

IS THE BIBLE THE WORD OF GOD?

by

W. Graham Scroggie

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CHAPTER THREE

IT CLAIMS TO BE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

And here again, as in the previous case, it is our purpose to examine the evidence, from whatsoever quarter, and to be subject to the result. The attempt to make the truth fit into our theories is both foolish and useless. Wisdom and honesty will espouse that theory which the truth dictates. Let us look first at:

(A) The Old Testament's Witness to the New.

If what has already been said has been to any purpose, it will follow that the witness of the Testaments is reciprocal, that the one implies and necessitates the other, and that, therefore, what can truly be predicated of the one stands good for the other. If the New bears witness to the Old, so does the Old to the New. The claim of the New Testament is that it is the realization of that of which the Old Testament is the anticipation. And the demand of the Old Testament is that its anticipation find a realization, a demand to which the New Testament responds. It follows, therefore, that if the Old Testament is the Word of God, the New Testament must be so also. The witness of the Old Testament to the New is that of “a mold to a medallion, the same image being found in both - sunk in the surface of the one, projecting from the surface of the other.” It is a witness of relationship, as of hand to hand, as of root to flower, as of seed to harvest, as of portrait to person, as of shadow to substance; so that what is true of the root, the seed, the portrait, and the shadow on the one hand, is necessarily true of the flower, the harvest, the person, and the substance on the other hand.

The two Testaments stand in relation to each other as the cherubim of old, facing each other over the mercy-seat, and beaten out of the same piece of gold. One thing is perfectly certain, namely, that the credit or discredit of either Testament is shared by its fellow; that the Old Testament and the New Testament stand or fall together.

But let us examine this truth somewhat more closely. A large part of the witness under review is to be found in:

I. The Unity of the Testaments

Modern Biblical criticism, for obvious reasons, little regards this, but here it is, and avoiding or denying it does not alter the fact. No one can read these Scriptures with any care without, sooner or later, discovering a five-fold unity.

(1) *There is Structural Unity.*

This may be regarded as coincidental and scarcely valid evidence. It is, nevertheless, most impressive, and might be illustrated from many standpoints. Look, for instance, at the three-fold division of each Testament:

First, Historic: Genesis to Esther (Old Testament), Matthew to Acts (New Testament);
Second, Didactic: Job to Canticles (Old Testament), Romans to Jude (New Testament);
Third, Prophecies: Isaiah to Malachi (Old Testament), Revelation (New Testament).

Or, compare the Pentateuch, that seed plot of all revelation, and the New Testament:

- Genesis, and the Four Gospels: The Great Foundations.
- Exodus, and the Acts: The Deliverance and Constitution of the Elect People.
- Leviticus, and the Pauline Epistles: The Believer's Standing and State; Separation and Holiness unto the Lord.
- Numbers, and the Catholic Epistles: The Wilderness Journey of God's People. Trial and Suffering.
- Deuteronomy, and Revelation: Review and Consummation.

This surely is apt and striking, and is calculated to lead to the belief that God is as careful of form as of substance; that there are order and design in the arrangement of his words as well as of his works.

We do not wish to lay undue emphasis upon the structural unity of the Bible, or to convey the impression that this balance of parts is a thing of any vital importance, but only that it enters into the revelation vouchsafed, and implies that that revelation is the product of one Mind.

(2) *There is Historical Unity.*

There is not an isolated book in the whole collection; each is dependent on the one before it until we come to the primary fact, "**In the beginning God.**" This is the more remarkable when we think of its many authors, and the period across which the writings were produced. This history is not the product of an editor who chose his contributors, mapped out the field, gave to each his period, and himself brought all into relation. Even in such enterprises as that unity is not always achieved. But here all are independent of one another, yet the result is a sublime story which moves on from period to period in most impressive eloquence from commencement to consummation.

Surely the explanation of this is to be found only in one direction. But further:

(3) *There is Prophetical Unity.*

This is in fact a miracle, and prophecy is one of the greatest proofs of the divine origin and authority of the Bible.

