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Genesis 21

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Genesis 21.

Topics.

- The LORD visited Sarah as He promised and Sarah bore Abraham a son.
- Abraham names his son Isaac who Sarah bore to him.
- Sarah laughed and said, "Everyone will laugh over me."
- Sarah tells Abraham to cast out Hagar her slave woman and her son.
- God tells Abraham through Isaac his offspring will be named.
- Abraham gives Hagar bread and water and sends her away with Ishmael.
- God heard Ishmael and the angel told Hagar He will make him a great nation.
- Hagar takes a wife for Ishmael from the land of Egypt.
- Abimelech tells Abraham to swear by God he will not deal falsely with him.
- Abraham reproves Abimelech about a well that Abimelech's servants seized.

FOR INFORMATION: concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

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The previous chapter: in chapter twenty the focus was upon Abraham's journey toward the Negeb, Kadesh, Shur and Gerar; Abraham telling Abimelech the king of Gerar that Sarah was his sister; God revealing to Abimelech that Sarah was Abraham's wife; Abimelech returning Sarah to Abraham and allowing him to dwell in the land wherever he pleased.

GENESIS 21:1-2

The LORD visited Sarah, and Sarah Bore Abraham a Son.

- **Genesis 21:1-2:** The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. ²And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.

The words, "The LORD visited Sarah as he had said," (v1), refers to God's promise to him in chapter seventeen and eighteen when he was ninety years old and Sarah was eighty-nine that Sarah would give him a son. Now we arrive at the fulfilling of this promise that Sarah would have a son. Abraham is now one hundred and Sarah is ninety (v5).

GENESIS 21:3-4

Abraham Names His Son Isaac who Sarah Bore to Him.

- **Genesis 21:3-4:** Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. ⁴And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.

Isaac: comes from the Hebrew word (*Yitschaq*), it literally means to laugh, it carries the idea of joyfully laughing out loud or laughing in mockery. The name is very apt since the following verses show that both Abraham and Sarah laughed when the LORD told them Sarah would give birth to a son.

- Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" (Genesis 17:17).
- Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" (Gen. 18:12).

Abraham circumcised Isaac when he was eight days old: (v4) in Genesis chapter seventeen it is written that all the male offspring of Abraham throughout all their generations whether born in their house or a foreigner bought with money are to be circumcised as a sign of the everlasting covenant between God and Abraham. Any male that is not circumcised is to be cast off from God's people because he has broken God's covenant. (Gen. 17:10-14). Concerning circumcision, the Bible teaches:

- Abraham took Ishmael and those born in his house and those bought with money and circumcised them on the very same day the LORD had finished talking with him. He was ninety-nine years old and Ishmael was thirteen when they were circumcised. (Gen. 17:23-27).
- No uncircumcised man was to eat the Passover to the LORD. (Exod. 12:48).
- Jesus was given his name by the angel before he was conceived in the womb and circumcised at the end of eight days. (Luke 2:21).
- The gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on uncircumcised Gentiles. (Acts 10:45).
- God will justify the circumcised and the uncircumcised by faith. (Rom. 3:30).

The gift of righteousness: is for the circumcised and the uncircumcised. Abraham received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he already had by faith while he was uncircumcised. The purpose for this was to make Abraham the father of the circumcised and the uncircumcised that walk in the faith that he had before he was circumcised so that righteousness would be counted to all people (Jews and Gentiles) by faith and not by works. (Rom. 4:9-12). Those who are circumcised should not seek to remove the marks of circumcision nor should anyone uncircumcised seek to be circumcised to be saved or after they are saved. (1 Cor. 7:18). Those who do seek salvation by being circumcised (or by keeping any other religious ceremony) are obligated to keep the whole law (Galatians 5:2-3). Striving to earn salvation by circumcision or by any other religious works annihilates the cross of Christ, and overthrows the whole message of his grace and therefore the Lord Jesus Christ is of no advantage to anyone who seeks to be saved by being circumcised or by adhering to any other religious ceremony or religious practice. Circumcision in the Old Testament made with human hands symbolised the following two things:

1. It was an outward ordinance that signified that those who were circumcised were devoted to God.
2. It outwardly signified that all sin was cut off.

