24/7 DISCIPLE SERIES • WEEK 1

How the Bible Works

The Mechanics of God's Word

A study by Pastor Greg Faulkenberry

24/7 Family Church • Bay County, Florida

Sunday, November 1, 2026 • 10:00 AM Worship Service • Bozeman School Cafeteria

Bring your Bible and follow along. Scripture is the NIV, written out in full.

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1. Opening

Good morning, church, and welcome! Today there's no sermon. We're going to open the Bible together, like a classroom.

Your comments are welcome anytime as we go. If a question comes to mind, write it down and turn it in at the end of class, and we'll take it up next time. Or text or email me anytime.

This is Week 1 of our four-week **24/7 Disciple Series**, and today's question is: **How does the Bible work?** Not just what it says, but how it's put together, so you can open it with confidence.

Prayer: Father, thank you for speaking to us. Open our eyes to your Word, and most of all, show us Jesus. In his name, amen.

> **READ: 2 Timothy 3:14-17 (NIV)**
>
> **Setting:** Paul's last letter, written from prison in Rome to Timothy, a young pastor in Ephesus. "Scripture" here meant what we call the Old Testament, which Timothy learned as a child.
>
> 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Two things. **Where** the Bible comes from: it is "God-breathed." And **what** it is for: to make us "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" and equip us "for every good work." So this isn't trivia. We learn how the Bible works so we can know Jesus and live for him.

> **KEY WORDS**
>
> **Scripture:** The holy writings of God; the Bible.
>
> **Inspiration:** God guided the human writers, so Scripture is "God-breathed."

> **QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF**
>
> *Is the Bible a book I own, or one that shapes me?*

Sources: Ligonier, "What Does 'Inspiration' Mean in 2 Timothy 3:16?"

2. The Big Picture

Recap: *Scripture is God-breathed and useful. Now, what is in this library?*

Hold up your Bible. It looks like one book, but it's a **library**. The word Bible comes from a Greek word meaning "books."

66 books: **39** in the Old Testament, **27** in the New. **About 40 authors**: kings, shepherds, prophets, fishermen, a tax collector, a doctor, a tentmaker. Written over **about 1,500 years**; the Old Testament alone over about 1,000 years or more.

Three languages. Most of the Old Testament is **Hebrew**. Parts of Daniel and Ezra are **Aramaic**, a sister language. The New Testament is **Greek**, the common language of the Roman world.

Forty writers, fifteen centuries, three languages, and yet **one story**. Why? Behind all the human authors is **one Author**. God used each writer's personality, and he guided them all. **One library. One Author. One story.**

Notice, too, that the Old Testament is about three-fourths of your Bible. It was Jesus' Bible. "Old" doesn't mean out of date.

> **KEY WORDS**
>
> **Old Testament:** The 39 books written before Jesus.
>
> **New Testament:** The 27 books about Jesus and his church.
>
> **Aramaic:** A language close to Hebrew; Jesus likely spoke it.

> **QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF**
>
> *How much time am I giving to read it?*

Sources: Bible Gateway, Common Questions About the Bible · Lifeway, How Is the Bible Structured?

3. Old Testament and New Testament

Recap: *66 books, one Author, one story. Now, why two Testaments?*

"Testament" means **covenant**: a binding relationship with promises. Not just "I'll do this if you do that," but "I am yours, and you are mine," like marriage. At Mount Sinai, God made a covenant with Israel through Moses. Israel broke it again and again. So God promised something new.

> **READ: Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NIV)**
>
> **Setting:** Jeremiah preached in Jerusalem around 600 BC as Babylon was about to destroy the city. Chapters 30–33 bring hope in the middle of disaster.
>
> 31 "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the
> people of Israel and with the people of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made
> with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because
> they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. 33 "This is
> the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I
> will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they
> will be my people. 34 No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another,
> 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,"
> declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no
> more."

What's new? God's law written **on hearts**. Everyone will **know** him. Sins **forgiven** and remembered no more. About 600 years later:

> **READ: Luke 22:19-20 (NIV)**
>
> **Setting:** The night before Jesus died, at the Passover meal with his disciples.
>
> 19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my
> body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." 20 In the same way, after the supper
> he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out
> for you.

Jesus takes Jeremiah's words and says the new covenant comes through his blood. We remember it every time we take communion. Then, after he rose:

READ: Luke 24:25-27 (NIV)

Setting: Easter Sunday. The risen Jesus walks with two discouraged followers on the road to Emmaus.

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets
have spoken! 26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"
27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in
all the Scriptures concerning himself.

READ: Luke 24:44-45 (NIV)

Setting: That evening, with his disciples in Jerusalem. "The Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" described the whole Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament.

44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be
fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."
45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

The big idea: **the Old Testament is promise; the New Testament is fulfillment.** The Old points forward. The New shows us who it was pointing to: Jesus. Between Malachi and Matthew, one page in your Bible, sit about 400 years.