Not only do great numbers of Old Testament prophecies become fulfillments in the New Testament, but the New Testament itself is largely prophetic - much more so than is commonly thought, and its prophetic outlook is in complete perspective with that of the Old Testament. It is fuller and reaches further than that of the Old Testament, but the forelook is in the same direction. All these voices speak one great truth because all their utterances are the articulation of one great Mind. Daniel and John unfold one great plan, and reveal one great purpose, covering thousands of years, and whatever the critics may do with the authors they cannot change the character of their works. This miracle of prophecy is unimpeachable evidence that the Bible is the Word of God. Yet again:

(4) There is Doctrinal Unity.

The countless contradictory doctrines held by men of our own generation should be enough to show how impossible it is for the unaided intellect to arrive at harmony of view about the great things - God, Life, the Soul, Sin, Destiny, and much besides. Yet in the Scriptures we find perfect harmony of teaching across a period of over fifteen centuries, and coming through men of great diversity of character and equipment. The apparent exceptions are due to faulty interpretations on our part, and do not exist in fact. It is not true that Jesus sets aside Moses, or that Paul contradicts James, though these things have been alleged in consequence of limited apprehension and mistaken interpretation.

The Bible does not teach Calvinism against Arminianism, or the latter against the former. It teaches both. They are different aspects of one great truth which finds expression in the sacrifice of Christ, on the one hand as propitiatory, and on the other as substitutionary. The sovereignty of God and human free will are not contradictory, but complementary. The enlightened Christian will be a Calvinist on his knees and an Arminian on his feet. In all the parts of this amazing revelation there is harmony of doctrine, and divine inspiration is the only explanation. Yet once more,

(5) There is Spiritual Unity.

The same sap pervades the whole of this tree of life; one spirit inhabits this body of truth; one energy moves from commencement to finish, and one redeeming purpose makes this library a single Book. The sap is the life of God, and the breath is the Spirit of God. The names and titles which the Scriptures bear are a declaration of its spiritual unity, as, for example, **“The Word of the Lord”**; **“The Oracles of God”**; **“The Word of Faith”**; **“The Word of Truth”**; **“The Word of Reconciliation”**; **“The Word of Life”**; **“The Word of Righteousness”**; **“The Faithful Word.”**

But the great evidence of the spiritual unity of the Bible is to be found in its atmosphere and its altitude. The air is rarer here than anywhere else; this is the most morally bracing climate in which we can live: it is stifling to iniquity, but health-giving to righteousness. The Bible is one long history of sin, but it nowhere sanctions or excuses it. To save the reputation of the saints is not an object here. Noah got drunk, Abram lied, David committed murder and adultery, and Peter swore; these are facts, and the Bible records them to save us from repeating them.

On the other hand, Jesus says to the adulteress, “**Neither do I condemn thee,**” and to the penitent thief, “**This day shalt thou be with me in paradise.**” The pull of the Bible is always up. The moral standards of the two Testaments are not contradictory, but the New transcends the Old.

Here, then, is a wonderful thing, that between the two Testaments there is no contradiction of historical facts, no confusion of spiritual types, no contortion of prophetic outline, no collision of doctrinal statement, and no collapse of divine perspective: all is a sublime unity, and this can be accounted for only by the fact that these writings are the Word of God.

Let us recall the thread of our argument. In showing that the Bible claims to be the Word of God, we have examined, first, the Old Testament – its witness to itself, and the New Testament's witness to it. We are now examining the New Testament. Here, also, the witness is twofold, – first, that which the Old bears to the New; second, that which the New bears to itself. Of the former of these we have already considered the evidence of the unity of the Testaments and we must now look briefly at the evidence derived from the presence of:

2. The Old Testament in the New.

If the claim of the Old Testament to be the Word of God is valid, the New Testament must share that distinction at least to the extent that the Old is in the New. Look then, summarily, at:

(1) The Range of the References.

By “References” let us understand quotations and allusions. Of the former, it has been reckoned there are 263; and these, drawn from all over the Old Testament, are found all over the New.