The circumcision of Christ," (Col. 2:11) Circumcision in the New Testament made without human hands is called, "The circumcision of Christ," (Col. 2:11). This refers to the internal spiritual putting off the whole body of the flesh (i.e., the corrupt nature) and all the sins that flow out from it in contrast to outwardly putting off of a little skin. This inner spiritual circumcision is obtained by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and believing the Gospel. All in Christ are spiritually circumcised at their

conversion and baptism. This spiritual circumcision of the heart brings about a personal fellowship with Christ which also brings about God's forgiveness and imputed righteousness. It is a circumcision of the heart that comes about when a sinner perceives the iniquity dwelling within and all that is wrong before God is laid open; they are convinced that they fall far short of God's Holiness and the heart is cut and broken, because of the corruption that has been revealed to their mind. With this insight the sinner humbles themselves before God; repents; and by faith accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour and trusts in his righteousness to save them and not their own self-righteousness. Those who have found Christ in this manner, and find that they have a natural loathing and abhorrence toward sin and those things that are an offense to God, can rightly and truly say Christ has circumcised their heart. In conclusion the apostle Paul wrote:

- There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. (Col. 3:11).

Here Paul is shining a spotlight upon the truth that in Christ circumcision counts for nothing.

GENESIS 21:5-7

Sarah Laughed and said, "Everyone will Laugh Over Me."

- **Genesis 21:5-7:** Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me." ⁷And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

Laughter: this is no longer the laugh of delight mingled with doubt, but that of wonder and joy at the power of the LORD overcoming the impotence of the aged mother. Sarah's statement, "God has made laughter for me," carries the following three ideas:

1. Sarah was overjoyed that she had given birth to a son at ninety years of age.
2. Sarah sees the humour in a woman having a baby at such a late age.
3. Sarah understands that her friends will also joyfully see the humour of it.

It is certain if anyone had said to Sarah three or four years ago that she would be giving birth to a baby she would have laughed at the very suggestion of it, since she was past the age of bearing a child and such a thing would be impossible. This we all know is exactly what she did do even when it was the LORD who told her she would be giving birth to a son (Gen. 18:12-15). The laughter we now read of is not laughter of doubt, but laughter of overwhelming joy that such an impossible birth has been made possible by the power of God. It is certain in the moment Sarah joyfully took her new born child into her arms she remembered the following words of the LORD:

- Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you about this time next year, and you shall have a son. (Gen. 18:14).

GENESIS 21:8-9

Sarah tells Abraham to Cast out Hagar oman and Her Son.

- **Genesis 21:8-9:** And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. ⁹But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing (mocking in KJV).

The child grew and was weaned: (v8) this is not circumcision, but weaning from the breast, according to tradition and most commentators Isaac would have been two or three years old when weaned, however there is no fixed time for a mother to wean her child, it was left to her discretion. In Eastern countries and in Persia and India it is still the custom to celebrate the weaning of a child by some form of simple domestic festivity in presence of assembled family members, relatives and friends.

Sarah saw Ishmael laughing (mocking in KJV): v9) the word mocking comes from the Hebrew word (*Tsachaq*) it literally means to laugh outloud (in merriment or scorn). What exactly Ishmael was doing is not said, some accuse him of committing abominable wickedness, but this it hardly likely, for if it was, Abraham would not have felt that Sarah's request to cast Ishmael out was so extremely grievous (v11). In the New Testament the apostle Paul tells us:

- He who was born according to the flesh (Ishmael) persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit (Isaac). (Gal. 4:29).

When it is considered that Ishmael had for fourteen years been the heir, and was now in the inferior position it should not surprise us to find that he has spiteful feelings toward Isaac, especially at this banquet given in honour to him. Rather than Ishmael committing some abominable wickedness it is far more likely that he by words and gestures (subtle or otherwise) ridiculed and mocked Isaac from the time of his birth and especially at the feast made for the celebration of the weaning of Isaac. It is also very likely that Hagar had never shown Sarah much affection since she had returned, and now that her son was disinherited, her bitterness would grow even more intense toward Sarah and her son Isaac. Ishmael being under the influence of his mother for fourteen years and being the older brother most likely treated Sarah and Isaac with the same contempt Hagar had for her prior to her fleeing Sarah. It is very likely that Ishmael supported by Hagar his mother argumentatively and aggressively trouble both Sarah and Isaac by continually insisting that he was the firstborn son and as such was the rightful and lawful heir and therefore the inheritance belonged to him. Much like many Jews today insist that the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob belongs to them and not to Christians.