KEY WORDS

Testament / Covenant: A binding relationship with promises, made by God with his people.

Messiah / Christ: Hebrew and Greek for "the Anointed One," the King God promised.

QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF

Do I read the Old Testament looking for Jesus?

Sources: BibleProject, Covenants · Lifeway, How Is the Bible Structured?

4. How the Books Are Arranged

***Recap:** The Old Testament is promise; the New is fulfillment. Now, how are the books arranged?*

A library has sections. Your Bible groups its books by **type**.

Old Testament: **Law, History, Poetry and Wisdom, Major Prophets, Minor Prophets**. Remember **5, 12, 5, 5, 12**.

New Testament: **Gospels, History, Paul's Letters, General Letters, Prophecy**. That's **4, 1, 13, 8, 1**.

"Major" and "minor" mean **longer** and **shorter**, not more and less important. Isaiah has 66 chapters; Obadiah has one.

The Old Testament: 39 Books

Group	Books
Law (5)	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
History (12)	Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther
Poetry and Wisdom (5)	Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs
Major Prophets (5)	Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel
Minor Prophets (12)	Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

The New Testament: 27 Books

Group	Books
Gospels (4)	Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
History (1)	Acts
Paul's Letters (13)	Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon
General Letters (8)	Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude
Prophecy (1)	Revelation

Paul's letters come in two groups: to **churches** (Romans–2 Thessalonians), then to **people** (1 Timothy–Philemon), each roughly longest to shortest. Most General Letters are named for their **writer**; Hebrews is named for its readers.

Jewish Bibles have the same Old Testament books in a different order: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. That's why Jesus said "the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

> **KEY WORDS**
>
> **Law (Torah):** The first five books, also called the Pentateuch.
>
> **Prophet:** A person who speaks God's message to God's people.
>
> **Gospel:** "Good news"; also the four books about Jesus.
>
> **Epistle:** A letter.

> **QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF**
>
> *Which part of this library have I never really explored?*

Sources: Britannica, Bible · Bible Gateway, Common Questions About the Bible

5. Book Order vs. Actual Chronology

Recap: *The books are grouped by type. Now, does book order match time order?*

Your Bible is arranged by type, **not** by date. So book order isn't always time order. Some examples.

Job sits in the middle, but its story may be set very early, around Abraham's time. We don't know for sure.

The prophets come after the history books, but most lived **during** them. Isaiah begins:

> **READ: Isaiah 1:1 (NIV)**
>
> **Setting:** The first line of Isaiah, naming the kings of Judah during his ministry, roughly the 700s BC.
>
> 1 The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Hezekiah's story is in 2 Kings 18–20, and Isaiah 36–39 tells many of the same events. Read them side by side.

After the exile. Babylon destroyed Jerusalem in **586 BC**. From **538 BC**, the people began to return. Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther (the last history books) and Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi (the last prophets) all belong to that same time.

Then came **about 400 "silent" years**, with no new Scripture, until the right moment:

> **READ: Galatians 4:4-5 (NIV)**
>
> **Setting:** Paul tells the churches in Galatia that God sent his Son at just the right time to redeem people and make them his children.
>
> 4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

Paul's letters are ordered roughly by length, not date. Romans is first because it's longest. **1 Thessalonians** or **Galatians** was probably among the earliest, around AD 50, and **James** may be early too.

Even the Exodus date is debated. One clue:

> **READ: 1 Kings 6:1 (NIV)**
>
> **Setting:** The writer dates the start of Solomon's temple by counting back to the Exodus.
>
> 1 In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites came out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the LORD.

Solomon's fourth year was about 966 BC, which points to about **1446 BC**. Others read 480 as a rounded number and suggest the **1250s BC**. Either way, God rescued his people.

A Simple Timeline (all dates approximate)

Era	Approximate date	Books
Creation and early world	Undated	Genesis 1–11
The Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph	c. 2000–1800 BC	Genesis 12–50 (Job may be set in a similar era)
Exodus and Moses	c. 1446 BC or c. 1250s BC	Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
Into the land; the Judges	After the Exodus to c. 1050 BC	Joshua, Judges, Ruth
United kingdom: Saul, David, Solomon	c. 1050–930 BC	1–2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1–11, many Psalms, Proverbs
Divided kingdom: Israel (north) and Judah (south)	c. 930–586 BC (north falls 722 BC)	1 Kings 12 – 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles; Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Jeremiah and others
Exile in Babylon	Jerusalem falls 586 BC	Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Jeremiah
Return and rebuilding	From 538 BC to c. 430 BC	Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
About 400 "silent" years	c. 430 BC to John the Baptist	No new Scripture; Greek, then Roman rule
Jesus	Born c. 6–4 BC; cross and resurrection c. AD 30–33	Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
The Church	c. AD 30–95	Acts, the letters, Revelation

Scholars differ on some dates: the Exodus, Job, Daniel, Galatians, James, Revelation, and the year of the cross.