Dr. S. H. Brooks affirms that Genesis is quoted 19 times in 9 New Testament books; Exodus, 24 times in 12 New Testament books; Leviticus, 12 times in 9 New Testament books; Numbers is quoted or alluded to in 9 New Testament books; Deuteronomy, 26 times in 13 New Testament books; the Psalms, 59 times in 12 New Testament books; Isaiah, 50 times in 11 New Testament books; Proverbs, 6 times in 6 New Testament books; and Zechariah, 6 times in 4 New Testament books. But to these we have to add about 376 allusions, more or less distinct. It is evident, therefore, that the New Testament is saturated with the Old. Indeed, it is not too much to say that if all references to the Old Testament were eliminated, there would be comparatively little left.

Stephen's speech is an Old Testament “mosaic.” The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Jewish portions of the Roman Epistle are entirely dependent on the Old Testament; and Professor Milligan, writing of the Revelation, says, “It may be doubted whether it contains a single figure not drawn from the Old Testament, or a single complete sentence not more or less built up of materials brought from the same source.” We have already said that out of the total number of 404 verses in this book about 265 verses contain Old Testament language, and about 550 references are made to Old Testament passages. The fact of and extent to which the Old Testament is in the New needs no further illustration. But the value of this for our present purpose depends upon:

(2) The Use of the References.

Does the New Testament quote the Old to approve or discredit, to endorse or deny it? Dr. Girdlestone says, "The more one studies the use of the Old Testament in the New, the more will one be struck with the fact that all New Testament writers use the Old Testament in the same way"; and what way that is we may judge from Second Timothy 3:15-17.

Sometimes the quotations are from the Hebrew, mostly from the Septuagint, and sometimes from neither, but in no case is the reference made for the purpose of correction or denial, but only for confirmation and expansion.

Sometimes the references are general, and sometimes particular; sometimes whole books are referred to as "the Scriptures," and sometimes the whole of the Old Testament is referred to in this way; but everywhere the writers assume that they are referring to the Word of God.

This absorption of the Old Testament gives character to the New, and is a valuable part of the evidence of its inspiration. But let us look now at:

(B) The New Testament's Witness to Itself.

What evidence is there on this side that the Writings are of divine origin and authority? What are the character and significance of these twenty-seven books, ascertainable by the study of them and comparison of them with religious writings of the period immediately following? The best answer to those questions would require more time and space than are at present at our disposal; yet we venture to offer an answer in brief outline, looking first at the external, and then at the internal, evidence:

1. The External Evidence.

Two things here claim our attention, and first, just a word about:

(1) The Canon of the New Testament.

By "Canon" we understand either that which measures or that which is measured; either that which rules or that which is ruled. The word occurs in the New Testament five times, two of which references speak of "**walking according to a rule**" which has been established (Galatians 6:16; Philippians 3:16).

The word may have come to be applied to these Scriptures in one of two ways, either by viewing them "as containing the authoritative Rule by which human thought and life are to be molded; or, by viewing these writings as ruled, that is, declared by the Church, after ages of doubt and debate, to be of divine inspiration. In any case, we know that by the end of the fourth century the books which make our New Testament were universally acknowledged to be Holy Scripture. Other books within that period made pretentious claims, but the great test was apostolicity, and this established, there was no longer any question as to recognition.

These twenty-seven books, since the completion of the Canon, have for over fifteen centuries been regarded as a true part of God's great Book of Scriptures. It is impossible to doubt that during those early centuries the divine Spirit quickened the discernment and directed the judgment of his people, leading them to recognize, on substantial evidence, what was, and what was not, divinely inspired.

This testimony must not be set aside, for "There is the same kind of evidence that the books of the New Testament are of apostolic origin as that the works of Xenophon, Cicero, or Plutarch proceeded from the authors whose names they bear."

Furthermore, the immense number of quotations made from the New Testament by the early Christian writers is witness to the growing consciousness that these were of inspired authority; indeed, they were quoted or alluded to as of equal authority with the Old Testament Scriptures.