GENESIS 21: 10

Hagar and Her Son are Cast Out, for He will not be Heir with Isaac.

- **Genesis 21:10:** So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman (bondwoman in KJV) with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac."

Bondwoman (in KJV) comes from the Hebrew word (*'amah*) it applies to a maid-servant and to a female slave. It is certain Sarah could see that the only way to restore peace and harmony to her home was to remove Hagar and her son. She gives the task of actually doing this to Abraham. Slaves had no ownership of property so Hagar and Ishmael's separation from the family of Abraham would have involved no loss of material possessions and actually resulted in Hagar gaining her freedom from slavery. It should also be noted that their departure did not mean their exclusion from the privileges of communion with God since Ishmael had been circumcised and would have remained under the covenant with Abraham. It would only be their own voluntary rejection of God and His mercy that would cut them off from the promise of eternal life.

GENESIS 21:11

Abraham is Greatly Grieved to Cast out Ishmael.

- **Genesis 21:11:** And the thing was very displeasing (grievous in KJV) to Abraham on account of his son.

Though Abraham would have felt some sadness at telling Hagar she had to leave, he was enormously grieved at losing Ishmael. Remember he had raised Ishmael for thirteen years most likely believing he was the promised son since God had not told him who the mother of the promised child would be until one year prior to Isaac being born. It is also most likely that Abraham had during these thirteen years raised him as his only son and there is no doubt Ishmael had become very dear to him.

GENESIS 21:12

God tells Abraham through Isaac His Offspring will Be Named.

- **Genesis 21:12:** But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named

God seeing Abraham's heartfelt grief encourages and comforts him telling him that it is through Isaac that his offspring will be named and that He will also make of Ishmael a great nation. In Isaac was Abraham's seed to be called, means through his bloodline the Messiah the Christ would come. From Isaac's offspring the holy seed, the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God and the Saviour of the world was to come and through him the whole race of God's people (Jews and Gentiles Old and New Testament) would, when God's eternal plan for mankind's salvation is completed be brought together as one heavenly body with Christ as their head.

GENESIS 21:13

God will make Ishmael a Great Nation.

- **Genesis 21:13:** And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring."

God seeing Abraham's great grief in separating from Ishmael comforts him by reaffirming the following promise he had made concerning Ishmael:

- I will bless Ishmael and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. (Gen. 17:20).

This is another amazing biblical prophecy that proves that the Bible is the inspired word of God. Ishmael became a great nation, by the nation of the Turks. In Jewish writings the Turkish Empire is frequently called the kingdom of Ishmael and the Arabic language is called the Ishmaelitish language. God also promise Abraham that Ishmael's offspring would multiply exceedingly which it did through many of the Arabian nations, the Hagarenes, Saracens and Turks, all springing from him. The Ishmaelites have continued to this day in free and undiminished possession of the extensive peninsula between the Euphrates, the Straits of Suez, and the Red Sea, from which they have overspread both Northern Africa and Southern Asia. The names of the twelve princes of Ishmael are recorded in (Gen. 25:12-18). (They are Nebaioth, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah).

GENESIS 21:14

Abraham Gives Hagar Bread and Sends Her Away with Ishmael.

- **Genesis 21:14:** So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

The water bottle was probably an animal skin bottle with a strap that Hagar could throw over her shoulder. The words, "she went along with the child," are somewhat misleading to us today since today we think of a child be a very young infant whereas Ishmael is at time around fourteen or fifteen. Water is precious in the wilderness, but in hot weather a bottle is soon emptied if no springs are found on the journey.

The wilderness of Beer-sheba: a wilderness in Scripture refers to land that is not profitable for cultivation, but is still to a greater or lesser degree at various seasons green enough for pasture. The wilderness of Beer-sheba is that part of the wilderness which was adjacent to Beer-sheba, where Abraham was probably residing at this time.