KEY WORDS

Chronology: The order in which things happened.

Exile: When God's people were taken from their land to Babylon.

c. / BC / AD: "c." means about. BC means before Christ; AD means "in the year of our Lord."

QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF

Do I ask when and where before I ask what it means?

Sources: Britannica, Babylonian Captivity · Reformation Study Bible, note on 1 Kings 6:1

6. Chapters and Verses Came Later

Recap: *Book order isn't always time order. Now, where did chapters and verses come from?*

The original books had **no chapter or verse numbers**.

Chapters were added in the **early 1200s** by **Stephen Langton**, a Paris teacher who later became Archbishop of Canterbury. **Verses**: Jewish scribes had long marked Old Testament verses, and in **1551** printer **Robert Estienne** numbered the New Testament verses. The **Geneva Bible** of **1560** was the first English Bible with both.

Numbers are like street addresses. They help us find things. But an address isn't the neighborhood. **Numbers help us find a verse. Context tells us what it means.**

> **READ: Jeremiah 29:4-11 (NIV)**
>
> **Setting:** A letter Jeremiah sent around 597 BC to Jews already exiled in Babylon. False prophets promised a quick return; God said it would be seventy years.
>
> 4 This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile
> from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what
> they produce. 6 Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give
> your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in
> number there; do not decrease. 7 Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I
> have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will
> prosper." 8 Yes, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the
> prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you
> encourage them to have. 9 They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent
> them," declares the LORD. 10 This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are
> completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back
> to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper
> you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Verse 11 was spoken to a whole nation **in exile**, told to settle down and pray for their captors' city, with rescue seventy years away. It shows us God's heart: he is good, he keeps his promises, and he calls us to be faithful **where we are**. It is not a promise that my plans will all go well, soon.

READ: Philippians 4:10-13 (NIV)

Setting: Paul writes from prison, thanking the Philippian church for a gift and speaking about contentment.

10 I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you
were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I
am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it
is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being
content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty
or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

"All this" means being content in need or in plenty. Christ gives strength to be content and faithful, whatever comes. It's not mainly about winning the game.

KEY WORDS

Context: The setting and words around a passage: who wrote it, to whom, when, and why.

QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF

Is there a favorite verse I've never read in its context?

Sources: Tyndale House, Where Did the Bible's Chapters Come From? · Trinitarian Bible Society, The 1551 Greek New Testament

7. Genres: Reading Each Kind of Book Rightly

Recap: *Numbers help us find a verse; context tells us what it means. Now, what kind of writing is it?*

You don't read a recipe like a love letter. A kind of writing is a **genre**. All of the Bible is true and God's Word, but each genre is read in its own way. Here are eight.

History

How to read it: A true story. Ask what it shows about God; not every action is an example to copy.

READ: Ruth 1:1 (NIV)

Setting: The opening of Ruth, set in a dark, chaotic time in Israel.

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from
Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the
country of Moab.

Law

How to read it: God's covenant with Israel after he rescued them. Read it through Jesus, who fulfilled it.

> **READ: Exodus 20:1-3 (NIV)**
>
> **Setting:** Mount Sinai, just after God freed Israel from Egypt. Rescue comes before rules.
>
> [1] And God spoke all these words: [2] "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. [3] "You shall have no other gods before me.

Poetry

How to read it: Read with heart and imagination. Look for word pictures and repeated ideas. Pray it.

> **READ: Psalm 23:1 (NIV)**
>
> **Setting:** A psalm of David, a former shepherd, picturing God as his shepherd.
>
> [1] The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

Wisdom

How to read it: Wise patterns for life. Usually true, not guarantees.

> **READ: Proverbs 22:6 (NIV)**
>
> **Setting:** A short wise saying describing a general pattern, not a promise a child can never wander.
>
> [6] Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

Prophecy

How to read it: God's message through his messenger, first to his people in their time: warning, a call to return, and hope.

> **READ: Micah 6:8 (NIV)**
>
> **Setting:** Micah preached in Judah in the 700s BC to people who kept rituals but acted unjustly.
>
> [8] He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Gospel

How to read it: True, eyewitness-based accounts of Jesus, written so you will believe.

> **READ: John 20:30-31 (NIV)**
>
> **Setting:** Near the end of John's Gospel, John explains why he wrote.
>
> 30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not
> recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the
> Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Letter

How to read it: Real mail. Ask who wrote it, to whom, and why. Read the whole letter.

> **READ: Ephesians 2:8-10 (NIV)**
>
> **Setting:** Paul writes to the mostly non-Jewish church in Ephesus about how they were saved.
>
> 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it
> is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's
> handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for
> us to do.

