The Feast of Pentecost



Jesus Christ is building His Church of firstfruits who will live by the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish all the good things the faith of Christ prompts us to do!

by Robert Curry

Are You Ready for Pentecost?

his will be my 53nd. For 2023 it will be Sunday, May 28. Pentecost is God's third Holy Day out of seven which His people are commanded to keep and will be delighted to do so since it's a special privilege to be a firstfruit (Leviticus 23).

So far none has been as earth-shaking monumental as:

- ➤ the one at Mt. Sinai where tradition says the preincarnate Jesus Christ scared the daylights out of the Israelites with His glory and majesty, and He gave them His 10 Commandments. They cried out to have Moses tell them! Israel entered into the Old Covenant marriage with YHWH (Jeremiah 3:14).
- ➤ Or surely the most important one ever on June 18, A.D. 31 when Jesus Christ sent tongues of fire on His 120 followers. This was talking about supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit so they could communicate with the different languages in the crowd. It wasn't gibberish! The miracle was in the hearing where all people heard the disciples talking in their language.

At this event Jesus started His Church He promised to build (Matthew 16:18) and then multiplied them exponentially with 3,000 baptisms in one day (Acts 2:41). Oh, that we could see such baptisms!

Pentecost celebrates the coming and giving of the Holy Spirit, in a whole new thrust beyond the way it was given to very few selected individuals in the Old Testament. Since the epochal Pentecost in Acts 2, individually we receive the Holy Spirit upon baptism by immersion and then the laying on of

hands by one of God's ministers asking God to grant His Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, 8:16-17). If you haven't yet done this, this is easily the most important milestone you need to seek!

If you have any doubts about whether your baptism was valid, or you didn't have hands laid on you to receive the Holy Spirit, you should counsel with one of God's ministers.

You cannot just decide to join the spiritual Church of God; **receiving the Holy Spirit puts you into the one spiritual Body of Jesus Christ**. This is when your name is written in the Book of Life and the angels sing for joy (Luke 15:7). You enter into the New Covenant marriage with Jesus—espoused to marry Him at the first and better resurrection (Hebrews 11:35). We'd better be passionately engaged in this life-changing commitment!

A profound message of Pentecost is that God the Master Timer is not trying to convert or save most of the world now. God is not in a losing battle with the devil to save souls before time runs out. The Father and Jesus are calling firstfruits and preparing them for future servant leadership in Jesus' millennial administration as His Bride.

Ponder the fact that after all that Jesus did on earth for 3-1/2 years, there were only about 120 disciples (Acts 1:15) when Pentecost arrived in Acts 2. Revelation 14:1-5 says the number of firstfruits will total 144,000. If an estimate of all who have lived is anywhere close to 140 million, that makes the firstfruits only one out of a million! Many argue that's a symbolic number, but I say the God who knows the number of hairs on our head and the sand in the sea knows how to count!

That's where you come in

If you understand and are convicted by what is written here, then God is calling you NOW to be in His early crew. Are you choosing to be faithful (Revelation 17:14)? What could be more important in our lives?

Pentecost is known by four names that bring out its prolific meanings [Feast of Firstfruits (Leviticus 23:10); Feast of Weeks (*Shavuot* in Hebrew) (Exodus 34:22); Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:16); and Pentecost (*Pentekostos* in Greek), "50th"].

Pentecost weekend puts God's people to the test. The whole weekend is holy time because it begins with the weekly Sabbath (May 27, 2023) and then progresses right on into Pentecost starting at sundown Saturday night and lasts until the sunset Sunday night. It's a double Sabbath! A whole weekend of no work! Of not choosing to do our own thoughts, pleasures and ways (Isaiah 58:13-14). But seeing what a delight God's days are! Such a weekend of services for those blessed to be able to fellowship in person with like-minded brothers and sisters of Christ (Hebrews 10:23-25). It's a test that can be physically demanding but oh so spiritually rewarding!

Next best will be to worship online which you can do at this link: http://www.ucg.org and then choose "webcast." The Sabbath service is scheduled for May 27 at 2:30 p.m. EDT, and the Pentecost service on Sunday, May 28 at 2:30 p.m. EDT.

