



“God is Gracious (to Israel)”¹

Romans 11:1-10

What would you think of a dad who gets himself ready on Sunday mornings, but rarely helped his wife get the children ready on Sunday mornings? Then, when the family is with the church, the wife takes children to Sunday School and picks them up from their class while the husband is doing other things. Then, during the service, the wife sits with the children, while the husband is elsewhere rarely addressing the children in the service. What would you say of this man? You might judge him and say he’s lazy and not really being a loving husband or father.

But, what if I told you that man is me. I don’t help get the kids ready on Sunday mornings because I’m here by 6:30 AM. I don’t take them to Sunday School because I’m here in a prayer group and then transitioning to either me teaching Sunday School or doing something else. I barely address my children during the service because I’m up here for half of the service! But if you didn’t know that I was a preaching pastor, and you didn’t know these details, you might presume that I’m a lazy or rude dad, right?

Details matter, don’t they? But many times, we can presume conclusions without having all the details. We can make statements without knowing all the details. And, there are some situations where we even don’t want to hear more details because we’re so confident we are right. I think of the time last year when a video went viral on the internet – picked up by a major news outlet – accusing a certain people group of putting down another people group. The video was quite horrible, but then the fuller video came out. After evaluating, the news outlet even apologized for it not getting all the details before publishing.

You know, when we have certain leanings, we can be very quick to believe our interpretations. But we need to be very careful with our interpretations. Are we willing to have our interpretations challenged? Are we willing to be open to learn?

The reason I bring this up this morning is because we’re still trekking through a very difficult portion of Romans, and Romans 11 is actually probably one of the most difficult passages to interpret in the entire book (even more than Romans 9). And, in this chapter Paul is continuing to address God’s saving plan for the Jews and the Gentiles. As we continues to explain God’s plan, Paul continues with a certain question and answer literary device. He asks a rhetorical question and then leads his readers along with an answer.

¹ This manuscript is still in the rough draft phase. I recommend you utilize these notes in conjunction to the sermon to gain greater insight and clarity.

When we uses rhetorical questions, he's addressing the presumptions of the readers. He does this to bring out their beliefs and show how their beliefs are causing them to interpret things incorrectly. Let me put it another way: If you were wrong, would you want to know? If your wrong beliefs affected how you viewed God, would you want to know? I would hope you'd say yes! In reality, with the readers of this letter, Paul seems to believe these individuals believe God is ungracious. The church may not say that, but their objections to the doctrines Paul teaches reveals they still have issues with God.

The same is true for us. When people get into Romans 9-11, I've heard many objections to the nature of God. God can't act that way. That's mean. He's making us robots. He doesn't care about evangelism if that's true! Paul counters all of these things, but he counters them by taking us back to our view of God. Why are we so quick to blame God? We are we so quick to make God smaller instead of believing God is infinitely glorious? After all, by the end of this chapter, Paul says that God's ways are past finding out. So, we should be seeing things in these chapters that blow our mind and case us to simply trust the Lord in all of his glory. But we *should not* believe there is any fault in God.

That said, today might be another day when your presuppositions (your underlying beliefs) about God might be revealed and confronted. And, if that's you, I pray that you would rest in the Lord today – trusting he truly is gracious. And, for all of us, I pray that we would see the gracious God that Paul presents in this text. So, if you haven't turned in your Bibles yet, go to Romans 11. After I pray for us, we will read verses 1-10 together. [Pray for Gerths, Calvary Baptist, and Harriette Dekker]

11 I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? ³ "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." ⁴ But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." ⁵ So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. ⁶ But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. ⁷ What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, ⁸ as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day." ⁹ And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; ¹⁰ let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever." ²

Let's recall why Paul is talking about Jewish salvation again. Paul is essentially stating that if God doesn't keep his promises to the Israelite nation then God will not keep his promises to Gentiles. We've read about all the things that Jesus has done for us in his death bringing us righteousness and promising us the Holy Spirit – empowering us to obey and follow the Lord. We have read about being children of God and having eternal hope that we'll be with God forever. But the Jewish readers could say, "What about Israel? What were God's promises to Israel?" And, by implication, if God doesn't keep his promises to them, how could Gentiles have any hope?

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:1–10.

So, Paul's bringing us back to that point here in chapter 11. If you remember, last week, Paul emphasizes that God has ordained certain Jews and Gentiles to salvation, and the conclusion of Paul is that we must therefore be evangelistic in this world! But then Paul ends chapter 10 with God holding his hand out to a disobedient and contrary people, Israel.

