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C0805 – February 6, 2008 – Joel: A Past Day Of The Lord

We've been working with the question "What is the day of the Lord?" And we said this is a terminology that arose in the ancient near east to refer to a great warrior king who could consummate an entire military campaign in a single day. And thus, the day of the Master, the day of the Lord. So, it refers clearly to military battle. Now, when used of YHWH, the King of kings and Lord of Lords we said, by way of a working definition, that it's a special catastrophic intervention by God into history. For example the Flood and I wouldn't be surprised if this is the real root of the concept. But on a day of the Lord God typically utilizes components of His creation to carry out the judgments; it may be water, fire, demons, angels, humans, meteors, whatever He wants to get the job done. But the bottom line is that God is sovereign and the day of the Lord past and future are demonstrations of His sovereignty. That nature is bounded by His word and not mathematical equations or something intrinsic to the molecules. God controls nature and He uses nature to serve His own ends. That's why we always say the word of God is superior to any mathematical formula. Mathematical formulas are just diaries of observations over a limited domain and they can't be universalized because no one has universal observation. Tonight we're going to see a day of the Lord that involves nature, a locust plague in Israel. But before we look at that we want to ask why this terminology of day of the Lord is introduced during this period of Israel's history? It's something that once introduced carries through to the end of the Bible. Why in the 9th century BC? Never been introduced before, we have a mention of it in Obadiah 15 about 845BC and then a detailed analysis of it here in Joel about 10 years later (ca 835BC). Why is that? And the answer has to do with Israel's covenants. Remember there are two covenant keys to Israel's history, the Abrahamic Covenant on one hand and the Mosaic Covenant on the other.

KEYS TO THE TWELVE

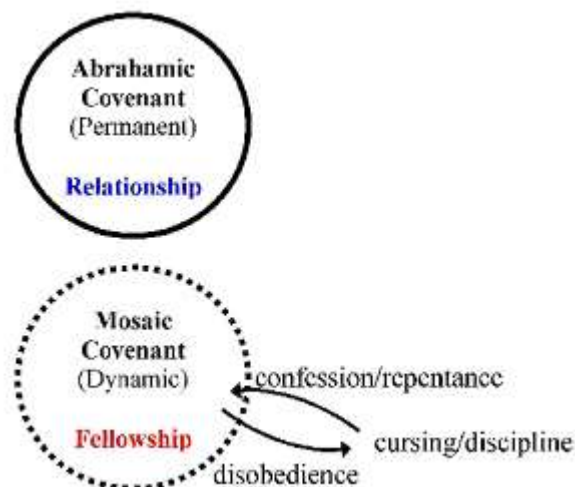
Abrahamic Covenant



Mosaic Covenant



So, if you go back to Abram, this Gentile man who God called out and made an “I will...” covenant with and Abraham had a son named Isaac who was the covenanted son and Isaac had a son named Jacob who was covenanted and he had 12 sons, all of whom were covenanted and that’s where you get the 12 tribes and they went down to Egypt for 400 years of slavery and they came out on the night of the Passover in 1445-44BC. That’s the historical event of the **Exodus** and that night is known as the birthday of the nation of Israel. She was born out of the womb of Egypt. Then they traveled for 50 days to Mt Sinai where they entered into an “if...then...” covenant with God called the Mosaic Covenant and she was disobedient so they wandered for 40 years and this is when God revealed the blessing/cursing motif in great detail in two key chapters of the OT; Lev 26 and Deut 28. These are absolutely essential to understanding what’s recorded in Scripture. Because what it is is a legal document, a record of Israel’s behavior and God’s behavior and the prophets are prosecuting attorneys for God calling the nation to repent and obey their covenanted God. Yet, despite the disobedience, even if Israel passes through all five degrees of cursing God will not cast them off. So, you have a permanency to the relationship and dynamics within the relationship, much like a father-son relationship. So, we diagrammed this out and we said you have these two circles, you have the top circle and its the Abrahamic Covenant, it signifies Israel’s permanent relationship and the parallel in the Christian life is eternal security.