Apocalyptic

How to read it: Visions and symbols. Don't get lost in details; God wins and makes all things new.

> **READ: Revelation 21:3-4 (NIV)**
>
> **Setting:** The apostle John, exiled on Patmos, sees the new heaven and new earth.
>
> 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now
> among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself
> will be with them and be their God. 4 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will
> be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed
> away."

> **KEY WORDS**
>
> **Genre:** A kind of writing, like history, poetry, or letters.
>
> **Apocalyptic:** From a Greek word meaning "unveiling"; visions and symbols that reveal God's plan.

> **QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF**
>
> *Have I been reading every part of the Bible the same way?*

Sources: Fee & Stuart, How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth (Zondervan) · BibleProject, How to Read the Bible

8. How We Got the Bible

Recap: *Each genre is read in its own way. Now, how did we get the Bible?*

God spoke and people wrote, in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. **Scribes copied** by hand. Those copies are **manuscripts**.

In **1947**, a shepherd near the Dead Sea found ancient scrolls in a cave: the **Dead Sea Scrolls**. One is the **Great Isaiah Scroll**, all 66 chapters, copied around **125 BC**. It's about 1,000 years older than the oldest complete Hebrew copies we had before, and remarkably the same. It includes these words:

> **READ: Isaiah 40:6-8 (NIV)**
>
> **Setting:** Isaiah 40 begins a section of comfort for God's people, looking ahead to the end of exile.
>
> 6 A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All people are like grass, and all
> their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. 7 The grass withers and the flowers fall,
> because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. 8 The grass
> withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

For the New Testament we have **more than 5,000** Greek manuscripts, far more than any other ancient book. Early on, the Old Testament was also translated into Greek, the **Septuagint**, which the early church used widely.

The church recognized the canon. It didn't invent the Bible; it recognized the books God had given. Jesus affirmed the Hebrew Scriptures. For the New Testament the church asked: Is it from an apostle or close companion? Does it teach the true faith? Is it trusted by churches everywhere? By AD 367, Athanasius listed our 27 New Testament books.

Translators translated, so we can read it. We use the **NIV** because it's translated directly from the original languages by a team of scholars, aiming to be both **accurate** and **readable**. First published in full in 1978, updated in 2011.

KEY WORDS

Manuscript: A hand-written copy.

Septuagint: The ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament.

Canon: From "measuring rod"; the list of books recognized as Scripture.

Translation: Putting words into another language.

QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF

Why would I leave God's Word on the shelf?

Sources: Israel Museum, The Great Isaiah Scroll · Lifeway, How Did We Get the Bible?

9. One Big Story

Recap: *God preserved his Word carefully. Now, step back and see the whole.*

Step back and see the whole: **Creation**, a good world. **Fall**, sin and death come in. **Israel**, a family chosen to bless the world. **Christ**, who dies and rises. **Church**, God's people with the good news. That's us. **New Creation**, all things made new. And the thread through it all is **Jesus**.

READ: John 5:39-40 (NIV)

Setting: Jesus had healed a man on the Sabbath in Jerusalem. Religious leaders who knew the Scriptures well opposed him.

39 You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal
life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me to
have life.

They knew the parts but would not come to Jesus. The goal isn't more facts. **The goal is to come to Jesus and have life.**

QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF

Am I studying the Bible, or coming to Jesus through it?

Sources: BibleProject, The Story of the Bible

10. Practical Tools and Close

Recap: *One story, with Jesus at the center. Now, some tools for this week.*

Reading a reference. John 3:16 means the book of **John**, chapter **3**, verse **16**.

> **READ: John 3:16 (NIV)**
>
> **Setting:** From John 3, which begins with Jesus' night conversation with Nicodemus, a religious leader.
>
> [16] For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

A dash means a range: Luke 24:44-45 is verses 44 through 45. **1 John** is a different book from **John**.

Cross-references, the small letters in the text, point to related verses. **Footnotes** explain other translations or manuscript notes. Notes are helpful comments; the text is God's Word.

A simple plan: read **Mark**, one chapter a day. Ask: What does this show me about God? About people? How should I respond? Then pray.

> **READ: Psalm 119:105 (NIV)**
>
> **Setting:** Psalm 119, the Bible's longest chapter, is a poem praising God's word. An ancient oil lamp lit just the next few steps.
>
> [105] Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

God may not show you the whole road, but his Word lights the next step. **This week, open your Bible every day.** Start with Mark 1, and join us Wednesday at 6 PM on Zoom for Week 2. Watch your texts and email for the Zoom link.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your Word. Make it a lamp for our feet this week. Give us hunger to read it, wisdom to understand it, and courage to live it. Draw us closer to Jesus. In his name, amen.

> **QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF**
>
> *What will I read tomorrow morning?*

Sources: Bible Gateway, Common Questions About the Bible

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