

Habakkuk 2:6-20 — Nobody Gets Away With Anything

August 26, 2018

This past week, a constant concern in our nation finally came to a tragic end. For the last month our country was heartbroken by the sudden and unexplained disappearance of Mollie Tibbetts, a young student at the University of Iowa. As many of you know, this past week, her body was found and the man who stands accused of her murder was taken into custody. All of us are heartbroken to hear of her death. While nothing can fill the hole in the hearts of her family, her friends and our nation, we are grateful for a bit of closure to the mystery of her sudden disappearance.

We are especially filled with gratitude to the hard-working men and women in law enforcement that worked tirelessly following leads that eventually solved the mystery of her disappearance and led to the arrest of the man who stands accused of taking her life.

Unfortunately, Mollie's case is the exception. Many tough-to-crack murder cases like Mollie's are never solved. Killers get away with taking life. Thieves steal and are never caught. Those who are in positions of power oppress the poor and nobody can stop them. People get away with terrible crimes, and there is nobody left to get justice. At least that is the way it appears.

This morning, as we turn to our study of God's Word, we will find that no matter what it looks like, because God is on the throne, justice will be served. For sure in the next life but many times God steps into situations and orchestrates justice against sin in this life. The big idea of this morning's message is simple:

Since God is on the throne, nobody gets away with anything.

Justice will be served. This is especially encouraging to those who are facing injustice in this life and nobody is an advocate. God is watching. In his time, he will step in. This is also a warning to each of us. When we sin, there is no way to escape consequences.

As a church, we are in a four-week study of the book of Habakkuk. Pastor Jordan from the Spencer campus preached the first two weeks of the book on both campuses, while I was on vacation. I am preaching the last two weeks of the book across both campuses while he is on vacation.

Before we get into this morning's text, we need to remember that every biblical text is set in context. I want to refresh your understanding of the background of Habakkuk before we study some often ignored verses in this book. Habakkuk was written around 600 B.C. Habakkuk was a prophet in the southern kingdom of Judah. While the Israelites were supposed to be God's people who walked with him, at this time, they didn't look anything like God's people. Under the reign of wicked King Manasseh and King Amon, the people of God left God's temple abandoned. They worshipped Canaanite Baals, which were fertility gods. I will leave it to your imagination to guess what worshipping a fertility god might involve. They were also worshipping the god Molech. How did you worship him? You burned your children alive. As I said, they drifted a long way from God.

As you might expect, the justice system of the nation was also corrupt. Criminals were manipulating the justice system to get away with crimes. Evil people were using the legal system to take advantage of the righteous.

Quarreling dominated society's landscape. It was a terrible time in Judah's history.

Habakkuk cried out to God, "God, why are you tolerating this? You need to do something about this." Habakkuk was hoping that God would send a revival. God had a different answer to his people's sin. God's plan was to send the wicked Babylonians to conquer his people and take them into captivity. This is like us complaining to God about the corruption in our government with Trump, the Russia collusion scandal and Mueller's Russia probe. In response to our complaints, it would be like God saying he would do something about it. He would send ISIS to conquer our nation and take us into captivity. That isn't what we would want to hear. We would accuse God of overreacting. Habakkuk felt the same way. The people of Judah were far from God, but the Babylonians were 100 times worse than God's people. How could God send them to conquer his people?

In our first week in Habakkuk we learned that sometimes God uses people more wicked than his people to discipline his people.

Last week, Habakkuk continued his talk with God. He understood God was using the wicked Babylonians as discipline on Judah for their sin, but his complaint was, "If you are disciplining your people for their sins, why aren't you chastising the Babylonians for their greater sin?"

In the ancient world, the Babylonians were legendary for their brutality. Last week, we saw Habakkuk used fishing metaphors to describe the way the Babylonians treated their captives. "God, why do you let the Babylonians bring

people up like they are fish on a hook and treat people like they are worthless creatures? They keep doing this forever.” Those were not just metaphors. Those were descriptions of the way the Babylonians treated their captives. When Babylonians took people captive, they put a ring through their lower lips and attached these rings to a long rope that they pulled to lead them into captivity. Has anyone put fish on a string? The Babylonians did the same thing but with human beings. As I said, they were legendary for their brutality.

That brings us to where we find ourselves this morning in Habakkuk 2:6. “God, you are disciplining your people for their sin by using the wicked Babylonians but what about the Babylonians and their wickedness?” What do we need to know when it looks like the wicked are winning and God is doing nothing? What do we need to know about those who appear to get away with murder and nobody can stop them? That is the theme of this passage.