So, the question returns: Has God rejected his people? Right here, we have to ask, "What does Paul mean by "his people?" Is Paul saying, "Has God rejected believers in Jesus?" Those are *his people*, right? Yes. But that's not what Paul's talking about here. In another sense, national Israel is God's people. And, that's clearly where Paul is going here because Paul then says that he's an Israelite, descendant of Abraham. So, Paul is asking about the Israelites. Has God rejected the Jews? The big idea of this text is that **God has not rejected Israel**. Paul is going to show how God has not rejected them because he's gracious. That's why the title of the sermon is God is Gracious (to Israel). We continue to question God's ways and think he's not gracious. So, Paul emphasizes God cannot reject Israel because his character is one of grace. And, as Paul moves forward, we see that **God will always save a remnant of Israel even though God is punishing Israel to this day**. So, let's break up this longer statement:

1. God will always save a remnant of Israel (vv. 1-6).

I'm stating positively what Paul is asking in the negative: has God rejected his people? The question should lead us to the answer "no." But Paul says "By no means." Paul gives this strong negative answer multiple times in Romans. Think back to Romans 6 when he asks if we should just continue on in sinful lifestyles because God is gracious. Paul's answer is the same: may it never be or by no means! This is the strongest negation in the Greek language – and it shows up here regarding the nation of Israel.

Listen carefully, if you believe that your growth in holiness is essential, you should also believe that God keeping his promises to the nation of Israel is essential, too! Now, what's interesting is that even in Paul's wording of this question, he's hearkening back to the Old Testament in potentially two locations. In 1 Samuel 12:22, God says that he "will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake. . . ." In that context, the people have cried out for a king other than God, and even in their rejection of God as King, God says that he will not forsake them. This is an amazing connection to what Paul is writing in Romans. In the first century, Jesus comes into Jerusalem as the King. He is the Lord of the Temple, and yet he is crucified. But in that crucifixion, he took the consequences for humanity's sin. He died, but he conquered death and rose as the King over all as the God-Man! Jesus is King! Yet, many in Israel still reject King Jesus.

Does that mean God has rejected Israel? Well, if he didn't reject them in 1 Samuel, why would he reject them now? This wording of Paul also reflects Psalm 94:14: For the Lord will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage. . . .³ This text simply emphasizes that in the midst of many enemies, God will rescue his people – there is a future hope. If we merge these two ideas, we see that even though national Israel is disobedient and contrary, God will be patient with national Israel, drawing people within Israel to himself and there is still a future hope for people within Judaism.

Has God rejected his people? Even by looking at these texts, we see that "no" is the answer. But, Paul shares more reasons to believe this:

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 94:14.

Argument #1: Paul's salvation (vv. 1-2a). If God has rejected the Israelites, then Paul would not have been rescued by Jesus. Paul says at the end of verse 1, "For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin."⁴ Paul isn't saying this to say that God saved him because he was the best of the best within Judaism. If you recall, Paul uses this logic in Philippians to say that all of this is loss in comparison with Christ. None of those things guarantee his salvation.

So here, Paul isn't using this to boost his Jewishness. He's simply saying these things to prove, he is a Jew. He is a follower of Jesus. Therefore, Paul goes on in verse 2 to say, "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew."⁵ Right here, some of you might say, "Paul can't be talking about national Israel here. He has to be speaking about the elect!" But the word "foreknowledge" doesn't have to refer to complete salvation. The word refers to guaranteeing a special relationship with someone or a group of people before they even exist. God, before the nation of Israel existed, set them apart for his glory! Amos 3:2 quotes God saying to Israel, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth. . ."⁶ This isn't saying God isn't aware of other nations. This is talking about God's close and special relationship with Israel. That's what Paul is bringing up here in Romans 11.

God has not rejected the nation he ordained before time to have a special relationship with. Now, Paul goes into his second argument in verses 2-4, building on the previous one:

Argument #2: Elijah and the prophets (vv. 2b-4).

Verses 2-4 say: Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel?³ "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life."⁴ But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."⁷

Paul goes back to the Old Testament example of Elijah when the nation of Israel was in almost complete darkness spiritually. Ahab is married to Jezebel and she has brought in Baal worship to the nation. All the people are worshipping the Lord and then there's a duel between the Lord and Baal. God reveals his power over the priests of Baal, and you would think everything would be over at that point. But, like any situation when our idols are confronted and we don't want God, Jezebel chases after Elijah for his life.

