for self.

And they're just lying to themselves. They're deceiving themselves. Man, I've seen it so many times.

I know people right now that I would say are in my life in some degree that are in that spirit. And you can't talk to them because they get defensive and argumentative. It's like the worst thing that they can imagine happening is having to face the truth about themselves and their relationship with God.

I want to read the expositor again. Let me just read this. Throughout his prophecies, Isaiah presents God first as the infinitely high and then equally the infinitely near.

The Lord is exalted in righteousness, yes, and sublimely above the people's low thoughts of Him. But likewise, He is concerned with every detail of their politics and social behavior. He refuses to be relegated to the temple where they want to confine Him.

But through His prophet, He enters every aspect of their lives, whether it's in the marketplace, the king's chambers, or the temple. He fastens His eyes of glory on every detail of their lives. Isaiah's unspoken cry throughout his book is that God is a reasoning being.

Do not act as if there were a fool on the throne of the universe, which you are doing with your meaningless worship. And man, that is exactly it. People think God is a fool.

They must think that way to do what they do. You know what I mean? Going through the motions of religion without their hearts being in it. They must think that God is an utter fool.

All right, I need to start wrapping it up. Let's read through some more of these verses though. Verse 15, So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you.

Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Well, first of all, this reminds me of Proverbs 1, that section, that terrible section where the Lord is saying, You wouldn't listen to me when I tried to reprove you.

So now when disaster comes upon you, I will not listen to you. You know, it's the same kind of a thought that came forth there. But when he's referring to their hands covered with blood, this is figurative language.

And he's basically describing in the most extreme form their utter lack of mercy for the needy amongst them. And you see it all the way through the book of Isaiah, over and over and over. One of the major indictments on the Jewish people, and especially the leaders, especially the rich and the well-to-do, is their lack of mercy on the orphans, the widows, the poor.

You know, they were constantly trying to take advantage of them and just strip them of everything they could get out of them, basically. And look what he says now. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean.

I mean, that's John the Baptist talk there. Just repent. You know, just repent.

Remove the evil of your deeds from my sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good. I mean, that is it right there.

That is the 180 that we should all be doing. You're going in the direction of being a taker in life. You need to do a 180 and learn to be a giver.

I mean, that is really the message. Seek justice. Reprove the ruthless.

Defend the orphan. Plead for the widow. And he's telling these people that you guys should be concerned about those in need, those who are defenseless, those who have no one to protect them, and so on.

And he's rebuking them because they don't care about them. And then here's this wonderful verse, 18. Come now and let us reason together, says the Lord.

Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. Now, there's a little more strength to this than we probably understand.

Those colors, scarlet and crimson, were very strong dyes that you couldn't get out. Once you dyed wool crimson, that's it. It's not going to change back to white.

It will not happen. And God is saying, unless you repent, the stain of your sins is going to remain with you. Now look at verse 19.

Again, it's a plea. If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.

Truly, the mouth of Yahweh has spoken. And that is a weighty conclusion to it all. You know that whenever the prophet says, the Lord has spoken, that is an assurance that what I say here is going to happen.

If you'll do the right thing, your sins will be blotted out. I will bless your life. I will bless the nation.

But if you won't repent, you will be destroyed. And then the rest of the chapter, he kind of goes into, it's almost like continuing the plea in a certain sense. He starts talking about the future, really.

He kind of sums up the future. Verses 24 on, he's talking about the restoration that will come to the land after judgment. Because judgment is going to come.

Because God knows these people are not going to do what they need to do. And so he talks about, like verse 26, I'll restore your judges. Well, that's referring to Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah.

Those godly men who led them once they got back to Jerusalem from Babylon, and after that you'll be called the city of righteousness, a faithful city. Once they got through the Babylonian captivity, the idolatry was finished. They never returned to the idolatry again, even though they did lapse back into formalism.

At least that wicked, devilish idolatry, they were done with that. And then he goes on to talk about what the idolatry is and so on. Kind of finishes out that way.

Now I just want to wrap up with one observation about, really it's about verses 19 and 20. In one sense, it's the conclusion of it. If you consent and obey, you'll be blessed.

But if you refuse and rebel, you're going to face judgment, what is being said. And there are conditional promises, obviously. But this is an interesting thing, that God uses throughout Scripture the carrot and the stick.

He just does. And some people don't want it to be that way. But all I can say is, I know it's very subjective.

God is a mighty God. He's worthy to be obeyed just because of who He is. That is true.

But yet that almighty God condescends down to our level and basically says, if you'll do the right thing, I'll bless you. He doesn't have to do that. He condescends down to our level throughout Scripture.

For instance, Deuteronomy 12. Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments, which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God.

Then in verse 15, but it shall come about if you do not obey the Lord your God, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you. And it is God coming down to our level and trying to reason with us. That's really what it's all about.

It's the Lord just laying it out there. He doesn't have to do it, but He does do it. And that's really what this chapter is all about.

It's God saying, I have all these indictments against you as a people, but if you'll amend your ways, then I will forgive you, and I'll forget that any of it happened, and I will begin to bless you as a nation. All right, so that's Isaiah 1 in a nutshell. And next week, we'll get into the next prophecy, which basically extends from chapters 2 on through 5. Okay, God bless you all.

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