Friday is the preparation day for a weekly Sabbath; now we are already preparing for this annual double Sabbath!

Connections Between Pentecost & the Book of Ruth

Testament—one of the five Megilloth festival scrolls that are read in synagogues at feast times. It wasn't a matter of "What book shall we read?" and Ruth was pulled out of a hat. Ruth has many obvious connections with this important Holy Day.



Firstfruits—Ruth and her mother Naomi arrived in Bethlehem during the barley harvest which began after the Wave Sheaf offering on the Sunday during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Ruth gleaned barley and then

wheat which ended at Pentecost (Ruth 2:23).

This is why one name for Pentecost is

the Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:16)

It's interesting that the instructions in Leviticus 23:22 about Pentecost tell landowners to leave the corners of their fields for the poor and strangers to glean. This makes showing kindness and love an obvious emphasis for observing Pentecost. Boaz (type of Jesus Christ) showed special attention and giving for Ruth (type of the Church) the way Christ loves us (Ephesians 5:25).

We learn God's plan of salvation by keeping His Holy Days

Let's not beat around the bush—if we don't observe God's Holy Days, we won't understand His plan of salvation. Does this

sound overstated? It needs to shock us into urgently studying the Holy Days including Pentecost—and just start keeping them because understanding will develop over time (Psalm 111:10). The physical harvests in Israel picture how and especially *when* God the Master Timer is harvesting His people spiritually for His Family and Kingdom.

The spring harvest is the smaller harvest, first of barley, then wheat.

This is why an important name for Pentecost is

> the Feast of Firstfruits

Keeping Pentecost provides the astounding revelation that God the Father is calling (John 6:44) only a few in the years up to the return of His Son who are being trained to serve as kings, priests, judges, mayors and teachers in His Millennium on Earth and in the ensuing Great White Throne Judgment. Those events are pictured by the fall Feasts when the big harvest of billions of humans will occur.

So we see from the Bible and its Hall of Faith (Hebrews 11) that God selected only Abel, Enoch and Noah up until the Flood. The New Testament says God has a "little flock" (Luke 12:32) on the narrow and difficult path that few find at this time (Matthew 7:14).

Jesus Christ is building His Church, which comprises people who are "firstfruits" in the spiritual harvest of mankind, having and growing in the "firstfruits of the Spirit" (Exodus 23:16; Romans 8:23; James 1:18).

I hope God has called you and that you are making your calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10)!

Pentecost is also called

> the Feast of Weeks—seven of them (Exodus 34:22)

It seems that these seven weeks compare to the seven eras of the Church in Revelation 2 and 3, stretching from Jesus building His Church, living in them through His Spirit, and urging them to overcome, until they are ready to be harvested at His return.

It seems that the 50th day equates with the year of Jubilee which begins every 50 years on a Day of Atonement. All indications are that Jesus' first year of His millennial reign will be a Jubilee year when He will "proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants" and "each of you shall return to his possession" (Leviticus 25:9-10). It's fitting that nobody knows when the next Jubilee year will be any more than when Christ will return (Matthew 24:36)!

Pentecost means "count 50"

We can learn from

- ♦ the tests Israel faced during the 50 days from leaving Egypt to the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai.
- ♦ the appearances that transpired during the 50 days from Jesus' resurrection and acceptance by the Father until Acts 2.
- the courtship in Ruth which covered 50 days of harvesting.

Become God's people—When Israel accepted the Old Covenant, they became God's people. Ruth chose to accept the laws of God and so became part of God's people. "Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God" (Ruth 1:16). Orpah obeyed Naomi and returned to her paganism—and who remembers her! My second-oldest daughter can be thankful she wasn't named Heather Orpah!

The surprise is that a Moabite is grafted into Israel and into the line of David and Jesus! (Matthew 1:5). Ruth becomes the great grandmother of David. Well, God had already welcomed Rahab the prostitute! It would seem like Deuteronomy 23:3-6 would have forbidden Ruth—and even David from becoming king since he would come before 10 generations would pass. The Jewish Midrash implies that the Deuteronomy prohibition related only

to women who wed Moabite males.