Elijah feels all alone. He's the only one who seems to be a public witness for God. He's out by himself and he cries out to God, feeling dejected and says in 1 Kings 19:14: "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."⁸ Elijah's been passionate for God, no one in Israel loves God.

Paul says here in Romans that Elijah appeals against Israel. In other words, Elijah is affirming that the majority of the nation does not follow God. This is true. However, that doesn't mean God has rejected Israel. God's response to Elijah is that there is a remnant. There are 7,000 men who haven't bowed the knee to Baal. This remnant means that God isn't done with Israel.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:1.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:2.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Am 3:2.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:2-4.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Ki 19:14.

From a biblical perspective, the idea of remnant is important. Think of a remnant like yeast in bread. It's going to affect the rest of the dough. When you read in Genesis that there's one person who is righteous, you often see God using that person to bring blessing to those around them. A remnant matters! And, as long as there's a remnant, that means God isn't done with a people.

So, Paul uses this to talk about Israel today. Just like the majority of Israel rejected God in Elijah's day, yet there was a remnant, so it's true in our day as well! Now, Paul comes to his final argument:

Argument #3: God's grace (vv. 5-6).

Read verses 5-6 with me again: ⁵So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. ⁶But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. ⁹

Some might try to argue that because Jesus has come and now instituted the church that God no longer has any obligation to national Israel; however, that would be a wrong conclusion. Here in verse 5, Paul says, "So too at the present time there is a remnant. . . ." There is a remnant of Jews in this present era. I believe this present era is speaking of this age post Jesus' ascension until his return.

This is in some ways mind-blowing. Do you realize that what Paul is teaching here is that there will always be Jewish people on this earth. That can't be said of other nationalities. Other nations have died out, but Israel won't. Even when they weren't in charge of land, they were still identified as a people. God has not made this kind of promise to other nations. Americans may not exist when Jesus comes again, but Jews will!

But Paul is quick to say that this remnant within Israel is by grace – not because of who they are! God made promises to Israel on the basis of his own grace. Paul's already shared that being a Jew doesn't guarantee salvation. It also don't make you more likely to be saved. Instead, God has simply made promises to keep Israel and to save people within Israel – and it's on the basis of his own gracious desires.

Remember the passage we studied last week? Paul shows that both the Jews and Gentiles were contrary to God. The Gentiles didn't seek God. They didn't want God – and yet God has saved many Gentiles. And now here, Paul is saying the same of the Jewish people. They seek to attain to salvation on the basis of themselves and not on grace. On the basis of their status and not on what God can do for them. And that's not going to win them anything. Salvation of any Jew is not because they're a Jew.

But you could look at this text and see Paul say, "it is no longer on the basis of works." So, you could say, "Well then, in the Old Testament, Jews *were* saved by works, but in the New Testament, it's by grace." This Greek construction that translation to English "no longer" does not relate to *time*, but instead to a logical conclusion. Meaning, they *thought* they were saved by works, but when you see the Messiah, you see salvation is no longer on the basis of works (and it never was)!

Salvation is (and has always been) because God is gracious! The Jewish people don't deserve salvation. They're like the nation in Elijah's day. They're like the people in Samuel's day, longing for a human king. They're like the people in David's day, facing many enemies. And yet God, instead of spurning them, says, "I won't reject you!"

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:5–6.

Talk about grace! I've had people treat me poorly at different times and I've had times where I've struggled to not be bitter. How often do we see Israel rejecting God and yet Paul says in chapter 10, God keeps putting out his hands to them! After a while, we would give up on people. But God doesn't. He keeps showing his kindness to Israel.

This should encourage our hearts as Gentiles, too! We who have been saved by God should recognize the phenomenal privilege that God has rescued us! And if he can be patient with the Israelites – and if he was patient with us – then he will never let go of us either! Praise God that he is the God of grace!

But there is an objection that people can have in all of this. People can still wonder *why* more Jews haven't been saved. And this is where people might still feel God is unjust. And Paul confronts this head-on. In verses 7-11, we see that God will always save a remnant from Israel *even though*

2. God is punishing Israel (vv. 7-11).

Verse 7 says, "What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened. . ."¹⁰

The "What then?" question is continuing off of what Paul is saying about a remnant? In essence, the question is saying, "What then is the conclusion that we ought to believe?" This is the right question. I think that we can many times come to the Scriptures with our own conclusions – sometimes not even realizing it. So, we read words and we think, "Clearly this is not what is meant by this." And then we get to wrong applications. What we need to do, by the grace of the Spirit, is to pray that we would always embrace whatever the Scriptures say – even if we personally battle understanding or embracing it.