All believers, whether they believe it or not have eternal security. If we are faithless He is faithful Paul says, no one can separate us from the love of Christ. Then you have the bottom circle and this is governed by the Mosaic Covenant, it signifies the dynamics of

fellowship and the parallel in the Christian life is 1 John 1:9, when the believer sins he gets out of fellowship and when he confesses he's restored to fellowship. So you don't lose the relationship you can only lose fellowship and that's the parallel with the nation of Israel. So, Israel is the national archetype of the individual Church Age believer and this includes divine discipline because you can see from the diagram that if Israel got out of fellowship then she would have to confess/repent and then God would restore her to fellowship and the same is true for the individual Church Age believer. Unfortunately too many Christians don't take seriously divine discipline, they just want to play games through the whole Christian life, become antinomian, use grace as a license to sin, "Oh, I'm going to heaven and go out and get drunk or high or commit adultery and then say 'Jesus died for that'" and move on and that's abusing grace, that's antinomianism, that would be what you get a lot of times in Methodism or believers go to the other extreme and become a legalist and this means they set out a list of pet sins, five or ten do's and don'ts and think if they can avoid those they're super-spiritual, that's what you get a lot in Baptist circles. Part of this is the believer who compares himself to every low life that ever lived and because he comes out on top he thinks he's alright. Well, none of that is spirituality. True spirituality is responding to God's grace with positive volition, appropriating the word by faith, its grace operation. Now, when we fail we come under divine discipline and the goal of God's discipline is to stimulate confession of sin according to 1 John 1:9 at which moment we are immediately restored to fellowship and we should keep moving forward at that point, studying doctrine, learning loyalty to God. But there's never a loss of justification. That's a courtroom decision and there's no double jeopardy. It's a once for all legal declaration in God's high court and no sin you can do can overturn His decision because it's based on Christ's work not your work. It's actually quite arrogant to think you can lose your justification. Anyone who thinks they can lose their justification has blown themselves all out of proportion. Who do you think you are that you can take yourself out of the Father's hand when you didn't put yourself there to begin with? So, this diagram is setting us up for Israel's history. So then you have Israel's period of **Conquest** under Joshua and that's followed by the **Judges** and finally you come to **Kingdom** and King Saul, King David and King Solomon and Israel was thriving under King David, a man after God's own heart, despite his failures the guy came under divine discipline and he got with it. And that's all God's asking for. He's not looking for sinless perfection; He already found that in Jesus Christ. What He's looking for is someone who will go positive to the word, confess, study doctrine and learn loyalty to Him. And that's what they had under David so that kingdom enjoyed divine blessing. Then you have King Solomon and he started out on a good foot, he asked the Lord for wisdom and he got the greatest measure anyone has ever gotten, he was brilliant, even beyond someone like a Leonardo DaVinci who was an engineer, an artist, a philosopher,

a mathematician, an astronomer, a multitalented genius, that was Solomon but he stopped trusting the Lord and started trusting his military alliances and brought in all these wives and the idols with them and they were having a real hey day in Israel. And God began to curse the latter reign of Solomon because of their disobedience and then came Solomon's son Rehoboam, and he was far from a genius he was a multitalented idiot. And that just shows you that you can be a genius or an idiot and be a spiritual failure. Now, since Rehoboam continued in the idolatry of his father God said "That's it, I'm done with you, I've blessed you and you've taken it all for granted and run off in the trolley's so I'm going to discipline and if you don't repent I'm going to spank you some more." And so the **Kingdom Divided** and God is disciplining Israel and both kingdoms start to go into **Kingdom Decline**. And here comes the 1st degree, 2nd degree, 3rd degree, and this is when God introduces the day of the Lord concept. And this is a prime time to introduce a new terminology because what He's saying is "Do you see this decimation? Do you see what I accomplished with the locusts? How I sent them to destroy your land? Well, just beware that a much bigger destruction is coming in the future." So, this local plague is a demonstration of God's sovereignty and it's a guarantee of a much greater day of the Lord in the future. So, that's what's going on, a past day of the Lord in chapter 1 which demonstrates God's sovereignty and guarantees a future day of the Lord of much greater proportions.

