

Dr. David Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 24, Judges 1-3

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This is Dr. David Howard in his teaching on the books of Joshua through Ruth. This is session 24, Judges 1-3, Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar.

Greetings again, Dr. David Howard, looking at the book of Judges now.

We have previously just looked at the introductory issues with the book of Judges and now we're ready to launch into a consideration of the book. So I've mentioned that you should have available for you an outline of the book of Judges that I've done and so it might help for you to have that with you to refer to. And just to remind you, I've kind of organized that outline around a theme that I see is one that kind of permeates the book, namely Israel's apostasy.

And so I've mentioned in the introductory comments that there are two introductions to the book. Chapter one verses one to two five and then two six to three six. And I would call that section the roots of Israel's apostasy that kind of unfolds and plays out through the rest of the book, but it's introduced here.

And then in chapter three, verse seven, and following to the end of 16, we have what I would see as a downward spiral to Israel's apostasy. So, here's how we will see, especially in chapters two and three, that there is this repeated cycle through the period. And the cycle is not just like this.

History is not repeating itself in identical terms, but rather it's more of a downward cycle and things get worse and worse as they go down. And sadly, it seems like the judges themselves are sometimes as much a part of the problem as the solution. So, it gets down and then you have those sordid stories at the end of the book.

That's why the book ends by saying, you know, in those days there's no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes or as they saw fit. And the subtext behind that is the flip side would be if there had been a godly king in Israel, then things would not have been so bad.

People have been doing right in the Lord's eyes. So, let's begin by looking at chapter one. And the prelude to the apostasy we find in chapter one through chapter two, verse five.

And here we have some continuing military activities after the death of Joshua. And it's kind of told in two different segments. Verses one to 21 tell us about the continuing conquests of Canaan, sort of incomplete conquests.

Then 22 to 36, and then into chapter two, tell us more about some specific tribes that were not doing this. So let's begin by looking at the first section. Chapter one, verses one to 21.

And it says that after the death of Joshua, chapter one, verse one, the people of Israel inquired the Lord saying, who shall go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them? And God said Judah shall go up. I've mentioned in the introductory comments that we don't have a clear leader designated here at the beginning of Judges as we had in the book of Joshua. And at the end of Joshua, sadly, we are told that the people of Israel continued following the Lord all the days of Joshua and the days of the elders who outlived him, but not any further.

And this begins, that portends sort of the downward spiral into chaos here. So Judah decides to take the lead in going into the land here and take Simeon, his brother, and Simeon and Judah, their territory. And in the land distribution lists in the book of Joshua, Simeon's inheritance is only of cities.

It's not, there's no border list for Simeon. And Simeon's, the tribe of Simeon seems to have been assimilated into the tribe of Judah. So those two go together and they fight against Jerusalem.

And verse eight tells us that they captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword, setting the city on fire. After this, let me, I'm sorry, let me make a couple of other comments. They had fought a king named Adonizedek, Adonibezek.

And each of these Canaanite cities had their own little king. So, the king, the kings in these, in Canaan were really more kinglets, I would say, kings of one city in the surrounding area. Not big kings like the Pharaohs in Egypt or the kings in Mesopotamia, Syria, and Babylon, but they were more localized kinglets or maybe tribal chiefs almost.

Jerusalem is mentioned in verse eight again, as I said, and if you go back into the book of Joshua, we find that Jerusalem is mentioned on the border of both Judah and Benjamin. In chapter 15, verse 63, at the end of the chapter on Judah, it says that Judah was not able to drive out the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And then in Judges chapter one, verse 21, we find here that the people of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem.

So, the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day. So there, appears to have been a city on the border. We will see later in chapter, one of the later chapters after 17, that Jerusalem was actually considered as a foreign city at this time.

It was not considered to be a Israelite city and we don't find Jerusalem actually captured until the days of David. David captures Jerusalem, and makes it his own. In those days, it was called Jebus for the Jebusites.

