

What is the Mark of the Beast?

by J.K. McKee posted 01 September, 2000 www.tnnonline.net

“And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and *he provides* that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, *either* the name of the beast or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six” (Revelation 13:16-18).

Students of Bible prophecy have always been intrigued by Revelation 13:16-18 and the questions that these verses pose. The mark of the beast, knowing it, and understanding what it is, have caused much speculation and controversy. This controversy will only continue as the Lord tarries and the Messiah has yet to return.

What is the mark of the beast and what is its purpose? How close is global society to its implementation? These are only a few of the key questions surrounding this phenomenon that we will discuss, including several views which you may consider “unique.”

What Some People Believe the Mark of the Beast is, or will be

There are a wide variety of views as to what the mark of the beast is. Here is a listing of what some people believe it will be:

1. A microchip implant
2. A tattoo or barcode
3. A biological component
4. Spiritual devotion to Satan
5. Non-observance of the seventh-day Sabbath

The first three views listed are consistent with the standard evangelical Christian views of pre-millennial eschatology present today. The fourth view is one that we should all agree exists, as the mark is of “the beast,” the antimessiah/antichrist who will be under the complete control of Satan during the Tribulation period, and is a symbol of one’s devotion to him. The fifth view, non-observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, is somewhat foreign to those in mainstream Christianity, and many in Sabbath-observing Messianic circles dismiss this view as well. In a search for Biblical accuracy, we will analyze all of these views, comparing these phenomena to both modern societal trends and religious opinions.

Many of the prophetic writings of the Bible are symbolic or allegorical. These include Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of the statue (Daniel 2:1-39), Daniel’s vision of the four beasts (Daniel 7:1-24), and the beast that comes out of the sea (Revelation 13:1-8). There are more literal passages of the Bible dealing with prophecy such as Yeshua’s Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). In addition to this, there are parables given by the Lord such as the parable of the evil slave (Matthew 24:45-51) or the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), stories which are to admonish the Believer to be on alert to His return. So, when dealing with the mark of the beast, one must wonder, are these literal, symbolic, or parabolic passages we are dealing with?

The Mark Used for Commerce and Identification

The most common teaching we hear today is that the mark of the beast will be used for commerce and identification, as Revelation 13:17 tells us “no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name” (NIV).

Since the Scriptures tell us that the mark of the beast is used “that no one will be able to buy or to sell” (NASU), it would appear that we are talking about an actual device or object used for commerce. Many prophecy teachers today have extrapolated upon this view and concluded that perhaps the mark will also be used as a tool of identification as well.

By far, the most common view in the pre-millennial prophecy circles today, *assuming the mark of the beast will arrive on the scene in the coming decade*, is that it will be a microchip implant. It is already well known that animals in various locations are being implanted with microchips for identification and tracking. Now, similar devices are being marked for humans. In

December 1999, Applied Digital Solutions received the first patents to a device that they call Digital Angel:

“Applied Digital Solutions, Inc...today announced that it has acquired the patent rights to a miniature digital transceiver—which it has named ‘Digital Angel®’—that can be used for a variety of purposes, such as providing a tamper-proof means of identification for enhanced e-business security, locating lost or missing individuals, tracking the location of valuable property and monitoring the medical conditions of at-risk patients.”¹

While additional companies have since acquired similar licenses to produce digital tracking technology for humans, and the technology has become more efficient and less cumbersome, the reasons in support for this have grown. The advent of global terror since September 11, 2001 has increased the need for identification of human persons, and the ability to know where “authorized” individuals are, versus those who are “unauthorized.”

Socially speaking, there are “logical” reasons why one would want to receive a microchip implant under his or her skin for tracking. It is a definite form of identification. A person would not have to necessarily worry about a driver’s license, passport, or even paper currency. All of these would be performed electronically, and one’s location could be pinpointed by satellites at all times. You would never get lost. Everything would be electronic.

Ten years ago there was a terrible airline crash in the Florida Everglades. On May 11, 1996 a ValuJet DC-9 took off from Miami and crashed just twenty minutes or so after takeoff. If you remember the stories surrounding this crash, there was an inconsistent passenger manifest. There was no definite way of knowing if there were additional people on the flight than originally intended, or if someone decided to board at the last minute or swap tickets with someone. Once the aircraft disappeared into the Florida swamps, all that remained were a few fragments of the fuselage. As far as we know, the remains of the passengers were either buried under mud, scattered throughout the debris, or gator food.