I. The Locust Invasion: A Past Day of the Lord (1:1-14)

So, in Joel 1 we have a past day of the Lord when God sent a locust invasion on Judah as an outworking of the cursings of the Mosaic Covenant in Lev 26 and Deut 28. In fact, go ahead and turn over to Deut 28. We haven't spent much time here, we've been spending time over in the Lev 26 passage but these are parallel passages, both outlining the blessings and the cursings. Deut 28:38, So, if we ask, "Why did God send a locust plague?" the answer is quite obvious. Because He said He would. God is faithful to His word. He always does what He says He will do. This is why when I counsel people I always give them the word because when the word is interpreted properly there are guarantees behind the word. I'm not making the guarantees, God is, I'm just a messenger, I'm just delivering His message. That's why I don't send you to Secular or Christian counselors. What kind of guarantees do they have? I'm a Biblical Counselor, I tell you what the Bible says because God's word, not my word, not anybody else's word, but only God's word is authoritative and sufficient. Yet time and again Christians want to hear the word of the so-called expert, "Oh, well they've got their Ph.D. and they've been working in the field for 50 years." I don't care if they have 500 degrees after their name, they're still not omniscient. They're finite so I'm much more interested in what an infinite God

says than finite man. God always does what He says He'll do, always, 100%, He's never failed to fulfill His word. Now, verse 15, we're clearly dealing with the cursings for disobedience to the word of God. And what did God say He would do in v 38? "You shall bring out much seed to the field but you will gather in little, for the locust will consume it." The *arbeh*, the locust, here's the prophecy, Joel 1 is the fulfillment. God always does what He says. He's flawlessly consistent to His word. And this locust invasion causes tremendous agricultural and economic collapse. In 1957, there was a locust invasion covered by Time magazine where they report the following, "Ominous pink clouds, as deadly as contaminated air, drifted out of war-torn Algeria into peaceful Tunisia...They were locusts, countless millions of them, spawned in areas of Algeria where the civil war had slackened normal spray control. They descended on scores of tiny oases in Tunisia's date-and-olive country. With horrified fascination Tunisians watched them swarm over the ground, in a matter of hours eat every green thing in sight, and then disappear into the hearts of the date palms, thereby dooming the trees....an estimated 70% of Tunisia's \$8,500,000 date crop had disappeared." Tremendous economic and agricultural collapse. So, now Deut 28:38 is being fulfilled and the obvious purpose of this divine plague is for Israel to repent and return to the Lord so He can bless them. But the prophet Joel is even doing something more. He's saying "Look at this local day of the Lord, this local locust invasion and just remember that God is sovereign and there's going to be a global day of the Lord in the future which is much worse."

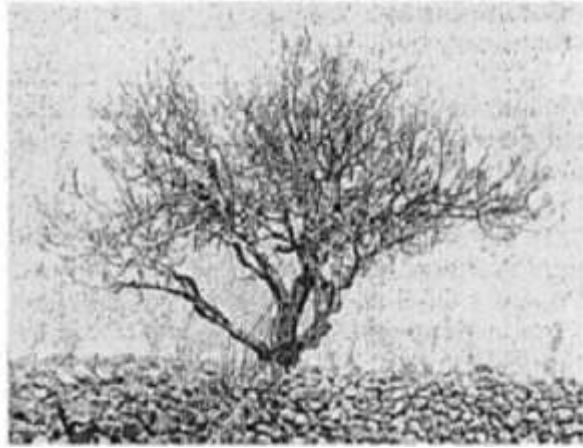
I. A Past Day of the Lord (1:1-14)

Verse 1, **The word of the LORD that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel:** Alright, this Joel, and there are many of them in Scripture, but this one is the **son of Pethuel**, we don't know anything about Pethuel except his name means "vision of God". We already know a little about **Joel**, his name is *Yah-el* which means "Yahweh is God" and that's the argument of the book. That "Yahweh is God" and every day of the Lord in this book is designed to demonstrate that Yahweh is God, that He is sovereign and therefore Israel should turn from worshipping false Gods and worship Yahweh. Every judgment phase day of the Lord is designed to get people to repent. Now, **the word of the Lord came to him** meaning he heard the literal voice of God as if you and I were talking. This is one way God revealed Himself, He audibly spoke to prophets such that if you had a tape recorder you could have captured God's voice. When the Bible says someone heard the voice of God it doesn't mean someone got a fuzzy feeling, it means they heard a voice like you're hearing my voice right now. And v 2 is what God said to Joel,