Marriage—Boaz and Ruth marry as a type of the coming marriage of Jesus Christ to His Church (Revelation 19:7). That marriage will be for all including gentiles who are grafted into the spiritual Bride.

Kinsman/Redeemer—A major theme in Ruth is kinsmanredeemer, based on Deuteroomy 25:5-10 about Levirate Marriage. The Hebrew word *goel* means "one who redeems" and is used 13 times in the book of Ruth.

Naomi guided Ruth to put a move on Boaz—who was sleeping in his work clothes with a coat for a blanket that Ruth pulled over herself as a sign she wanted to be under his "wings." There was nothing indecent about Ruth's proposal! It aroused the older Boaz to realize that Ruth wasn't set on a younger man, and it was time for him to redeem and marry! But there was a closer kinsman who had the first right of refusal and could have closed the deal on Boaz! So all parties controlled themselves and waited to see what God was working out. God had been doing that all along! Ruth didn't just "happen" to choose Boaz' field (Ruth 2:3).

About a mile east of Bethlehem is a field called "Field of Boaz" and adjacent is the "Shepherd's Field" where tradition says an angel announced the birth of Jesus. The place of their courtship follows down the line to Christ! Who but God could work that out!

Jesus Christ is our Redeemer! (1 Peter 1:18-19)

A kinsman-redeemer had to:

- be a blood brother—Jesus became our brother by His virgin birth.
- ♦ have money to purchase the inheritance—Jesus bought us with a price of His own blood (1 Corinthians 6:20).
- be willing—Jesus laid down His life of His own free will (John 10:18).

• marry the redeemed—Jesus will marry His Bride.

None of the good blessings would have come *for Ruth* if she hadn't been a hard worker of admirable character. It is estimated that Ruth gleaned about 31 pounds of barley per day!

Or *for Boaz*—if he wasn't a godly man who kept God's laws, he would've, as the joke goes, remained ruthless! Every day he greeted his workers: "God with you" [the word "be" is in italics—not in the Hebrew (Ruth 2:4)], an interesting tie-in with God's name of Immanuel ("God with us").

Boaz prayed that God would reward Ruth, and he got to be the answer to his own prayer (v. 12). Like when Joseph was chosen to be the administrator to rescue Egypt from the coming famine after he told Pharoah what needed to be done!

"The reputation we earn opens—or closes—the door of opportunity"—*Bible Reader's Companion*.

"The story is set in the difficult days of the Judges, which were marred by appalling spiritual, moral, and social decline. Yet, as the story unfolds, we discover that within the corrupt society there were still true believers: simple folk who tried honestly to love and serve God, and to live generously with their neighbors"—Lawrence Richards, *The Bible Reader's Companion*, 1991.

Are we taking advantage of our opportunity to be part of God's firstfruits harvest as we keep Pentecost? Are we working hard in God's fields which are "white for harvest" (John 4:35) to build the Family of God?

Counting to Pentecost

he Bible says to count 50 days "from the day after the Sabbath" (Leviticus 23:15) that falls during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Since so few actually keep the Days of Unleavened Bread, it's hardly surprising that few would concern themselves with the Wave Sheaf Offering and counting when Pentecost should take place.

And even the Church of God has struggled to get it right. The Church was keeping it on a Monday for years until it was learned in 1974 that the Hebrew word for "from" [min] means to count inclusively that first day rather than start counting from the next day after, as English would direct. So now we keep it on a Sunday and get to joke about "what are we doing worshiping on a Sunday!" since we rarely do that as Sabbath-keepers.

On top of that, "the day after the Sabbath that falls" easily leads to confusion about whether you're talking about "the Sabbath that falls" or "the day after [Sunday] that falls." In the years when the Passover falls on a Sabbath, that could mean a difference of a week's time!

To add to the confusion, the Jews think the word Sabbath refers not to the weekly Sabbath but to the High-Day Sabbath, and that day is always the same day each year (Nisan 15), making Pentecost Sivan 6. Result for them: no need to count! You can pretend to count it, but why bother if you always end up on the same day!