What would have happened if all of the passengers had a microchip implanted somewhere in their bodies for identification? First of all, upon boarding the aircraft there would have been a computer-logged registry of the passengers. Secondly, those investigating the crash would have had a much better idea who was on the flight, and quite possibly, the location of certain remains could have been detected.

We should all be familiar with the fact that the days prior to the Messiah’s return will be very unstable. The ValuJet accident was not the result of terrorism, but rather faulty mechanics. But consider what would have happened if everyone boarding the American and United flights on September 11, 2001 were logged in with a microchip implant. Investigators would have had an easier time identifying the rogues, as well as the people missing, in their examination.

Is some form of *mandatory physical identification* a coming reality for the people of Planet Earth? Although I do not want to be viewed as being presumptuous or fear mongering, with the advent of the Electronic Age and the Internet, the need for definite security and identification is on the extreme rise. To dispense with this entirely is to underestimate what technology is capable of. While socially there may be an extreme distrust with a “Big Brother” system, nevertheless as threats in the world become more severe there will rise “legitimate” reasons to want to “tag” people.

The Biological Mark?

Continuing on with the notion that the mark of the beast is used for commerce, what happens if the mark is not some form of microchip implant? In the past, prophecy teachers have usually compared the prophecies of the mark of the beast to the technology level that existed, and made appropriate comparisons. Thirty years ago, the view that was held concerning the mark was that it was going to be a tattoo. Today, the common view is that it will be a microchip. But what

¹ *Applied Digital Solutions Acquires Rights to World’s First Digital Device* (1999), 15 December, 1999, from <<http://biz.yahoo.com>>.

about tomorrow? What if the mark does not arrive until an age when silicon based computers are a thing of the past?

Revelation 16:2 tells us that at the pouring of the first vial of God's anger there will appear "a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image." Clearly, the mark of the beast is going to be a physical implement that one receives on his or her person, so that at the first vial judgment those who have it receive "ugly and painful sores" (NIV). If the mark of the beast is to be a microchip, could some of the chip's components malfunction causing toxins to be released into the human body causing some sort of boil?

There is, however, another factor we must consider, *especially if the Tribulation period is not to come for several decades* (or not even in our lifetimes) as I believe. What if the mark of the beast is not going to be a silicon implant, as many currently believe?

Some scientists are suggesting that the silicon chip may not last long into the Twenty-First Century. Once conventional microchips are obsolete, what sort of technology will we have to turn to? Dr. David Whitehouse, the scientific consultant for the BBC, writes that "perhaps in the drive to build faster, more powerful and smaller computers we will turn to biological molecules and harness the power of DNA than try to push electrons along arcades of silicon atoms."²

It appears as if the alternative to a silicon-based mark of the beast may lie in something that sounds like it is directly out of science fiction. Interestingly enough, it is from this genre that we can probably find the best example. In the sci-fi television series *Earth: Final Conflict*, the world is in cooperation with an alien race known as the Taelons who have recruited various humans for their personal protection. These agents are implanted with what is called a *skrill*, a living bio-weapon that also increases their psychological loyalty to the aliens.

Since before the year 2000, there have been many who have spoken presumptuously in regard to the Second Coming of the Messiah, in *both* the pre- and post-tribulational camps. Many have used fear of "the chip" to either "gain converts" or increase the business of their ministries. Such fear has been picked up by the secular media, and many secular citizens shun the idea of a microchip implant today or have been totally seared against it. Many, even though not religious, oppose the idea of receiving any kind of microchip for identification—or for that same matter any kind of identification card beyond a driver's license or passport.

However, if in the future a biologically-based computer component arises for identification, would people be more apt to receive it? If a scientist could take a person's organic cells and grow a "living computer," which would integrate with a worldwide network, would people be more receptive? I certainly believe so and concur that something made of mutated cells could very well cause the same "deadly sore affect" as a microchip would. But this technology is a long way from being fully developed.