A. Summons to All Judah (1:2-4)

Hear this, O elders, And listen all inhabitants of the land. It's a call to all the people of Judah, the southern kingdom. **Has anything like this happened in your days Or in your fathers' days?** These are rhetorical questions which require a negative answer. No locust invasion had ever caused such destruction. **³Tell your sons about it, And let your sons tell their sons, And their sons the next generation.** Alright, this is the passing on of truth from father to son. It's vital that fathers pass on truth to their sons. We're having a real problem with this today and it's destroying the family, it's eating away at DI#3. The father is responsible to teach his sons. Why? It all goes back to DI#1, Responsible Dominion. Man is to have dominion and a part of that dominion is the development of a godly culture. So, you have the man and he marries a woman and together they develop a godly culture, they have children and pass that culture on to their children. If this doesn't happen it results in cultural erosion, ungodly principles become the norm. And the responsibility goes back to the father. He's the family leader. And this verse is re-enforcing the divine institutions through fatherly instruction. Don't forget this God's saying, don't forget this day, this is a visual lesson for all generations of Israel. Verse 4, **What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten; And what the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten; And what the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten.** Now, there are four Hebrew words used here of the locust, the *gazam*, the *arbeh*, the *yeleq* and the *hasil*. Some scholars claim this is four human armies under the figure of locusts that successively attacked Judah; Assyria, Babylon, Greece and Rome. Others argue they are literal locusts. I take it they are literal locusts. The locust is like a 2 inch grasshopper. There are hundreds of varieties.

Some scholars argue that the four Hebrew words refer to the four developmental stages of locusts but more likely what you have here is four waves of locusts in the invasion. So, the first wave they had the *gazam* and the *gazam* came in and did their damage and then you had the *arbeh* and the *arbeh* did some more damage and then you have the *yeleq* and the *yeleq* ate some more and finally the *hasil* and the *hasil* finished it off. It may be four different kinds of locusts that eat particular parts of the vegetation, and so, by the end of the four waves there's nothing left, its total agricultural destruction and in an agricultural society that translates into economic collapse. To get the idea of what these swarms can do these two pictures were taken 15 minutes apart before and after a locust invasion.



Now, there are hundreds of different types of locusts around the world and these invasions are well documented events even today as I read to you earlier. There are certain abnormal weather conditions that result in these invasions. First you have a drought and the eggs of the locusts remain in a state of dormancy during the drought. When the drought lifts if you have high temperatures coupled with a lot of rain this will cause an abnormally high number of the eggs to hatch and the existing locusts to start breeding. Now, if there is not an adequate food source immediately available this gets the locusts all agitated and they start to swarm and they set out looking for food, usually on the wind currents traveling up to about 100 miles a day totally stripping one patch of vegetation after another. Adult locusts, with serrated jaws rasping from side to side, can consume daily their body weight in food. Locust swarms have been known to blanket 2,000 square miles, stripping vegetation, fouling the air with excrement, and triggering epidemics as they die and rot. It has been estimated that a single swarm of locusts could eat in one day what 40,000 people eat in one year.¹ For example, in Niger, Africa in 2005 a villager testifies. It was the middle of an August afternoon. Suddenly, a black cloud came towards the village. "The sky turned black and we couldn't see the sun. The locusts came at two o'clock. They ate and when they had finished at 10 the next morning, they left." The villagers looked on dumbfounded and helpless as the locusts destroyed a year's work in a few hours. Nothing remained, not even one ear of the young millet. "We searched in all the ant hills around here. Ants stock grain and we managed to find a few hundred grams of millet here and there. We were so hungry that we began to eat leaves, at first from the giga plant, then bagga and tafasa." Finally they were obliged to eat the anza, a plant so bitter and indigestible that it has to be soaked and rinsed several times to make it minimally edible. "We had to be truly starving to try to eat it. Anza was our last chance." So, these swarms are massive; often billions and billions of insects. One recently in Israel was 10km wide; observers always claim they completely black out the sun. You can't drive a car and it impedes flying, if they hit you it's painful so people and animals flee the area not to mention they can devour an entire country's food supply in a