In this section, God inspired Habakkuk to write a song with five timeless truths about the way God works in this world and the way he handles those who do evil. These are five truths that describe how God would handle the wickedness of the Babylonians, but these truths also show us how God handles the wicked today. They are called scoffs, or taunts. They are statements intended to mock the Babylonians in their victory.

Shall not all these take up [their taunt against him](#), [with scoffing and riddles for him](#), and say... Habakkuk 2:6 (ESV)

In other words, “You think you are winning and destroying; let me tell you how God will handle your sin. Nobody gets away with anything. God is on his throne. Justice will be served.”

Each one of these truths begin with the word “Woe.” The Hebrew word literally means, “Ahha!” “You think you are winning? You think you are getting away with murder? Ahha!” Let me tell you what you need to know about the way God works his justice in this world and the way he will work justice on you. These five woes teach us that nobody gets away with anything. Let’s read this text.

Look for the word “wWoe,” which begins each of these truths.

Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say, “Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own— for how long?— and loads himself with pledges!” Will not your debtors suddenly arise, and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoil for them. Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. “Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm! You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples; you have forfeited your life. For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork respond. “Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity! Behold, is it not from the Lord of hosts that peoples labor merely for fire, and nations weary themselves for nothing? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. “Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink— you pour out your wrath and make them drunk, in order to gaze at their nakedness! You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision! The cup in the Lord’s right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory! The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. “What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols! Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it. But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.” Habakkuk 2:6–20 (ESV)

1. Those who steal and oppress will be robbed and destroyed.

...“Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own— for how long?— and loads himself with pledges!” Will not your debtors suddenly arise, and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoil for them. Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you, for the

blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.
Habakkuk 2:6–8 (ESV)

Remember when this was written. This is written before Babylon conquered Judah. This is a taunt that was spoken prophetically about the end of the Babylonian empire, but at this time Babylon hadn't invaded Judah. God declared the way history would unfold! What amazes me is the incredible accuracy with which these taunts described the Babylonians' sin and the way God would respond to it.

Nebuchadnezzar brought ancient Babylon to its cultural peak. Babylon conquered the ancient world. The primary source of riches in the city was not trade and commerce. It came from conquering and plundering new parts of the world. Babylon already had enough riches. They took everything of value from the people they conquered to impoverish them. It described the Babylonians as heaping up plunder. They took far more than they needed and far more than they knew how to manage so they left conquered people in subsistence living conditions.

The other thing this text describes is how they loaded themselves up with pledges. What are pledges? Today, we call them taxes. If you think our taxes are too high, try Babylonian taxes. In my research, I learned that from the years 560 to 530 B.C. we know the Babylonians charged a 50 percent tax rate on all their conquered kingdoms. The purpose of these high taxes was to keep conquered kingdoms in poverty. Remember, the Babylonians didn't need the money. They already had more than enough. They did this because they were bullies who

liked to oppress the world. The problem was nobody could stop them. At least that is the way it appeared.

Who is the one his throne? Who is watching and judging? Who says nobody gets away with anything? Our mighty God. God declared he would deal with the oppressive Babylonians. Suddenly their debtors would rise up and make them tremble. The many nations they plundered would rise up and plunder them. God is on his throne. Nobody will get away with anything. God will see to it there is a reversal where the greedy is conquered in an instant and will experience what they have done to others. Did this take place?

Ancient Babylon was the largest city in the ancient world. It was 2,500 square acres. The book of Daniel tells us what Nebuchadnezzar felt about the Babylon he built through conquering and oppressing.

...and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?"
Daniel 4:30 (ESV)

It looked like Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon would last forever. It looked like Babylon held the world in its grasp and would never be destroyed.

God said he would destroy Babylon and he would destroy it suddenly. The Babylonian kingdom only lasted about a hundred years. In the year 539 B.C., Babylon was surrounded by the army of Cyrus, king of Persia. Daniel 5 tells us what it was like that night in Babylon. Belshazzar the king was at ease. He had a drinking party. What did he have to worry about? The city of Babylon was impregnable. The army of Babylon was invincible. Cyrus could wait outside the gates as long as he wanted.