The Sabbath Factor

One issue that very few evangelicals have opened dialogue about is the Sabbath observance question that arises when dealing with the mark of the beast. This is in part because some groups—often from the fringe—advocate that non-observance of the seventh-day Sabbath is the mark of the beast. They usually have false beliefs associated with them about the Divinity of Yeshua, salvation, and the afterlife. Because of these factors, the view is often immediately dismissed. However, with the growth of the Messianic movement, some have begun to consider that one who does not keep *Shabbat* has the "mark of the beast."

Historically, Protestant Christianity has considered itself "Sabbath honoring," but it has viewed the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) as applying to Sunday and not to Saturday. For this reason, many in evangelical groups today totally dismiss the belief that the mark of the beast is non-Sabbath observance, because they may be forced to deal with this issue. Although it is not my intent to unfairly judge Christians, this is a subject that needs to be brought to the table.

² David Whitehouse (1999). *Time up for silicon chips*, 23 June, 1999. *BBC News*. Retrieved 27 March, 2006, from <<http://news.bbc.co.uk>>.

As Messianic Believers who desire to live the life of Messiah Yeshua, we firmly believe that the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* is to be honored and that we should obey the Torah.³

In Acts 15:19-21, we are told the requirements that James the Just set forth for the non-Jews who were coming to faith in Messiah Yeshua:

“Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath” (Acts 15:19-21).

One of the expectations implied in Acts 15:21 is that non-Jews coming to faith would be expected to attend synagogue and learn the Law of Moses. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:11-12 that non-Jewish Believers have become part of the Commonwealth of Israel via their faith in Yeshua, not a separate entity known as “the Church.”⁴ Our Heavenly Father tells us in Exodus 31:13, “But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for *this* is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.’” So, the question of whether or not we are to keep the seventh-day Sabbath is a question of whether Believers **are to be holy or set-apart unto God**. Interestingly enough, during the Tribulation period people will be given the choice of either choosing God or choosing Satan—*so the question of being consecrated or set-apart unto the Lord remains critical*.

However, what is the Sabbath’s relation to the mark of the beast, if any? Stereotypically, aberrant or unorthodox groups are the ones that have advocated that non-observance of the seventh-day Sabbath is the mark of the beast. Have we suddenly gone their way? Not at all, in fact, although we maintain a pro-Sabbath and pro-Torah position, as does most of the Messianic movement, **we do not believe that non-observance of the seventh-day Sabbath is the mark of the beast**.

Some have made the argument that the “sign” or “mark” of God is keeping His appointed times, on the basis of Scriptures such as Exodus 13:9: “And it shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth; for with a powerful hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt.” The Hebrew word for sign is *ot* (אֹת), meaning “*sign, pledge, token*” (BDB).⁵ Some have said that those who have the “mark of the beast,” in contrast to this, are doing things contrary to what God has decreed. As the seventh-day Sabbath was given as a major sign to Israel, it is argued that the absence of Sabbath-keeping is the “mark of the beast.”

This view, however, has some serious exegetical flaws. While anyone who receives the mark of the beast in the Book of Revelation is certainly doing things contrary to the will of God, and is committing himself to Satan, the vocabulary used to describe the mark of the beast and keeping God’s appointed times is totally different. *Ot* is translated as *sēmeion* (σημεῖον) in the Septuagint, meaning “*a sign, a mark, token*,” or quite possibly also “*in reasoning, a sign or proof*” (LS).⁶ The Revelation account, describing the “mark of the beast,” employs the term *charagma* (χάραγμα), “**a mark that is engraved, etched, branded, cut, imprinted, mark, stamp**” (BDAG).⁷ The mark of the beast is clearly something that is physical, as opposed to something primarily ideological such as the Sabbath.

³ Consult the editor’s articles “Is Sunday ‘the Lord’s Day?’” and “How Do We Properly Keep Shabbat?” for a further discussion of this issue.

⁴ Consult the editor’s article “When Did ‘the Church’ Begin?” for more details.

⁵ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 17.

⁶ H.G. Lidell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 727.

⁷ Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1077.

How are a physical mark and the Sabbath question possibly tied together?