David, in 2nd Samuel chapter five, captures the city and makes it an Israelite city. So here, the complete destruction of Jerusalem in verse eight would appear to be sort of a temporary one because Joshua says that they had not been able to do it. We read here in verse 21 that Benjamin could not do it.

So, it's a city that was kind of in flux, a city that of course, much later in Israel's history, figured very prominently as the center of Israel's life and in a sense, the capital of God's kingdom. But here, it's not there yet. In verse 11 following, we have a story of Caleb and particularly his daughter.

Caleb offers his daughter to someone who will go up against Kiriath-sepher and capture it. And so, Othniel steps forward and does this. This actually repeats almost word for word, this little section repeats almost word for word, the little story of and his daughter in Joshua chapter 15, verses 15 to 19.

So, this is kind of a repeat excerpt from the book of Joshua as we see a couple of other passages as well. So, Caleb's daughter is bold and she says, ask for a blessing in verse 15. And also, she wants to have springs of water.

She needed to have some sources of water for her and her family to flourish. And so, Caleb does that in verse 15. After this, you have the descendants of the Kenite Moses' father-in-law who went up with the people from the city of Palms into the wilderness of Judah.

Moses' father-in-law was Jethro back in the book of Exodus and his descendants here, the Israelites and the Kenites have been friendly in the wilderness. We read about them in Numbers chapter 10. The cooperation here fulfills what words of Moses that he's spoke back in Numbers 10 when he said, we will do good to you, speaking of the Israelites to the Kenites.

And the city of Palms, here's another word for Jericho. So, they're in the valley near the Jordan River. So, Judah captures Gaza and some of the other territories.

These are in the Southwest along the Mediterranean coast. These are areas that later were known as the Philistine territory. And the Lord is with Judah, verse 19, but he was unable to completely drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had the chariots of iron.

Now might be a good time to look at a passage in Samuel about that. So, turn to 1 Samuel chapter 13. We will see and kind of get another insight into these kinds of weapons.

1 Samuel 13, verses 19 and following. This is now a few hundred years later in the time of Samuel, David, and Saul, and specifically here it's during the kingship of Saul. But 1 Samuel 13, verses 19 to 22 gives us another insight into this.

So let me read it, and make some comments. So, it says, now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel. For the Philistines said, lest the Hebrews make themselves swords or spears.

Verse 20, but every one of the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, or his sickle. And the charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares and for the mattocks and a third of the shekel for sharpening the axes and setting the goats. So, the point here is that Israel does not seem to have access to the technology of iron, and that seems to be a monopoly in the hands of the Philistines.

Their forebears, whom we read about here in the book of Judges chapter one. Last verse, verse 22, so on the day of the battle, there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people with Saul and Jonathan, but Saul and Jonathan, his son, had them. And then they go out to battle against the Philistines.

Just to make a point here, if we have the picture of the land Canaan, there's kind of a high central mountain ridge through much of the land. Jericho is down in the valley. The lowest part on earth is the Dead Sea, about 1,200 feet or so below sea level, and Jericho is in that valley, so it's below sea level.

You have to climb very steeply up to get up to Jerusalem, which would be about here, and there's that ridge, and this is the hill country, and then the Philistines lived along the coast in the southwest, and there the land was flat. And so, it makes sense to think of chariots being able to go up and down the coast very easily, but chariots could not navigate the hill country, so that gives us an insight into why the Israelites didn't have chariots, also, of course, the Philistines had this monopoly of iron weapons. So, if we come back to Joshua 1, Judges 1, the final section, the final verse of the first section, tells us about the failure of the Benjaminites to not drive out the Jebusites from Jerusalem, and so the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

We mentioned earlier in the discussion the dating of the writing of the book. By the time of David, the Jebusites were driven out, so the book as a whole, or certainly this portion of the book, would have been reflected in an earlier time before David,

which is around 1000 BC. This would be closer to maybe 1350 or somewhere in there, 300-plus years earlier.

In verses 22 and following, we have another section of the book that we might call incomplete conquests, and these incomplete conquests portend the forthcoming disaster. It begins with here the Benjaminites not driving out the Jebusites. Verses 22 to 26 show the tribes of Joseph, presumably Ephraim, Manasseh, or certainly Ephraim.