Dean Burgon, in his great index of patristic quotations discovered 22,534 in the writings alone of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen; and these quotations are from the Gospels, Acts, the Pauline and Catholic Epistles, and the Apocalypse.

The late Professor Johnstone has shown in his "*Principles of Evidence in Critical Enquiry*" that by the beginning of the third century of our era there would be approximately 2,000,000 Christians in the world, and that the belief of such writers as Irenaeus, or Clement, or Tertullian, that the New Testament writings were of divine authority was the view of the Church throughout the world at that time.

This evidence is not new, but it should be known that it is still valid.

Another part of the external evidence that the New Testament is divinely inspired is to be found in:

(2) *The Post-Apostolic Writings.*

Between the canonical books and even the best of the uncanonical there is a distinction which impressively reveals the limits of the unaided Christian intellect and imagination.

Canon Bernard's *Bampton Lectures* should be read here. He discusses the distinction between the apostolic period and subsequent periods of church history, and inquires into what constitutes the distinction. The result is somewhat as follows: That whereas the apostolic period is part of the history of the communication of truth by God, and of the apprehension of it by man, the post-apostolic periods are parts of the history only of the apprehension of truth by man; in other words, the apostolic period was the last of communication and the first of apprehension. That it was the last of communication is proved by the fact that the apprehension of truth on the part of the Church throughout this age has been an apprehension of what the evangelists and apostles wrote, and not of what any person wrote after the close of that period. "No later communications from heaven are supposed or alleged."

All definitions, decrees, and creeds have these writings and these only for their warrant and substance. It was not a new communication that was given in the time of Athanasius, Augustine, or Luther, but a new apprehension and a reaffirmation of a former communication. The matter may be summarized in this way:

Writings of the EVANGELISTS	Writings of the APOSTLES	Writings of the FATHERS
Period of COMMUNICATION Only	Period of COMMUNICATION and APPREHENSION	Period of APPREHENSION Only
PRE-APOSTOLIC	APOSTOLIC	POST-APOSTOLIC

From this diagram the situation will be clearly seen. But in addition to that important fact, it has always been recognized, and recognized by the apostolic Fathers themselves, that the writings of the sub-apostolic age are incomparably inferior to the writings of the New Testament, though they have many beauties of a distinct interest. These facts together constitute strong external evidence that the New Testament writings are the Word of God. We shall now proceed to:

2. The Internal Evidence. And first of all let us examine:

(1) The Testimony of Christ.

Perhaps it is not too much to say that the testimony which is inclusive and convincing is that of:

(a) His Self-Consciousness.

Who did Jesus believe and declare that he was? If his witness be accepted, nothing remains to be said on the subject of these articles, for his claim carries with it the whole Bible. We are so familiar, in a way, with our Authorized text that we are not mastered by such statements as:

- **“Come unto me . . . all . . . and I will give you rest”;**
- **“Before Abraham was I am”;**
- **“I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life”;**

And that first recorded utterance:

“Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?”

It is difficult and perhaps impossible to say when Jesus became conscious of who he was, but that consciousness was certainly his at twelve years of age, and Dean Farrar, in a note on Luke 2:49, in the Cambridge Greek Testament, says that “did ye not know?” was designed to “recall their fading memory of who he was.” If that be so, his God-consciousness awakened before his experience at Jerusalem.

But the fact to be marked for our present purpose is that Jesus believed that he was God, and declared it, alike by his life, his teaching, his Passion, and subsequent events.

That fact, let me repeat, has a bearing on all relative claims that is simply determinative. Examine one or two of these as, for example,

(b) His Attitude Toward the Old Testament.

This has already been examined, and is referred to again now only that what he said about it may be read in the light which breaks from the fact that the Speaker was divine. Those who challenge the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures are up against the deity of Christ.

Then there is,

(c) His Claim for His Preaching.