The Church of God was led by God to see that the Hebrew *Ha Shabbat* always refers to the weekly Sabbath, not the High-Day Sabbath.

I have no idea why the Jews get their own Hebrew wrong! They are always doing something completely different for the Holy Days than the Bible teaches!

That's a good reason why God's Holy Days are not Jewish!

Some years for those who don't count it as the Bible commands, the correct date won't "fully come" (Acts 2:1 New King James Version). They would miss out assembling!

The key is the Sunday after the weekly Sabbath that falls during the Days of Unleavened Bread because that is the day for the Wave Sheaf Offering that pictures the resurrected Jesus Christ ascending to the Father's throne to be presented to Him---on the Sunday morning, after He came out of the grave just before sundown the Saturday before to complete the three days and three nights in the grave that He promised as the only sign of His Messiahship (Matthew 12:40). Right there, you can see lots of room for confusion!

The result is the "Christian" holiday of Pentecost is celebrated 50 days after Easter Day, counting inclusively (including both the first and last days), seven weeks after Easter Day. It should be intuitive that if you're counting from a pagan celebration, you should count on the fact that you should rethink what you are doing!

So, to get it right and end all the confusion. Pentecost is counted 50 days from the Sunday that falls during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

OK, but who needs to count it! I carry a card in my wallet that projects out all the proper days of Pentecost for the next five years. It's calculated for years to come until Christ comes and new cards are printed! So it appears I have no need to personally count it.

Or do IP

God says we should count it.

Firstfruits need to be numbering our days as sojourners here on Earth as we redeem the time and diligently seek the first resurrection into the Family and Kingdom of God for eternity. And knowing exactly how many days until Pentecost, this year on May 28, surely helps us be more eager and ready for it!

It's exciting when God grants new understanding to His people!

Intriguing Details

he entire span of seven weeks of the Feast of Weeks begins and ends with a firstfruits offering. That's one reason why Pentecost is also called the Feast of Firstfruits.

Two firstfruits offerings

The Wave Sheaf Offering (Leviticus 23:9-14) begins the 50-day countdown to Pentecost. It was an offering of firstfruits of the barley crop to God. Seven weeks later, on Pentecost, there would be a Wave Loaves Offering of the firstfruits from the wheat crop. I'm not a farmer, or particularly adroit about agriculture, and I could never remember which offering was barley and which wheat. My new memory hack: B comes before W.

Both offerings point to a greater harvest to come, so Pentecost is also called the Feast of Harvest.

These two wave offerings are similar but unique.

The Scofield Study Bible III [page 183] comments, "The Feast of Firstfruits ... is typical of resurrection—first, of Christ, then of those who are His at His coming (1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)."

English translations call both offerings "firstfruits." However, Hebrew makes an important distinction between the two. For the barley offering, the Hebrew word is *reyshith*, meaning "the first/chief/or best of the firstfruits. For the wheat offering, the Hebrew word is *bikkur*, meaning "firstfruits."

The *reyshith* Wave Sheaf Offering points to Jesus Christ, the first of the firstfruits. He is the only one—so far—who has gone through the whole process of a flesh-and-blood human being becoming God. Hebrews 2:10 calls Jesus Christ our captain, pioneer, trailblazer—the firstborn of many sons and daughters to be glorified! (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). "First of the firstfruits" tells us there will be more firstfruits! And then other fruits!

The Wave Sheaf Offering during the Days of Unleavened Bread

The timing of the Wave Sheaf ceremony pointed forward to Christ actually experiencing what it pictured. In A.D. 31 He left His grave exactly three days and three nights later as He promised—the only sign of His messiahship (Matthew 12:40), on Saturday night just before sunset.

"On the day after the Sabbath, the priest will lift it up before the Lord so it may be accepted on your behalf" (Leviticus 23:11, New Living Translation).