Manasseh is mentioned in verse 27, but at least Ephraim, sons of Joseph, went up against Bethel, which is a little bit north of Jerusalem. Long story there, they were able to capture Bethel, and this is the success in this section. The rest of them, there are half a dozen short little stories after this in the chapter that show failures by the people of Israel to drive out whichever inhabitants.

So, going to the rest of the chapter, verse 27, Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-Shean and its villages and all the other places around them. The Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land, end of verse 27, and they put the Canaanites to forced labor but did not drive them out. In verse 29, Ephraim did not do the same thing.

In verse 30, Zebulun did not do the same thing. Verse 31, Asher. Verse 33, Naphtali.

And verse 34, the Danites. The Amorites pressed the people of Dan back into the hill country because they didn't allow them to come down to the plain. We will see later in the book that the tribe of Dan had an inheritance near the sea, but they were forced by the Canaanite opposition to migrate to the north, and there's a more extended discussion of that later in the book.

So, this is a rather inauspicious beginning to the book of Joshua, seeing fits and starts, but mostly, I suppose you'd say fits, mostly failures to complete the job that should have been done already in the book of Joshua. So, that's not to their great credit. Chapter 2, verses 1 to 5 is a little story about the angel of the Lord who comes and speaks to the people and encourages them, repeats a lot of things that are said back in the Pentateuch and also in the book of Joshua.

So, he comes and reviews what God has done for them. Verse 1, I brought you up from the land of Egypt, brought you into the land that I swore to your fathers to give. So, the idea of the promise-keeping God we saw in Joshua.

You shall make no covenant with them, and you shall break down their altars. So, that's the instructions given, but the indictment of the angel is that you have not obeyed my voice, and so what have you done? And so, the angel of the Lord gives

them a rather dire prediction. Verse 3, promise, I guess we would say, I'm not going to drive them out before you.

There will be thorns in your side, and the gods will be a snare to you. And those are words, almost word for word, from Joshua chapter 23. If you want to look at that real quickly, Joshua 23, verse 13, says, God says, Joshua says on God's behalf, know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they will be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides, thorns in your eyes until you perish from all this good land.

That is if you don't turn to him. And by this point, in the book of Judges, it's clear that's not happening. So, the angel of the Lord reiterates those words.

And to their credit, the people responded, not with hard hearts, but with some sort of apparent softening of their hearts, repentance. They cried out and wept. They call the name of the place Bochim [Judg. 2:5], which means people who weep, weepers.

And they sacrificed there to the Lord. So, they're engaging in something that is something we can commend. But that's all it says.

We're not told then that God said, okay, everything's fine, and it'll be a lot different. So, that ends the first introduction to the book, which is kind of the prelude to all the apostasy that's ready to unfold later. In chapter 2, verse 6 now, through chapter 3, verse 6, there's kind of a second introduction to the book.

It's a different kind. In that one, the author kind of steps back and is not tracing the specifics of one tribe doing this or that. It's more very generalized.

It's kind of giving a sweeping overview of what would be happening in the period. It's not saying here's who did this and who did that or who didn't do this, who didn't do that. So, in that sense, it's kind of a more overview, a generalized preview of what's to come.

And it talks about the cycle of falling into sin and putting into slavery under the thumb of some other country and then calling out to God and then God saving them and so on. So, that's what's happening in this next section. So, it begins with a flashback to the book of Joshua, chapter 2, verses 6 to 10, which are almost word for word from Joshua chapter 24, verses 28 to 31.

In our lectures on Joshua, the book of Joshua, we talked about that being part of the death notice of Joshua. And here, this helps us in the transition to the second introduction to the book. Joshua had already died, chapter 1, verse 1. Joshua does not die again, but rather it's kind of a repetition of information that now introduces more of the generalized apostasy description.

The picture painted of Joshua here is very positive in the book of Joshua, which says that the people followed the Lord in the days of Joshua and the days of the elders who had lived him. But here, it goes a little bit beyond. In verse 10, Judges chapter 2, all that generation were also gathered to their fathers and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he'd done for Israel.