matter of days. Consequently these insect pests continue generating billions of dollars in crop losses around the globe. Now, the question is, “What does God have to control in order to make this happen?” These Israeli’s just suffered four successive locust invasions due to disobedience. And the lesson is that Yahweh is sovereign. He’s in control. So think about it. What does He have to control to pull this off? Number one he has to control the amount of rainfall in four different regions because you’ve got to have a drought so you get four distinct swarms that come in waves. That involves controlling global atmospheric conditions, wind patterns, humidity, barometric pressure, temperature, the whole bit. Then he’s got to alter those conditions so that you get high temperatures and rain so the larvae of these four swarms hatch. Then he has to control the wind currents so that wherever these four swarms originate they are taken to the land of Israel in successive waves. Now, that’s the point, God is sovereign, that’s how we extend our comprehension of God’s sovereignty. That’s the history lesson the fathers are to pass down to their sons, this happened in Israel and it came in four swarms, something never before seen in Israel.

Now, why four swarms? There’s an interesting hint in a couple of passages that the number four pictures a total devastation. Jer 15:3, “I will appoint over them four kinds of *doom*,” declares the LORD: “the sword to slay, the dogs to drag off, and the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy.” And Ezek 14:21, this one is real interesting because it’s so similar to the 4th seal of the Tribulation judgments in Rev 6:7-8. For thus says the Lord GOD, “How much more when I send My four severe judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts and plague to cut off man and beast from it!” Turn over to Rev 6:7-8 and note the four parallels. And keep something else in mind. Locust swarms are chosen for this decimation particularly because what they do to the land is so much like what a human army does that their invasions start to look forward to future demonic invasions in the future day of the Lord, in fact some scholars say Joel 2 looks to the demonic locust invasion of Rev 9. But here, “When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come.” I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.” So the four successive waves portray total devastation.

1. Summons to Elders (1:5-7)

Now, we want to go into v 5 where we have the first of four groups that are commanded to “wail”. God wants every branch of Jewish society to weep and wail because of what

their sin has caused. It's not just economic collapse, it goes much deeper, it gets into the first reason for agriculture, the Temple offerings. Remember the first of their fruits were to be given as offerings in the Temple but now that's cut off. So they can't draw near to God. So the first group of people are the drunks in vv 5-7, **Awake, drunkards, and weep**; Normally the drunk doesn't get out of bed, normally he laughs at what is going on around him, he doesn't care but now he will care because there's not going to be any more alcohol, **And wail, all you wine drinkers, On account of the sweet wine That is cut off from your mouth.** The **sweet wine** was the most desirable wine, The verb **wail** is *yatal* and it is used of all four groups that follow, it's the common thread. It means "to howl loudly". We find it odd as Westerners to read this kind of intense emotion but this is the common mode of mourning among Oriental peoples. Why is the **sweet wine cut off**? **'For a nation has invaded my land,** So the locust swarms are referred to as **a nation.** Some people think this is a literal nation or series of nations; Assyria, Babylon, Greece and Rome but I think it's the locusts under the figure of a nation. They have **invaded** God's **land.** But at the same time I think you have to be careful here and realize that this is a foreshadowing of the next chapter when the army of locusts shifts to human and/or demonic armies. So, there's some foreshadowing in using **nations** as a figure of the locusts. But there is no question that the locusts are like a nation's army that comes in and decimates. **Mighty and without number**; There are literally billions and billions of locusts in the swarms. **Its teeth,** that is, the locust teeth under the figure of a nation, **are the teeth of a lion, And it has the fangs of a lioness.** Their strength lies not in their size but in their numbers. And the teeth of these critters are like a saw, they rip and they tear the vegetation like a **lion** tears flesh. God designed these creatures with these teeth so they could portray the destructive force of a massive human army. **⁷It has made my vine a waste** so they destroyed the vineyards so there were no grapes to make wine. **And my fig tree splinters. It has stripped them bare and cast them away; Their branches have become white.** This is what some locusts do, they have a preference for the bark and they strip the bark off. "The vine and the fig tree were symbols of God's blessings on Israel"ⁱⁱ and so the stripping of them symbolizes God's cursings on Israel according to Deut 28:38.