We are all familiar with the Kenosis controversy, and I have only one object in introducing it here; namely, to affirm that whatever that mysterious and altogether blessed revelation may point to, it certainly could never mean that he so “emptied” himself that he was liable to “mistakes about fact, even in so great a matter as the nature of the Old Testament Scriptures.” The matter of knowledge is not in view at all in the context, but Christ's willingness to become, and his becoming, the truly human Bondservant of the Father.

But even suppose we admitted (which we do not) that he was as liable to misread the Old Testament writings as were the Jews of his day, such error cannot be ascribed to his teaching, which, he expressly and often affirms, he received from his Father.

- **“My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”**
- **“As my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.”**
- **“I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.”**
- **“Even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.”**

Anyone who dares to challenge the teaching of Jesus must take the full responsibility of directly challenging the truthfulness of God. Let us now take one more step in pursuit of the evidence we want, and look at what may be called:

(d) His Cryptic Prophecy.

I refer to two verses in the upper room discourse (John 14:25; 16:13): **“The Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”**

“When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.”

It is to the three sentences in italics that I would call your attention:

He promised his disciples an aided memory as they went forth to preach the Gospel, and out of that oral Gospel our four records have come.

He promised that the Spirit would guide his disciples into all the truth; pointing to a field of truth of which he himself was the substance.

When was that promise fulfilled? Primarily when he inspired the apostles to write the epistles, each of which presents some definite aspect of “the truth” concerning Christ and Christianity; and progressively, as he, through these ages, has led believers into an ever deeper understanding of what was then written.

He promised that the Spirit would announce to them **“things to come.”** And the last book in the New Testament begins with the words: **“Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him to shew unto his servants what must shortly come to pass.”**

There is, therefore, in these three declarations a veiled promise of what we now have and know as the New Testament, distinguished in its parts as history, doctrine, and Apocalypse, and answering to the great divisions of the Old Testament history, wisdom, and prophecy.

Christ, therefore, set his imprimatur upon the whole as yet unwritten New Testament, as afterwards in resurrection life he set his seal upon the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures as we now possess them, neither more nor less. He then endorsed the whole Bible, though at that time not a line of the second part was written.

Let these things be taken together Christ's self-consciousness, his attitude Toward the Old Testament, his claim for his teaching, and his foredraft of the New Testament - and it must be felt that this is cumulative evidence, more than enough, that the New Testament writings are the Word of God.

Yet this is by no means the only evidence.

There is, in addition,

(2) The Apostolic Consciousness.

If the claims which the apostles themselves make have any meaning or value, they are conclusive evidence that their writings are Holy Scripture. One or two examples will suffice:

(a) *Paul says:* **“We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things freely given to us of God.”**

“Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (I Corinthians 2:12, 13).

If that utterance signifies anything at all, it is a definite claim to an inspiration which extends to the “words” employed in communicating divine truth; that is, to what is called verbal inspiration. Such an idea is to-day ridiculed by the disciples of the “new knowledge,” but no research in which scholars may engage, and no enlargement of the field of positive knowledge can in any way alter primary facts. Let us rejoice in the stores of information bearing on the New Testament which modern scholarship has brought to us, but when that learning presumes to modify or deny the claims of these writings for themselves, then we must part company.

But hear Paul again: **“If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord”** (I Corinthians 14:37).

The proof that one is **“a prophet, or spiritual,”** is this; that acknowledgment is made that the authority of Christ is continued in his apostle. That claim is strong, but what follows is stronger: **“But if anyone is ignorant [of this] he is ignored.”**

Professor Findlay's remark on this is, “The professor of divine knowledge who does not discern Paul's inspiration proves his ignorance; his character as prophet, or 'spiritual,' is not recognized, since he does not recognize the Apostle's character” (*Expositor's Greek Testament*, p. 916).

It is to be feared that a great deal of modern scholarship must stand condemned at that bar, and for the reason that, not content to discover facts, it has attempted to create them, and that often by way of denial of the real facts.

But Paul is firm and plain: **“When ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe”** (I Thessalonians 2:13).

He therefore distinctly asserts that when he made known the doctrines contained in his writings, he and his words were directly under the control of the Spirit of God. And what he claimed, the other apostles claimed.