So, what we intuited, if you've seen the lectures on Joshua or look carefully at the end of Joshua, what seems to be implied, namely that Joshua's leadership sort of stopped short of designating another godly leader and Israelites continued for generations following the Lord. It appears that the commitment to God was only alive for a few years, maybe a few decades after Joshua's death. And here, it makes it much more explicit, saying that there arose another generation that did not know the Lord or the work that he'd done for Israel.

So, that again sets the stage for this unfolding, unraveling apostasy in the book of Judges. So, it is this section, verses 6 to 10, that is a repetition of what we find in Joshua 24, but it adds its own relevant details as well that help advance the storyline of the book of Judges. In verses 11 to 23, in other words, 11 to the end of the chapter, we have, it kind of unfolds in this recurring cycle.

And the cycle essentially is that Israel fell into sin and God gave them into the hand of this or that enemy, and then the people were suffering and they cried out to the Lord. The Lord raised up the next judge, saved them, and then the land had rest for X number of years. So, a mnemonic device, maybe, helps you.

As they fell into sin, they were placed under servitude. The people cried out to God in supplication. The Lord sent salvation or deliverance, and then there was Sabbath rest.

So, if you like S's, you can be reminded of this. This is kind of the cycle, then after this, it comes back to that, and it just keeps going. Now, that pattern is not echoed specifically in the way the stories are told later, but this is, in this section, that's how it's kind of presented, and we see that's the backdrop, that's the structure, that's the backbone behind the stories that followed them.

So, just to jump in at one place, after the people had called out to the Lord, remember, notice at the beginning, it just says, they went after other gods, verse 12, they abandoned the Lord, and they served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, in verse 13, so God's anger was kindled against them, he gave them their plunders, and they did not succeed. So, then they were in terrible distress, end of verse 15, and so the Lord raised up judges, verse 16, the Lord was with the judges, verse 18, and, but, verse 19, but whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their

fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them, so they were more corrupt, that kind of helps reinforce the downward spiral that we've talked about, things got worse and worse, and God just has had enough of that. The ending to this second introduction to the book is in chapter 3, verses 1 to 5, 1 to 6, sorry, and it kind of comes at it from a slightly different angle, and talks about God's doing these things and giving them in the hands of the enemies in order to test Israel.

It almost sounds like it was God who placed them under the oppression of the others, sort of these innocent Israelites and God was, you know, as a bully, kind of placing them under this, but I think the point is, I mean, it's clear in the earlier parts of the passage that it's their own sin that it's brought them to this point, and the test is that God wants to see if they're going to remain faithful or not, and consistently they keep failing the test, and that's the point of the chapter 3, verses 1 to 6. Verse 5 mentions the different peoples, so the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, and their daughters they took to themselves for wives, their daughters they gave their sons, so there's this intermarriage, and they served the gods, so clearly the back and forth and the turning away from God is what's unfolding here. We've recorded a little separate segment about the syncretism in this period, as well as other periods, and ask the question, why was it that Israel continually pursued away from the Lord, and what was the payoff, what was the reward, why did they, what was the incentive for them doing this? We talked about sex and money and peer pressure, and we find all those things behind this. We'll go through all of that again, but I urge you to review that video clip where we talk about that because it seems as if that's, there were very strong incentives or strong compassion, put it that way, for going away, and we see that happening over and over again.

So, starting in chapter 3, verse 7, we have the beginning of the cycle of all the judges, and there are a dozen judges that, whose stories are played out. We've mentioned the introduction briefly, that there are major judges and minor judges, and out of the 12 judges, we can maybe describe seven of them as major judges, and five of them as minor. The minor ones are ones in which we just learn their name, and only where they judge, maybe how many years, and that's about it, one or two verses.

The major ones are ones in which we have, you know, more of a storyline. Othniel, the first one, chapter 3, verses 7 to 11, would be one of the major judges. Now later in the book, we have some of the judges' stories told in extended chapters.