2. Summons to Jerusalem (1-8-10)

The second group is not labeled but the singular feminine verbs indicate Jerusalem and her inhabitants are in view. Verse 8, **Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth For the bridegroom of her youth.** When you mourned in Israel you would put on **sackcloth** as a visual display that you were in mourning. Sackcloth was a garment of poor quality or goats hair. And due to the desolation they are to **wail like a virgin for the bridegroom**

of her youth. The Hebrew word for virgin here is *betulah* and refers to a young girl who is betrothed to a man but they have not yet married so she is still a virgin but he died before the day of marriage. The Hebrew **wail** (*yatal*) which means to “howl loudly” is used throughout the passage of intense weeping due to an appalling loss. **9The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off From the house of the LORD** because of the agricultural destruction. These two offerings were daily offered in the Temple. The **grain offering** required flour and oil (Num 28:5). The **drink offering** required wine (Exod 29:40). **The priests mourn** because they cannot carry out their daily responsibilities. **The ministers of the LORD** were the servants of the priests in the Temple. **10The field is ruined, The land mourns;** The land is personified as mourning since its produce is ruined. **For the grain is ruined, The new wine dries up, Fresh oil fails.** That which they had in store was depleted so that no offering could be made in the Temple. It was bad that they had nothing to eat but it was worse that they could not worship Yahweh.

3. Summons to Farmers (1:11-12)

Now the farmers are summoned in vv 11-12, **Be ashamed, O farmers, Wail,** there's the Hebrew word used of each group, *yatal*, again. **Wail O vinedressers, For the wheat and the barley; Because the harvest of the field is destroyed.** They've worked all year for the harvest, harvest time was a time of great joy among the nation (Ps 4:7) but there will be no harvest. **12The vine dries up And the fig tree fails; The pomegranate, the palm also, and the apple tree, All the trees of the field dry up. Indeed, rejoicing dries up From the sons of men.** These are the things which the Psalmist says make man's heart glad and sustain our souls (Ps 104:15). Yet without them famine sets in and **rejoicing dries up.** Their failure is a sign of God's cursing (Deut 7:13).

4. Summons to Priests (1:13)

Notice God's desire to see an external display to accompany their repentant hearts, **Gird yourselves with sackcloth And lament, O priests; Wail,** again *yatal*, **O ministers of the altar!** These are those directly involved in the Temple activities. **Come, spend the night in sackcloth O ministers of my God, For the grain offering and the drink offering Are withheld from the house of your God.** The destruction was so bad they had nothing to worship God with in the Temple. This all foreshadows a future time in the Tribulation when these same offerings will be cut off from the Tribulation Temple at the mid-point by the Antichrist when sacrifice and offering are cut off (Dan 9:27). There's a lot of foreshadowing here and I just want you to catch a glimpse of it.

B. Summons to All Judah (1:14)

Now, in verse 14 he returns to a summons to all Judah as he did in v 2. **Consecrate a fast, Proclaim a solemn assembly; Gather the elders *And* all the inhabitants of the land To the house of the LORD your God, And cry out to the LORD.** So they are called to have a national gathering in Jerusalem at the Temple for two purposes, to fast and to pray. These two areas almost always found together in Scripture. Everyone, man, woman and child are to come to the Temple and in genuine repentance. The fast would be required because there was no time to do anything but pray. That's how dire the situation is.

Verse 15 gives an interjectory note that looks forward to a future day of the Lord. The main point here is that there was a past day of the Lord that gives historical precedence for knowing that He will also bring a future day of the Lord that will affect the entire cosmos. The past and future day of the Lord are given to demonstrate that Yahweh is sovereign. He controls the forces of nature and uses them for His purposes as the great sovereign of the universe.

ⁱ Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen and H. Wayne House, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), Joe 1:6.

ⁱⁱ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003), Joe 1:5.

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