The Wave Sheaf offering took place at the time of the morning sacrifice (9 a.m.) and pictured the offering being accepted by God at His throne. Mary Magdalene came to the empty tomb "while it was still dark." The resurrected Jesus appeared to her but told her not to touch Him because He had not yet ascended to His Father (John 20:17). Later that Sunday he appeared to her and the disciples and showed them His wounds. This occurred on the Sunday during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

The Wave Sheaf Offering foretells the precise day of the week Christ would return to the Father more than 1,400 years before that day actually occurred! Just like the 70 Weeks Prophecy foretold that Christ would be cut off in the middle of the week, and He was crucified on Wednesday, April 25, in A.D. 31.

The Wave Loaves Offering during Pentecost

The bikkur Wave Loaves Offering foreshadows God's harvest of firstfruits from all humanity ... the Church of God. It marks the end of the firstfruits harvest season.

"The priest will lift up the two lambs as a special offering to the Lord, together with the loaves representing the first of our crops. These offering, which are holy to the Lord, belong to the priests" (Leviticus 23:20, NLT).

The two wave loaves have leaven, even though grain offerings for the altar were to be unleavened (Leviticus 2:1-5). However, there is no contradiction here because none of this leavened bread is placed on the altar. After it is waived before God—not left to right but lifted up and down—it's given to the priests to eat along with the lambs which are fellowship offerings.

Bible students have long guessed that perhaps the two loaves represent Old and New Testament, Old and New Covenant, Israelite and Gentile, male and female. It's interesting that the Bible is one book with one way of salvation, and "there is neither Jew nor Greek ... slave nor free ... male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

A newer thought is that the two loaves of leavened bread along with the two lamb quarters might have been bulky and heavy enough to require the priest to make two wavings, paralleling the resurrection of the dead followed by those alive. Perhaps Paul might have been thinking of this when he wrote that we are "raised with Christ" (Colossians 3:1).

It's interesting that while the two loaves are leavened, representing that humans will sin right up until they are finally changed from flesh and human nature (1 John 1:10), the Work

of the Church is likened positively to God's "woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened" (Luke 13:21).

Offerings of thanksgiving for crops to come!

Both of these firstfruit offerings were offerings of thanksgiving to God. But not like when we ask a blessing on a meal we are about to eat. Both of these firstfruit offerings ask God to extend His blessings to the whole crops to come. The setting apart of a small portion has a sanctifying effect on the whole crops.

God told Abraham that "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). All nations would be blessed through His seed {Christ] Galatians 3:16). And physical Israel was to be a blessing to all the other nations on earth. Where is the visionary Arab leader who would just take God up on His promise to bless those who bless Israel!

Spiritual Israel [the Church of God—Galatians 6:16) has the responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 24:14, 28:18-20).

Some think they don't need to be a part of a church. Just before Jesus Christ began His New Testament Church on Pentecost, He had promised "you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Church of God leaders have long realized that we're not in this just for our own salvation but for the crop that is going to be harvested. Pentecost is about God providing us with the power of the Holy Spirit to complete our mission.

My new favorite verse: "May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith [of Christ] prompts you to do" (2 Thessalonians 1:11, New Living Translation).

Trumpets & whirlwinds

Numbers 10:10 indicates that trumpets are blown on all of the Holy Days. But they are two silver trumpets rather than a ram's horn shofar. A shofar blasted on Pentecost when the 10 Commandments were given at Mt. Sinai so loud it made the people tremble! (Exodus 19:16, Hebrews 12:19). However, appearing to mute the issue, Acts 2 mentions no trumpet being blown at this most famous Pentecost ever.

Both epoch Pentecosts of Exodus 19 and Acts 2 involved whirlwinds

Ezekiel 1 describes YHWH coming as a whirlwind in His portable throne, and this passage is read in synagogues on Pentecost. So it's very interesting that Isaiah 66:15 and Zechariah 9:14 prophesy that whirlwinds will accompany Jesus Christ's return. But Isaiah says He is coming in anger to judge and Zechariah says He will "defend ... devour and subdue."

God's thoughts and plans are higher than our best logical deductions! (Isaiah 55:9). Human reasoning is fingered as one of the four enemies of faith [along with doubt, fear and worry].