Consistently the people have accused God of being unjust or at least not making sense. But now Paul is calling to trust. Here's the conclusion you ought to embrace. And, Ventura, it's a conclusion *you* ought to embrace. Paul shows us three different groupings within Israel. There is the entire nation. Then there is the elect within the nation. And then there are those who are not elect, who were hardened.

If you still get upset hearing these words and phrases, I urge you to spend concerted time praying that you would submit to the Sovereign, All-Powerful and Gracious God. Is God gracious? Yes! Is he more knowledgeable than you? Yes! Does he only do right? Yes! Then can you trust him? You ought to. Paul wants the readers – and us – to trust God's great power. God keeps his promises! And, even Israel's failure does not thwart God's plan. In fact, it all falls under his sovereign control. This doesn't mean God approves of sin, but God is has ordained the history of Israel. And if that blows your mind, good! God is greater than us!

So, Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. What was Israel seeking? Well, in Romans 9:31, we read that "Israel. . .pursued a law that would lead to righteousness [and] did not succeed in reaching that law."¹¹ They sought a right standing with God on the basis of themselves. They thought they could succeed in saving themselves in the sight of God.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:7.

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 9:31.

This is how many in this world function. I have friends who believe it is entirely unjust of God to punish those who are relatively moral. They think they're trying to be good. But they don't realize that their greatest problem is their rejection of God. Even in their statements, they are admitting that they don't want God – they just want to attain things on their own. They don't want to depend on the Lord. They embrace more of a Muslim-like view of eternity where God isn't in Heaven and we get all the stuff we want. But that's really just emphasizing our selfishness. We are saying, "No thanks, God! I don't want you. I just want what I want in my own ways on the basis of my own preferences." Paul showed us in Romans 1 how that is suppressing the truth about God and embracing a lie. And actually, if you live that way, all sorts of sinful actions flow from that mentality. You aren't relatively good if you reject God. You are a sinner.

Israel didn't want to admit that. Since this is the case, how are any going to be saved? Only if God chooses to save some. That's why Paul brings up the idea of elect here. Elect does not mean that God put a vote up in Heaven to see who the angels thought he should save. Elect refers to God's sole choice – like what Paul says in Romans 9 that God has mercy on whom he will have mercy. The reality is that people are so sinful, including Jews, that salvation means that *only* God can save them. They don't have a sliver of goodness in them that makes them smart enough or wise enough to choose God. No. Instead, they will only love God if God loves them first. This is the idea of elect. And actually, in this text, a more literal translation is not "the elect obtained it," but "election has obtained it." God made salvation for them; therefore, they are the elect! Salvation can only take place by God. And, because God saves completely, people's salvation is guaranteed. If our salvation rests at all in us, our security is shattered.

Paul then presses this and says, "the rest were hardened." And this is where some people might say, "NO FAIR!" I think that response reveals how blind we are to humanity's sinfulness. It also reveals that we don't understand what God's holiness really means. Whenever people are confronted with the holiness of God – or even with angels who are sinless – they fall down on their faces in trembling fear. Isaiah, shocked by the holiness, cries out that he deserves God's eternal just wrath on himself!

Isaiah would have never said, "It's no fair that you don't save everyone!" Instead, Isaiah would have said, "It's amazing that you would even have an elect that you'd save." We shouldn't say, "How could you only save a remnant?" We should say, "How could you save any?!" Remember that grace is grace. What I mean is that grace is undeserved. You can't say God *has* to be gracious, otherwise it's not gracious. No human deserves grace. But God gives grace.

With Israel, he's truly gracious. We see God's grace in the midst of Israel's continual sinning. It's so intriguing to me that we are more prone to blame God for only saving some when we really should be burdened that a nation rejects God. God's not at fault. Israel is! God keeps extending his hand to a disobedient and contrary people for millennia – and he continues to draw a remnant to himself even though the nation is hardened toward him! This is kindness. This is patience. And, it should again teach us of the amazing kindness of God towards sinners that we should express to the world around us!

In order to prove this premise, Paul then gives two Old Testament examples.

Example #1: God has hardened Israel to this day (v. 8).