During the night, Cyrus' soldiers diverted a river that flowed through the city. While the Babylonians had steel bars that went deep into the water, to protect the city, they didn't go to the bottom of the river. When the river was diverted and went dry, Cyrus' army walked into Babylon in the middle of the night, walking under the bars on the riverbed bottom. When the Babylonian army realized the city was invaded, it gave up without much of a fight. In an instant, the world's mightiest kingdom was conquered and plundered, just like God said it would.

God says, "You think you will get away with stealing from the weak, using your power to oppress people and take stuff you don't even need and nobody can stop you?" You forget that God is on his throne. He is patient and giving you an opportunity to repent. If you don't repent, in the blink of an eye, he can change your future and it will be over. God will see to it that justice is served.

That is not just true for ancient Babylon, but that is still true about the way God works in life today. Nobody gets away with anything. This is also a New Testament principle where God repays with affliction those who afflict his people to bring about a measure of justice.

...since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you... 2 Thessalonians 1:6 (ESV)

How well did oppression of the Jews and the conquering of the world work for Nazi Germany? Who do you think declared their end? God was on his throne. He overthrew them. How well did raping, killing and oppression work for Al-Qaeda? God provided them a time to repent but ultimately he handed out justice against them. God will treat our country the same way. Justice will be served, not

just in eternity but many times in this life. Even if you think the tables could never be turned, like they thought in Babylon, God can turn those tables in the blink of an eye, just like he did for the Babylonians.

2. God will destroy the future of all who try to leave a legacy built on a foundation of their sin.

Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm! You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples; you have forfeited your life. For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork respond. Habakkuk 2:9–11 (ESV)

This woe deals with legacy. The Babylonians were very interested in leaving a lasting legacy of their greatness. Nebuchadnezzar was particularly interested in leaving a legacy of his greatness. The historical record tells us that Nebuchadnezzar claimed one of the reasons he built such massive walls around Babylon was so it would be impenetrable and could never be conquered. That way his legacy lasted. He hoped that if Babylon amassed enough money and enough power it would be a kingdom that would last forever. The empire would be like a bird that builds its nest in a high rock peak. It would be untouchable.

By ancient standards, Babylon was considered impenetrable. As a city, it was surrounded by two walls. The innermost wall was 21 feet thick of solid brick. Twenty-three feet away from the inner wall was the outer wall which was 12 feet thick of solid brick. There were



massive defensive towers every 65 feet around the top of the wall. The outer wall was also surrounded by a moat that was 200 feet wide. As the city grew, another wall was built around an expanded part of the city. That was a single wall made of brick that was 80 feet thick with defensive towers every 130 feet. It also had a

moat around it that was 300 feet wide. The idea was to leave a lasting kingdom that would never end.

God is on his throne. The only kingdom that will last forever in the kingdom of his son, not a kingdom set up by any man trying to make his legacy last forever. So how did Nebuchadnezzar do when it came to leaving a legacy? Only 22 years after Nebuchadnezzar stepped away from the throne, Babylon was conquered by the Persians. So much for leaving a legacy. From there Babylon continued to decline. Today it is uninhabited. It went from the largest and most powerful city on earth to uninhabited. Nebuchadnezzar's legacy was destroyed.

God is on his throne. Nobody gets away with anything. If you are trying to make your legacy last forever by oppressing people, God is watching. He will eventually carry out justice and shut down your plans. Here is the principle. God fights against the wicked and he destroys their legacy. That is the way God works. He is large and in charge.

...Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors. Proverbs 1:18–19 (ESV)

Jeremiah also prophesied about what God would do to Nebuchadnezzar and the legacy he wanted to leave behind.

The horror you inspire has deceived you, and the pride of your heart, you who live in the clefts of the rock, who hold the height of the hill. Though you make your nest as high as the eagle's, I will bring you down from there, declares the Lord. Jeremiah 49:16 (ESV)

Here is the irony. Those who are oppressing people to build houses and kingdoms for their own glory to leave a lasting legacy will ultimately find the very stuff they stole crying out against them.

I love the way Habakkuk says this. “You think there is nobody to testify against you? The very rocks you stole for your walls and the wood you stole for your beams will cry out against you. We are stolen goods! We don’t belong here!”

Jesus picked up this line from Habakkuk. Habakkuk was speaking about objects in creation crying out against those who sin. “The very stones and wood you stole for your house will cry out against you.” Jesus took this part of Habakkuk and used it in a positive sense as he entered the city of Jerusalem and people worshipped him as God.

...saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” Luke 19:38–40 (ESV)

God is on the throne. He will destroy those who try to make a legacy for themselves by wickedness. All they have built for themselves will not last.