At the least, Pentecost pictures the firstfruits from the seven Church eras who keep the Law of God given at Mt. Sinai on Pentecost through the power of God living in them through His Holy Spirit given in Acts 2 on Pentecost, and they are trained and prepared to be accepted by the Father to become His children in the first resurrection at the return of Christ. The firstfruits are sowing a harvest now, doing the Work of preaching the gospel to all nations and preparing a people for

God.

Amos 3:7 says God will show His Church what we need to know when the time comes. Let's be there and find out!

If Only We Could Be in One Accord by Pentecost

n A.D. 31, "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1). Some translations say "in one accord."



This makes for a great Bible joke. Remember the days when the craze was to see who could stuff the most bodies into a VW? Well, here there were 120 in one Accord!

It truly would be a modern greater miracle if all of God's firstfruits could

unite together in one accord spiritually (1 Corinthians 1:10).

We keep the Passover "proclaiming the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Jesus was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8) for the sins of all humans (Romans 6:23). We are all united in the need to be forgiven of our sins. If only we could unite in loving each other!

We keep the seven Days of Unleavened Bread where we put out leaven, representing sin, through the power of God the Father and Jesus Christ our Unleavened Bread of Life living in us. Dream on if any of us think we're actually sinless now! (1 John 1:8). Yet God wants us to be living under His imputed righteousness, living under true grace as the Father and Son direct! All humans are brothers and sisters in God's Family and Kingdom to be if we respond when our calling comes!

Pentecost ties all that together

The world faces so many problems that require spiritual solutions, but the Holy Spirit has only been given so far to the firstfruits chosen by God. That's why there's so much suffering! Mankind exercises its free moral agency to sin.

God's law is spiritual and it shows us what sin is so we can avoid it and be forgiven of it. The Bible says we would not know what sin is without the law showing us.

But we can never keep God's law perfectly on our own human power. Nothing we do can ever earn forgiveness or salvation.

Pentecost promotes the unity we need. One calling. One body. One Spirit. One hope. One Lord. One faith. One baptism. One God and Father of us all (Ephesians 4:1-6).

Let's choose to be "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (verse 3). Let's "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" (verse 1). We dare not neglect our eternal opportunity. Nothing else in this life really matters.

Let's get ready for Pentecost. Squeeze in!

What If We Experience a Pentecost Like the Ones in the Bible!

We will!

Pentecost May 28, 2023

What will this glorious Holy Day be like for us? In my 53 years of keeping this special Holy Day, we've never experienced supernatural heavenly signs. Likely the only tongues of fire will be the spirited fellowshipping!

Today God's New Testament Church has taken the gospel around the world, and God has generally provided worship in the appropriate languages needed. I have heard of rare instances where speaking in tongues occurred because it was needed.

Hopefully,

- we will say like the Israelites: "We will do everything the Lord has commanded" (Exodus 19:8).
- we will choose to listen to God's voice as He speaks through His ministers in services!
- our hearts will be pierced in the Pentecost services like the crowds were by Peter's first inspired sermon for the New Testament Church of God.
- we'll respond: "what should we do?"

With the power of the Holy Spirit living in us, we can keep the 10 Commandments that Jesus Himself gave on a long-ago Pentecost. "If someone claims, 'I know God,' but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth" (1 John 2:3).

God has given satan rulership of the world for now (2 Corinthians 4:4) until he will be removed, likely on the first Day of Atonement of Christ's millennial reign (Revelation 20:1-3). While satan is bound, most people will at last have their opportunity for salvation during the Millennium and Great White Throne Judgment pictured by the fall Holy Days—with us firstfruits who had to resist him assisting Jesus Christ in teaching them! That's a big reason the firstborn get a double portion (Deuteronomy 21:17)!

But what separates His firstfruits who are Philadelphian from those who are lukewarm Laodicean is their passion for doing the Work of fulfilling the Great Commission. God has opened doors that no man can shut so we must be taking the gospel to the ends of the earth rather than just trying to save our own skin.

A greater miracle than mighty heavenly signs is for you to experience conversion and character through the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's experience Pentecost May 28!

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