Read verse 8 again: as it is written, “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.”¹²

Paul is probably merging two Old Testament texts: Deuteronomy 29:4 and Isaiah 29:10. In Deuteronomy 29:4, Moses is confronting the people before they enter into the Promised Land. They have been disobedient to the Lord, and Moses says that their consequence is that God has not given them a heart to understand. Keep this in mind, the hardening of their heart is a consequence of their pursuance of sin. This is like Romans 1. God gives people over to their disobedience as further consequence. So God has done that with Israel. Then the Isaiah 29 passage talks about the spirit of stupor.

What’s interesting is how Paul uses these texts. In Deuteronomy 29, Moses confronts them, he states that they will be in exile, but he also looks forward to a day when God will circumcise their hearts. Some might think that sounds gross, but all that means is that God is going to affect them from the inside so that they would actually trust Jesus and follow him! But that day is not yet. Moses says that God hasn’t given them understanding *until this day*. And, what’s interesting is that Paul says in Romans 11 that God has not brought about that day yet for Israel. Please listen carefully here. If you think that God has rejected Israel because Jesus has come, this is *very* important to note. Paul is saying God hasn’t fulfilled his promise to Israel to circumcise their hearts yet. Paul says even up until *his* day, that great spiritual circumcision of Israel hasn’t happened yet. And in Paul quoting from Isaiah, he’s emphasizing this all the more. The spirit of stupor was taking place in Isaiah’s day because of their disobedience, and Paul quotes it here to say it’s still continuing. But in the context of Isaiah, we’re told that there is a day to look forward to. A day when understanding will be granted to them. Paul says they’re not experiencing that day yet. Sure, a remnant is coming to Jesus in this time period, but God hasn’t fulfilled his promise to Israel for a greater living of Israel.

In all of this Paul is showing *why* many in Israel reject. It’s because of their own disobedience and God’s punishment to God. Are we ok with God being God and punishing his creation for sin? We ought to be. God can do whatever he wills. So, Paul gives a second argument.

Argument #2: Israel is to be ashamed (vv. 9-10).

In verses 9-10, Paul quotes Psalm 69, which says: “Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever.”¹³

Psalm 69 is repeated multiple times in the New Testament as a messianic psalm, showing Jesus is the Messiah, the Rescuer for humanity and creation. In the original psalm, this statement shows up to speak of the enemies of David. David was the anointed one of God, as King of Israel. And David points to the greater Anointed One, Jesus. So, Paul is saying that this is true of the enemies of Jesus.

Shockingly, Paul is saying that in large part, the nation of Israel functions as enemies of Jesus! So, Paul says that their table should become a snare and a trap. I believe that this means that the graces God gives to them should be turned on their heads. They abuse the kindness of God and therefore, they’re storing up wrath for themselves. Then David writes that their eyes are darkened and their backs are to

¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:8.

¹³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:9–10.

be bent. To have you back bent, in this context is talking about forever living in shame. Your heads forced downward.

This reveals the nature of God's punishment toward Israel. So, let's put this all together because right now it sounds like Paul is saying God *has* rejected Israel. But what Paul is saying is that **God will always save a remnant from Israel even though God is also punishing Israel.** But what Paul teaches here also alludes to a couple of other truths that are going to show up in the next few weeks. First, there is a future day that is coming where God will shower down blessings on Israel like never before. Until that day, God is saving a remnant even though they reject him. This is tremendously gracious of God.

The other truth we should embrace is that we shouldn't be arrogant about this. We shouldn't say, "Well, God hasn't rejected us! We're obviously better than the Jews." No! We saw last week in the end of Romans 10 that we were a people who didn't seek or want God either, yet God was gracious to us!

Finally, as we ponder this, we need to look briefly at the words of Paul in verse 11. Paul essentially asks, "Does God just want Israel to fail?" And then Paul will go on to show how all of this comes together to form a beautiful tapestry of salvation for people from every tribe, nation and tongue.

If you were here a couple years ago during the Ecclesiastes series, you remember the illustration of a loom. When a rug is being made, under the loom looks awful. And, in this world, we live under the loom. We're trying to make sense even of the things God is doing. And, every once in a while God allows us to see above the loom. While it looks like a mess with the discipline of Israel and Gentiles, Paul shows us here that God has a gloriously good purpose in all of it. Can you see it? Can you trust that he's masterful in his skill to save as well as gracious and right?

With all of this knowledge, I think **the call for us is to continue to pray for the Jewish nation, to evangelize the world around us and to pray that we would be humbled at the salvation God has given to us. Because God has not rejected his promises to national Israel, he will never reject his promises to his children, those who trust Jesus! God is gracious.**

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