Even if the mark of the beast is not failing to keep the Sabbath, this does not mean that it cannot in some way be related. The mark of the beast is a physical manifestation of a person's rebellion toward God. In the final days before the Messiah's return, human beings will be given the clear choice of either receiving the salvation available in Yeshua, or rejecting it. Those who reject the Lord will receive the mark of the beast—be it a microchip or biological implant. There will be a clear distinction during this time between the Force of Light and the Forces of Darkness. Many people, sadly, will choose to follow after the beast and accept his rhetoric against the God of Creation. The Prophet Daniel describes how he will arise:

“Thus he said: ‘The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the *other* kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it. As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. But the court will sit *for judgment*, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of *all* the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom *will be* an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him” (Daniel 7:23-27).

Specifically, we are told that the antimessiah/antichrist will have the power “to change the times and the law” (RSV). It is important to note that the Aramaic word *dat* (דַּת), appearing in Daniel 7:25, to be differentiated from the Torah or Law of Moses (תּוֹרָה). It specifically relates to “state legislation, public law” or “law as religion” (*HALOT*).⁸ When Daniel prophesied that the beast would have the power to change the law, he was referring to the state laws that would be legislated that would prevent God's people from keeping His Law. One of the principal laws that will be mandated in the Seventieth Week of Israel by the worldwide antichrist system will be the implantation of the mark of the beast:

“He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name” (Revelation 13:16-17, NIV).

This human law that will be made requires a person to receive the mark of the beast in order to conduct in trade and commerce. Those who do not receive the mark of the beast are killed as traitors to the state (Revelation 13:15), or what we might call the antimessiah's “New World Order.” Receiving the antimessiah's “mark” will be considered a sign of loyalty, if not worship. The implementation of the mark of the beast is contrary to God's Law, as the Torah prohibits a person from making a tattoo or any kind of idolatrous etching on his body:

“You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:18).

Traditional Jewish theology has always advocated, under the premise of *Pikku'ach Nefesh* or “regard for human life,” that any commandment of the Torah short of committing idolatry can be broken to save one's fellow. However, one who receives the mark of the beast will be committing idolatry, embracing a physical symbol on the body that he or she is loyal not to God—but to *Satan*. But how is this related to “the Sabbath”? Consider the blasphemies that the antimessiah will declare against God, described by John in Revelation:

“There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, *that is*, those who dwell in heaven. It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him” (Revelation 13:5-7).

⁸ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 2:1856.

Both Daniel and Revelation speak of the antichrist who will speak out against God Almighty, and persecute the saints. The saints in Revelation are specifically described as those “who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Yeshua” (Revelation 12:17; 14:12). **This is a description of Messianic Believers.** Messianic Believers today should know Messiah Yeshua as their Personal Lord and Savior, and likewise be striving to obey God by following the Torah. A critical part of the Torah is keeping the weekly Sabbath or *Shabbat*.

We now arrive at an interesting impasse. Understanding that *Shabbat* is indeed a sign given by God to His people, what will happen during the Tribulation period? What kind of rhetoric or blasphemies will be issued by the antimessiah and his cohort against the God of Israel and the Torah? Are there not places on Earth today where it is difficult for many Jews to follow the Torah? In various European countries, laws have been passed that prohibit traditional kosher slaughter of animals,⁹ and impede the practice of infant circumcision.¹⁰ One day, the Scriptures tell us that people will be “marked” with some form of physical identification. Perhaps the answer of how the mark of the beast and *Shabbat* may be connected is more simple than we think.

One of the most critical parts of keeping the Sabbath is not buying or selling. Buying or selling on the Sabbath was definitively prohibited during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, when the exiles of the Southern Kingdom returned from Babylon and experienced some difficulties with their non-Israelite neighbors. We are told that, “As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or a holy day; and we will forego *the crops* the seventh year and the exaction of every debt” (Nehemiah 10:31). The principal reason in Revelation that people receive the mark of the beast is **to buy and sell**. Receiving the mark of the beast goes against the principal requirements of keeping *Shabbat*: abstaining from work and engaging in commerce.

The connection between a physical mark of the beast and Sabbath observance may come as a result of the blasphemies that the antimessiah issues against God. It may be manifested as simply as a statement made by the antimessiah such as, “We’re going to use our marks to buy and sell on that ‘God’s Sabbath!’” coming as a result of seeing Israel being restored and the 144,000 on the scene. At the first bowl/vial of God’s wrath (Revelation 13:17), those who have the mark (*charagma*) will receive a grievous sore, and they will physically pay for their foolishness.