We have Gideon in chapters 6 to 8, Jephthah in chapter 11, and Samson in chapters 13 to 16, but, so Othniel only in five verses, but still he is a major judge in the sense that we have a story about him, we have battles that he engaged in, and how he saved and delivered Israel in his time, in his part of the country. One pattern that we find in the stories of these major judges is almost everyone begins with a statement

about Israel doing evil in the eyes of the Lord. So, chapter 3, verse 7, the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

Chapter 3, verse 12, the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Chapter 4, verse 1, the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Chapter 6, verse 1, the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

We see that in chapter 10, verse 6, the people who did what was evil on the side of the Lord, and we see it again in chapter 13, the same thing. So, the stories of almost every one of the major judges, we have that as the prelude, and that echoes the generalizing statements in chapter two about this is the beginning of the cycle. Then everything else flowed from that, God gave them in the hand of the next enemy.

So Othniel is the one, the first one, verse seven tells us that the people did evil, but they forgot the Lord, and they served the Baals and the Asheroth, the Asherahs. We've mentioned the religion of the Canaanites, and the highest god was El, but he was kind of a distant figure, marginal. His wife was Asherah, Baal was the main god, and his wife sometimes is seen as Asheroth, but sometimes it appears that Asherah was also his wife, and there's kind of fluidity in the flow chart and the structure of these pantheons of the ancient nations.

Maybe say a word about that here. We've mentioned earlier in some context in the Joshua lectures where there seem to be four levels of gods and goddesses in the ancient societies. The top level of the highest gods, a very small handful.

Next level of gods of the different parts of nature, the mountains, the hills, the sea, the rivers, and so on. The next part, is the gods of different locations, the Baal of Peor, and different things like that. And then the personal household family gods, like Rachel and Laban in the Book of Genesis.

Rachel steals the household gods and hides them under her, blankets, as she's leaving, and Laban comes to get them. But it seems like in ancient societies, the idea was sort of the more, the merrier. So, in the Book of Jonah, when the storm comes up and the sailors in the boat that Jonah is in are afraid, everybody calls out to his own god.

And so, if this god isn't going to answer, maybe this god would work, and so on. If one nation conquered another nation, they would assimilate the conquered people's gods and goddesses into their own systems, their own gods would be the highest gods, but these others would be a part of it, so it would multiply. There were literally dozens, even totems, kind of all, sometimes even hundreds of gods and goddesses among the nations.

The relationships were not always exactly clear, so sometimes we see Baal and Asherah, Asherah as the main characters, Asherah perhaps as the wife of Baal, but other, in the Canaanite texts we mentioned, Asherah is more the wife of Baal's father, Asherah is Baal's mother. But anyway, here, clearly, a recurring theme in the books of the Bible, Judges, Samuel, and especially Kings, is that Baal and Asherah were the focus of worship among the Israelites when they were turning away from the true god. So, we see that here.

God was angry, verse eight sold them into the hand of a king, Cushan-rishathaim, and they served him, they cried out to the Lord, so the Lord raised up Othniel. Verse nine, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he judged Israel, and he went out to war, delivered them, and so the land had rest for 40 years, and then he died. So that's in brief compass, in a capsule form, kind of the, again, the cycle that we've mentioned, and this, its kind of is fitting as the first one to launch the cycle of the 12 Judges, because that kind of captures in miniature the, what was happening for most of these, most of these times.

We'll talk about the spirit of the Lord at another time in our discussions of Judges, but the spirit of the Lord comes upon people like Othniel, Samson, and others, and that's an important feature of the Old Testament. The spirit of the Lord also comes on others, not so much for feats of strength, but more to empower speaking. So we'll see different aspects of how the spirit of the Lord is with the people.

So, in verses 12 to 30, we have the second of the Judges. His name is Ehud, and he delivered Israel from Eglon, the king of Moab. Moab is east, across the Jordan River.