The same is true for us. Every one of us would like to leave some kind of stamp of permanence in life. The only way to do that is by walking with God and letting his kingdom be your legacy, not by trying to create a lasting legacy for yourself.

3. God will destroy all nations built on slavery and injustice.

Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity! Behold, is it not from the Lord of hosts that peoples labor merely for fire, and nations weary themselves for nothing? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Habakkuk 2:12–14 (ESV)

The city of Babylon was one of the wonders of the ancient world. It was beautiful. It contained the hanging gardens of Babylon, which was a gardening masterpiece. The problem is the entire city was built on the backs of slave labor from conquered people like the Jews. Each one of those slaves was worth more

than the entire city. No matter how impressive the city, God was not impressed by the city because of the way it was built. It was a city built on suffering. God saw that so he promised it would all go up in smoke. All the hard work would be for nothing because God in his justice would crush the city.

That is what happened to ancient Babylon. While Babylon was the largest city in the ancient world with a population of more than 200,000, after it was conquered by Cyrus, it declined and disappeared. God doesn't just care what we do. He cares how we do it. Those who get rich by extortion and using people to build something impressive will see it all torn down by God. God cares how we build something, not just that we build. God is on his throne. Nobody gets away with anything. The Babylonians didn't get away with their sin.

You see, God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They were to be fruitful and multiply. They were to build a city. A city represents the fruition of mankind's efforts to fulfill the creation mandate and subdue the earth. A city solidifies into a single whole the intelligence and skill of different people so the city works together to form a culture and community which should function for the glory of God.

Ancient Babylon was a city not working together for God's glory but was made of slaves working together for Nebuchadnezzar's glory. That is why God tore it down.

The way God works is he promises to destroy those cities founded on wickedness and slavery. That is not just ancient Babylon. That is true of North Korea. That is true of China. That is true of America. God knows when people

build a city based on wickedness and slavery. It a pointless creation. The city was given to us by God for us to work together for God's glory.

What will last? Nebuchadnezzar's goal was to fill the earth with his glory like the waters cover the sea. God will not stand for that. Ultimately God will fill the earth with his glory like the waters cover the sea.

How will that happen? The Bible tells us in Revelation 21 that God will establish a city called the New Jerusalem. In that city, all that is done will be to God's glory, not man's glory. From that city the glory of God will expand to cover the earth like the waters cover the sea.

We were created to give God the glory and honor he is due. Only what is done for God's glory will last forever because what will fill the earth is not an earthly kingdom like Nebuchadnezzar's but the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. That will last.

4. Those who shame people and abuse God's creation will experience God's wrath.

Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink— you pour out your wrath and make them drunk, in order to gaze at their nakedness! You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision! The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory! The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. Habakkuk 2:15–17 (ESV)

Who is this referring to? Most likely it is referring to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. Secondly, it is referring to anyone who acts the way he did.

Here we find the king of Babylon making his subjects drink. He was making them get drunk in his presence. That way they would get so drunk they would get naked. The king was using his power to get people drunk so he could

fill them with shame. The Hebrew wording here is a little more graphic. It was more than just getting them drunk so they were naked. It was getting people drunk to have them commit sexual immorality.

You know how this works. When people are thinking clearly there are things they would never do. If you can get them drunk, you can get them to do all kinds of kinky things for your amusement. They end up waking up in bed with people they never met.

Nebuchadnezzar made people drink so they would shame themselves. God said the king of Babylon was responsible for abusing his people. As the leader of the world, he should have been serving people, not using them for his amusement.

Historically, the Babylonians were known for these wild drinking parties. We find this talked about in the book of Daniel and the drinking party that took place under Belshazzar, on the night Babylon was conquered. As I read this, notice the king using his power to force his subjects to drink from the vessels of the temple and get drunk to shame themselves.

King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand. Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. Daniel 5:1–2 (ESV)

God said, “You want to get drunk? You can get drunk on the cup of God’s wrath. You were used by God to bring his wrath on the godless nations around you.”

Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord’s hand, making all the earth drunken; the nations drank of her wine; therefore the nations went mad. Jeremiah 51:7 (ESV)

“Now it is your turn to drink from the cup of God’s wrath because of how you treat your people.” The Hebrew says, “You will now vomit shame all over your glory.”

...but it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another. For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs. Psalm 75:7–8 (ESV)

The promise of God is that empires who use and degrade their people will ultimately be judged and destroyed by God. It may not seem like God is watching what happens on earth, but he is watching. Nobody gets away with anything.