GENESIS 21:15-19

The Angel of God tells Hagar, He will make Ishmael a Great Nation.

- **Genesis 21:15-19:** When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. ¹⁶Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, "Let me not look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. ¹⁷And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. ¹⁸Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation." ¹⁹Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

Hagar's water bottle has been empty for so long that Ishmael is drained of all strength, energy and vitality so much so Hagar believes he will soon die. In great heartache, grief and tearful sorrow she lays her only son under the shade of a bush.

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God hears the voice of Ishmael: (v17) meaning he heard his weak and feeble groans as life faded from him, in response the angel of God calls Hagar telling her not to fear for her son for God will make him into a great nation. Ponder for a moment, Hagar's bewilderment, her son is almost dead, she is an Egyptian slave woman of little worth in the eyes of those that were freeborn and God's angel now comes to her and renews the following promise the angel of the LORD had made to her:

- I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude. (Genesis 16:10).

It is very likely that Hagar may have thought that God had withdrawn this promise from her since she had been cast out of Abraham's household and this is why God reaffirms it to her here.

God opened Hagar's eyes: (v19) Hagar's eyes are opened and she saw a well of water, she gives Ishmael a drink, he recovers and the rest is history. The fact Hagar laid Ishmael under bushes show us that though she is in a wilderness she is in an area where there are shrubs, bushes and most likely trees which means that the opening of Sarah's eyes most likely means that God restored and sharpened her dimming and weak mind and drew her attention to a well that she had not before seen.

GENESIS 21:20-21

Hagar takes a Wife for Ishmael from the Land of Egypt.

- **Genesis 21:20-21:** And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. ²¹He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

The wilderness of Paran: (v21) there are two main wildernesses mentioned in Scripture: the Wilderness of Paran and the Wilderness of Zin. The wilderness of Paran (so called from Paran, a city in Arabia), it is such a large desert area that it includes many places. It reached from the wilderness of Shur to Mount Sinai. Sometimes it is called the desert of Sin, and sometimes the desert of Sinai (from the mountain of Sinai). The name Pharan seems to be the most general of all the names of this very long and large desert area. It was in this wilderness that the Israelites wandered in for around forty years. In the book of Numbers, it is written, "And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran." (Num. 10:12). It was in in the wilderness of Paran that Hagar and Ishmael came to after leaving Abraham and Sarah. (Gen. 21:20-21). Paran itself lies south of Palestine and is on the path the Israelites used when travelling to Egypt and returning again.

His mother took a wife for him: (Gen. 21:21 v21) Hagar being Egyptian herself (Gen. 16:1) took a wife for Ishmael, not from Canaan, but from Egypt, her own country (very likely from one of her relatives). This means that the Ishmaelite's are descends on the mother's side from the Egyptians and on the father's side descendants of Abraham. Having an Egyptian mother and an Egyptian wife would naturally strengthen any thoughts Ishmael may have had toward other gods which would naturally pass on down through his descendants.

Sarah the free woman cast out Hagar the bond woman: Paul in the New Testament wrote, "Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. (Gal. 4:22).

- He who was born according to the flesh (referring to Ishmael) persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit (referring to Isaac), so also it is now. ³⁰But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." (Gal. 4:29-30).

Paul takes these two women and makes them types and figures of the two covenants, the covenant of law and the covenant of grace, Hagar symbolising those who are under the covenant of law and Sarah symbolising those who are under the covenant of grace. In the same way that:

- Isaac the child of promise was persecuted by Ishmael the child of the flesh, the children of promise should expect to be mocked by the children of the flesh.
- Sarah to have peace and harmony in her house had to cast out Ishmael the child of the flesh, likewise, the children of promise to have peace in their house must cast out of their own bodies all that is of the flesh (meaning they must do all they can to subdue it and deny it).
- The covenant seed of Abraham were called to be a people by themselves those who belong to the covenant are called to be a separate nation amongst the world. (This does not mean they are to totally separate themselves from those of the world, but that their devotion and affections of their heart and mind are not attached to the things of this world.