It's actually east of the Dead Sea, and Ehud, or Eglon, was a standard kind of an enemy to Israel at this time. The Moabites are descended from Lot, Abram's nephew, and so there's this kind of distant relationship between sort of cousins, we might say, and it's an off-and-on relationship, as we've seen through the Pentateuch and later, but that's Ehud. The story of Ehud with Eglon, Ehud being the Israelite judge, and Eglon being the Moabite king, is one of the more graphic stories in the Bible.

One of the things that I talk about when I'm lecturing about sort of the nature of the Hebrew narrative in general is the different characteristics of the Hebrew narrative. It tells stories in a straightforward fashion. It does lots of things, but one of the things it does is it often presents things in a very realistic fashion.

You see that here; you see that certainly in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. 1 and 2 Samuel cover about 100 years in history. There are 55 chapters in those two books, and so you can imagine that books of 1 and 2 Samuel is going into great detail about David's life, Saul's life.

Sometimes it's almost a day-by-day or even hour-by-hour discussion. In contrast, for example, the books of 1 and 2 Kings are shorter. They are 47 chapters in length, and they cover about 400 years.

So, you can see that the way the author of Kings presents his stories, he paints with a much broader brush. He's much more concise and much more formulaic in discussing the various kings throughout history. But in 1 and 2 Samuel, there's great realism and great detail, and we see that played out here also in the story of Ehud and Eglon.

So, Ehud is a Benjaminite. It turns out he's left-handed, which is a critical part of the story. The Israelites are sending a tribute, verse 15, to Eglon, the king of Moab.

They're paying taxes, essentially, to him. And so, Ehud is not about to take this, and he decides to take things into his own hands, literally, and he disguises himself, dresses himself up, hides a sword under his clothes, comes, and pretends to present a tribute. But he arranges things so that when he's finished and the servants leave, he comes back into the chamber with the king, draws close to the king, and thrusts with his left hand.

Now, the king would be expecting most people to be right-handed and expecting an attack to come from the right hand, so when the left-hand attack comes, it's a surprise to the king. And I never know whether I like or I hate the description of what happens here, but in verses 21 and 22, we have great realism, and you can imagine if this was being videotaped in the modern day, a movie made of it or a television show, that the camera would focus in, and the gore, and the blood, and the guts, and so on. But verse 21 says, Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly, namely Eglon's, and the hilt went in after the blade.

The fat closed over the blade because he did not pull the sword out of the belly, and the dung came out, the refuse came out. So, it's a bloody, messy, messy scene. And I don't know what to make of that so much.

It appears that the author, in giving us that level of detail, may want us to delight in that. Certainly, it shows the downfall of the enemy of Israel. But I think also there's a sense in which the authors, when they present this kind of detail, are just kind of saying, I'm not making this up.

Here are the details. I'm not just kind of giving a generalized picture, but it really happened, and here's the support for that. So the servants didn't understand what was happening.

Their king is still locked in the room, and eventually, they go in and find him, and Ehud escapes. And so, Moab, end of verse 30. Verse 29, they killed about 10,000 Moabites, and then Moab was subdued, and the land now had rest for 80 years.

So, there's these formulas of the land having rest, 40 years, 80 years. The third judge is named Shamgar, and we read about him in only one verse. Now, depending on the scholar that you read or commentary that you look at, sometimes Shamgar is listed as one of the minor judges because he only occurs in one verse.

Others would place him as one of the major judges because you have a story of his being militarily a leader. I would place him along with the major judges, even though we only have one verse. So, it says, he was Shamgar, son of Anat, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an ox goat, and he too saved Israel.

That's all we know about him, but it's a pretty impressive feat. We don't know if it all happened at one time or over a period of days or weeks, but that's the end result. This obviously previews the stories of Samson later on, who killed more than that of the Philistines and also had a jawbone of the Adachi.

This one had an ox goat, but he saved Israel. So, a third of the judges, so the first three stories of judges are ones of the judges that are fairly positive in terms of the results, and we don't really read a whole lot of negative things about these judges. They're presented fairly well unless you are turned off by the machinations of Ehud in chapter three.

So, we'll stop here at the end of the first three chapters, and we'll continue on with the stories of Deborah and Beric later.

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