The same is true today in every nation of this world. God is watching how people are treated. He will eventually step in and judge nations who shame people. This includes our country. God is on his throne.

Interestingly, God was not just concerned about the way the Babylonians treated people. He was also concerned about the way they treated the places they conquered.

This text also talks about the violence they did to Lebanon. Lebanon was a beautiful pristine forest in Israel. It was legendary for its huge cedar trees that were very old, like the Redwood trees in California. The Psalms talk about the giant cedars of Lebanon being so old they were planted by God.

The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. Psalm 104:16 (ESV)

What did the Babylonians do to these ancient trees? They clearcut the forest. They cut them down not because they needed the wood but because they liked to destroy. God cares about how we treat the planet. Can we cut down trees? Yes. Should we destroy entire forests of ancient trees just because we are

bored? Absolute not. Remember God is on his throne. He is watching our lives. Nobody gets away with anything. Justice will be served.

The same thing was true about the animals in Lebanon. The Babylonians also destroyed the animals of that forest, not for food but for sport. God saw that. He cares about that. He repaid the Babylonians for needlessly destroying animals. Can we hunt? Yes. Should we needlessly kill animals for fun? Absolutely not. God is watching. He cares about how we treat people. He cares about how we treat his creation. The Babylonians were judged by God for their senseless destruction. God still judges people for that today. God is on his throne. Nobody gets away with anything.

5. Those who worship idols trust in their own creation, which is worthless.

“What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols! Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it. But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.”
Habakkuk 2:18–20 (ESV)

Babylon was a nation filled with idols. The chief God of Babylon was Marduk. They thought that he was the one in power. He was the one who gave them victory. His temple was so tall it pierced the skyline of their city to show Marduk’s prominence and power.



God said, “Think about this — do you think Marduk, or any of the idols in Babylon, contributed to your success? Your idols were made by craftsmen.” They are just carved metal images. The one who makes an idol trusts in his own creation. Idols cannot talk. They cannot teach.

Idols are not alive. They are just pieces of wood overlaid with gold and silver.

There is no breath in them.

For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Psalm 96:5 (ESV)

The true God of the universe is different. He talks. He talked to Habakkuk in this book. He knows the future and controls the future. He raised Babylon up and he chose when to put Babylon down.

Remember the five specific woes that describe Babylon's sin and how she would be destroyed were all given by God before Babylon came to conquer Judah. Obviously God is in charge of world history since he is the one who specified the beginning and end of the Babylonian reign in the world. Our God is in charge of history. He has no rivals. At times it may look like God is absent and the world is out of control, but that is not true. God is always in complete control. The problem is we just don't understand God's wisdom and God's ways because of our small brains. What we can rest on is that justice will be served.

Habakkuk began his book with questions and complaints. "God, why aren't you doing something about the injustice and wickedness in our community?" Then he realized God was doing something about it, even if he couldn't understand the wisdom of God's ways, he could trust God's ways. Since God is on his throne, instead of questions and accusations for what God isn't doing in this world, all we can do is stand in silence and reverence trusting God's wisdom even if we can't understand God's ways.

Everything that happens on earth and that happens in our lives is part of God's good plan and his unfolding purpose for history. We may not understand it.

We may want to feel anxious as the world is falling apart around us but nothing on earth happens apart from God's will and good plan. No matter what comes our way, he calls us to live by faith, knowing that in the end of history, God's glory is what will cover the earth. God wins. All we need to do is stand in silent trust before him even if we don't understand him.

When I think of trusting God's wisdom by faith when the world is falling apart around us, I think of the crucifixion of Jesus. From everyone's perspective, it looked like evil was winning. Jesus was unjustly accused. Jesus was being put to death. Satan cheered. The demons jumped with joy. God had lost control. They were finally able to destroy the very Son of God. While nobody could see it, today we know God had a good plan. We know God was completely in control, even if nobody understood his wisdom or ways.

God used the death of his son to destroy Satan, sin and death. Justice was served. He also used his son's death to adopt us into God's family as undeserved brothers and sisters in Christ, making us the most blessed beings in the universe.

When life looks like it is falling apart, when life looks like it is spinning out of control, remember God is on his throne. He has a good plan. We can trust him and humbly wait on him. No matter how great the adversary, justice will be served. For sure in the next life but many times God also hands out justice to those who oppress his people in this life as well.



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