GENESIS 21:22-23

Abimelech tells Abraham to Swear by God He will Not Deal Falsely.

- **Genesis 21:22-23:** At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, "God is with you in all that you do. ²³Now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my descendants or with my posterity, but as I have dealt kindly with you, so you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned."

Abimelech king of Gerar (Gen. 20:2) recognized that God's favour was with Abraham, however he did not trust him, this of course was because Abraham in the previous chapter had told Abimelech that Sarah was his wife (Gen. 20:2), because of this deception Abimelech intended to take Sarah as his wife; God seeing what Abimelech was about to do inflicted him with some kind of deadly plague and warned him that Sarah was a married woman. Abimelech no doubt in shock at hearing this immediately returned Sarah to Abraham and God healed him. (The full story is in Genesis 20:2-18).

I have dealt kindly with you: (v23), this refers to the sheep oxen, male and female servants and the thousand pieces of silver Abimelech gave to Abraham and the fact he gave Abraham permission to dwell in his land wherever he pleased. (Gen. 20:14-16). Now Abimelech asks Abraham to return to him the same kindness.

GENESIS 21:24-34

Abraham Reproves Abimelech about a Well.

- **Genesis 21:24-34:** And Abraham said, "I will swear." ²⁵When Abraham reproved Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized, ²⁶Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today." ²⁷So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. ²⁸Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart. ²⁹And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?" ³⁰He said, "These seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, that this may be a witness for me that I dug this well." ³¹Therefore that place was called Beersheba, because there both of them swore an oath. ³²So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Then Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army rose up and returned to the land of the Philistines. ³³Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. ³⁴And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines.

Beer-sheba: comes from the Hebrew word (*Be'er Sheba`*) it literally means well of an oath. The first word, "Beer" comes from the Hebrew word (*b'e'er*), it literally means a pit, especially a well. The second word "Sheba" comes from the Hebrew word (*sheba`*), it is a primitive cardinal number; seven (as the sacred full one), also seven times and by implication a week and by extension an indefinite number (i.e., seven-fold). Clearly the name Beer-sheba is alluding to the seven ewe-lambs which Abraham used for the endorsement and confirmation of the covenant between him and Abimelech and that were to act as a witness that Abraham had dug the well.

Wells: were built of stone or clay bricks they could range from five feet (about 1½m) in diameter to twelve and a half feet (about 3½m) in diameter. The depth would go as far as needed to reach spring water at the bottom and ropes and buckets would be used for drawing the water up. On some wells stone troughs would surround the top edges and be filled with water for cattle to drink from. Wells of water were scarce and extremely valuable in eastern countries, on account of the long absence of rain. To prevent disputes in future those who dug them during these early ancient times took great care to have it known to those surrounding it that they had dug it. The digging of a well often gave a certain title or name to the adjacent fields.

Abraham and Abimelech make a covenant: unbeknown to Abimelech his servants had seized a well that belonged to Abraham. Abimelech pleads his innocence to Abraham; Abraham accepts the truth that Abimelech was innocent in the matter and therefore makes a covenant with him. Both Abraham and Abimelech swore an oath that they would treat each other with kindness. (Gen. 20:23).

Then king Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army rose up and returned to the land of the Philistines.

Abraham planted a tamarisk tree (a grove in KJV): (v33) a grove can embrace a wooden pole representing a sensual goddess or cult deity; a group of plain trees, oak trees, olive trees or tamarisk trees sacred to the people of Israel or to pagan religions and cults and to a group of trees in a desert area or amongst the woods or a forest used for sacred worship or cult practices. However, the word grove in this verse comes from the Hebrew word (*'eshel*) and refers to the tamarisk tree which is a common tree in the Middle East. The tamarisk tree is an evergreen tree that can reach a height of 50 feet (about 15 metres), it grows needles rather than leaves and provides shade and a pleasant coolness. At the time of planting this tamarisk tree Abraham called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God (v33) so his reason for planting the tree was most likely to act as a memorial to the everlasting God and stand as a monument to God's faithfulness that He keeps His promises since Abraham now had the son that God promised him and Sarah; he had peace with his neighbours; he could dwell anywhere in the land that he pleased and he was abundantly prosperous.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.

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