(b) *Peter writes*: **“That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour”** (II Peter 3:2).

There he places the apostolic writings on a level with the Old Testament prophetic writings, of which latter he had already said:

“Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (chap. 1).

And he further classes the Pauline writings with **“the other Scriptures”** as of equal authority (II Peter 3:15, 16). Hear also the claim of:

(c) *John*. **“We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error”** (I John 4:6).

Let any man outside of the apostolic circle make such a statement as that, and he at once loses all claim to our attention and respect. But such utterances on the lips of Paul and Peter and John do not shock us, because the teaching to which they point, and for which they make the claim, bears abundant evidence that it originates not in man, but in God. This compels us to say just a word upon:

(3) *The Character of the Teaching.*

On this subject alone libraries have been written, and might be written, and only by prolonged and painstaking study can anyone do more than begin to apprehend the wealth and wonder of the apostolic teaching. Very few, if any, can go deeply into the whole of these writings, but sink a shaft where you will; you will strike veins of purest gold.

In profoundness, comprehensiveness, sublimity, and power there is nothing in any or all the literatures of the world together to compare with these writings. That no men before the apostolic period wrote like that, and that none since have written so, is evidence in itself that men of that period could not have written as they did except under the immediate direction of the Spirit of God.

The individuality of the writers is everywhere clearly marked, so well so that it has been claimed that each has his own grammar (A. Souter, though Winer is horrified at that idea); yet, this notwithstanding, they together present a body of truth which the most brilliant of men, unaided, could never have thought out of themselves; and even had they been able to do so, it would have been impossible to harmonize their teaching. But in these writings are found heavenly instruction and heavenly harmony, to be accounted for only on the hypothesis that they have a heavenly origin.

No classics are treated as the Church has from the beginning found it necessary to treat the sacred writings in order to arrive at their true meaning and value; namely, by way of examination of the teaching, sentence by sentence, and word by word. What does such a treatment imply, if not that the thought is so expressed that the whole import of it in any given place may depend upon a tense, a number, a case, or a preposition. A commentator once said in a lecture, "The whole force of the revelation in the Bible is contained just in two letters - the Greek preposition for '**in**'." That is a strong and striking pronouncement, but it was made by one who was competent to speak on the subject.

Abundant evidence of the amazing precision with which words are used everywhere and always in the New Testament may be found in any of our best Greek grammars of the New Testament, Winer's and Robertson's, to name no others. I am tempted to give a hundred illustrations at random, but must resist. This, however, let me say, that the teaching of the New Testament is unmistakably divine in its nature and origin, and is communicated in words which, not only in themselves were the best in the language to communicate such thoughts, but which became enriched by being used for such a purpose; for, as Dr. A. T. Robertson says, "The Christian spirit put a new flavor into this vernacular *koine* and lifted it to a new elevation of thought and dignity of style that enrich and glorify the language.

This new and victorious spirit, which seized the best in Jew and Greek, knew how to use the Greek language with freedom and power” (*Greek Grammar*, p. 113).

To sum up, then, the evidence that the New Testament Scriptures are the Word of God is witnessed to by the Old Testament along at least two lines:

First, that of the unity which exists between the two Testaments, a unity which is fivefold-structural, historical, prophetic, doctrinal, and spiritual;

Second, that of the range and use of the Old Testament in the New, confirming, illuminating, and amplifying.

It is also witnessed to by the New Testament itself; and the evidence is both external and internal. External evidence is found in the history of the Canon, and by a comparison of the apostolic with the sub-apostolic writings.

Internal evidence is found in the testimony of Christ, the apostolic consciousness, and in the character of the teaching.

These are by no means inclusive or exhaustive evidences, but are sufficient to furnish an ample and firm ground for faith.

Let this witness be added to what preceded, - that the Bible seems to be the Word of God; and these two added to what is to follow, that the Bible proves to be the Word of God, and for all whose judgments are not grievously warped the matter will be placed forever beyond question.

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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