What is the connection between the physical mark of the beast and non-observance of the Sabbath? While I do not believe that not keeping the Sabbath is “the mark of the beast,” I do believe that the antimessiah can blaspheme God by proclaiming that those with the mark should buy and sell profusely on *Shabbat*, which is forbidden in Scripture. Why and how the Sabbath observance issue is brought to the world scene may also be an interesting phenomenon to follow. Could it come about because of Israel’s prophesied end-time ingathering and restoration under the Messiah?

What happens to those who receive the mark of the beast?

“Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; *that is*, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness” (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12).

The Word of God is very clear that Satan comes to deceive humanity. We are told in Revelation 12:9 that “the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan...deceives the whole

⁹ In Switzerland, for example, traditional kosher slaughter of animals has been illegal for over a century. Additional countries that have made it illegal include Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands. For a further discussion, consult the article “Kosher Country: America’s Jewish Soul” by Rabbi Daniel Lapin, accessible at <<http://www.towardtradition.org>>.

¹⁰ Consult the editor’s article “Is Circumcision for Everyone?”

world.” However, in 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12, the Apostle Paul writes that it is God Himself who sends unbelievers a “strong delusion” (KJV) in the Last Days because they rejected the salvation message available from believing in Yeshua. Will those under such an influence be those who accept the mark of the beast?

What happens to those who receive the mark of the beast, be it a microchip implant, organic component, or something physical we have yet to conceive?

“Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; **and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever;** they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name” (Revelation 14:9-11).

The Book of Revelation is quite clear that those who receive the mark of the beast are destined for eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire. They secure themselves a place among the condemned by receiving a physical mark of their rebellion against and rejection of God. They get to suffer for eternity along with the beast whom they worshipped. During the Tribulation period, before their consignment to the Lake of Fire “There is no rest day or night” (NIV) for them. In no uncertain terms, they suffer the same fate as the antichrist, false prophet, and Satan himself.

“And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone” (Revelation 19:20).

“And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

The antimessiah, the false prophet, and Satan will all spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. All who take the mark of the beast will suffer the same consequences and they will have no hope for salvation. We need to pray for those who might be deceived by the mark of the beast before it comes (even if we are long since dead before the Tribulation is upon us), so that they might have ample enough warning to reject it and receive the saving power of Yeshua the Messiah. Likewise, any of us who may live during this time, or those of future generations, must be prepared to endure hardships and persecution for a short season because of our faith in Yeshua. **A short season of pain and suffering for the Lord is nothing compared to an eternity of punishment that awaits those who take the mark of the beast.**

Conclusion

The issue surrounding the phenomenon called “the mark of the beast” is perhaps more complex than one truly realizes. On the surface, it seems as if it is just something that is physical used for commerce and identification in the days of the antichrist. But if one does some further examination, where common views are sometimes challenged, one can still see the validity of the mark of the beast being a physical implement, but realize that there are more elements involved which primarily relate to how we are to be set-apart from the world and consecrated unto God.

We fully affirm that there will be a physical mark, etching, marking, or carving (Grk. *charagma*) that will be placed on the followers of antichrist during the Tribulation period. However, we also believe that in doing so, the beast will blaspheme against both God and against His people who are singled out by observance of His commandments. In saying this, our salvation does not come by following His commandments, but it is His commandments that make us holy unto Him and set-apart from the sins and evils of this world. When the antimessiah blasphemes against God’s people, He will blaspheme against their obedience to Him.

The study concerning what the mark of the beast is should be a sobering thought to us. The Scriptures tell us that those who take the mark will suffer the horrors of the Lake of Fire.

Yeshua tells us, “false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24, NRSV). If any false messiah or false prophet arises, do we have the discernment to distinguish between truth and error? When *the* false messiah comes, many, even some among God’s elect, will be led astray. The only way we can counter this is by having set-apart lives unto the Lord, and be in obedience to Him. Furthermore, are we in prayer for the lost who might take the mark of the beast and reject God’s salvation?

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