

John

Lesson #8

Tabernacles and Tension

(7: 1 – 52)

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Review

Lesson #7 began John's "C Cycle" (6:1 - 20:31), the 3rd Passover, with Jesus' discourse on the Eucharist, a reflection on the body and blood of Christ. To set up the discourse, John began with Jesus and his disciples crossing to the east side of the Sea of Galilee (the "other side") where Jesus taught the crowds and multiplied the fish and the loaves. He then retreated to the mountains. Later that night, Jesus wanted to return to Capernaum, but blocked by the lingering crowd, he walked across the water, meeting his disciples midway on the lake, where they took him into their boat.

The next day the crowd made its way around the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, finding Jesus already at Capernaum. When they asked him how he got there, he countered by saying, *"Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled"* (6: 26). He continued, *"Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you"* (6: 27).

Preview, cont.

This led Jesus to compare the manna in the desert, which God gave to sustain the Israelites during their 40 years in the wilderness, to the *genuine* bread—his body and blood, which God gives to sustain us during our pilgrimage of life. And Jesus did not compromise, invoking symbol or metaphor: *“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true [i.e. “genuine”] food, and my blood is true [i.e. “genuine”] drink”* (6: 53-55).

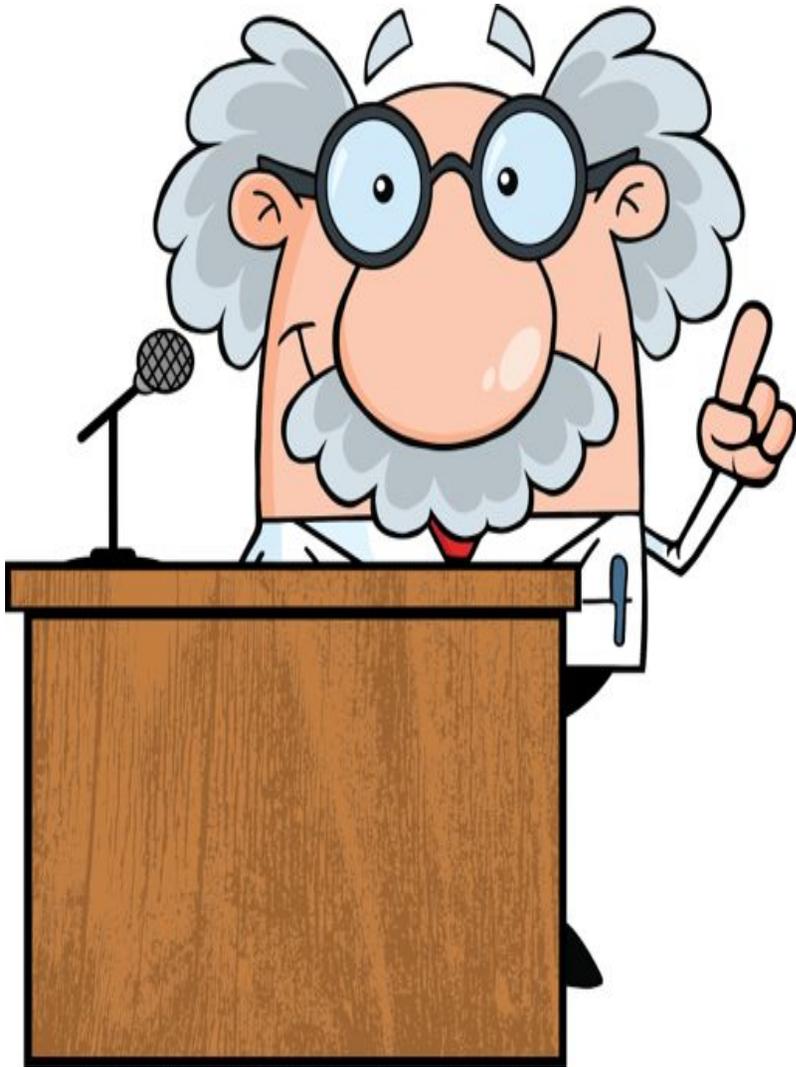
In light of Leviticus 17, this is scandalous, and his disciples said so: *“This saying is hard [i.e., σκληρός, “hard,” “rough,” or “unyielding”]; who can accept it”* (6: 60). Jesus did not back down, however, insisting on a literal understanding of his words, refusing to dilute his statement to make it more palatable.

Preview

Autumn brings increasing conflict and tension within Jesus' family, with the crowds and with the religious authorities in Jerusalem. As the feast of Tabernacles nears Jesus' "brothers," [ἀδελφοί] (those of his immediate family, named in Matthew 13: 55 and Mark 6: 3—James, Joses, Judas and Simon) urge him to go to Jerusalem, but in a tone of mocking sarcasm:

“Leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. No one works in secret if he wants to be known publically. If you do these things, manifest yourself to the world.’ For his brothers did not believe in him” (7: 3).

At first Jesus refuses to go *“because the Jews were trying to kill him” (7: 1)*, but he soon relents, making his way secretly to Jerusalem, arriving halfway through the feast. And, indeed, he walks into a hornet's nest. During a series of heated exchanges with the crowds, the religious leaders dispatch temple guards to arrest him, but they fail to do so.



Chapter 7 presents seven controversies as the feast of Tabernacles approaches:

1. Controversy with Jesus' brothers;
2. Controversy over Jesus' identity;
3. Controversy over Jesus' teaching;
4. Controversy over whether Jesus is the Messiah;
5. Controversy over Jesus' arrest;
6. Controversy over the Spirit; and
7. Controversy over the origin of the Messiah.



Nice!

- * 7 "signs";
- * 7 "I am" statements;
- * 7 controversies

**I saw that
coming: 3 sets
of 7!**

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The feast of Tabernacles (or Sukkoth) is one of three pilgrimage festivals, during which all Jews who are able go to Jerusalem to worship as one people.

Tabernacles remembers the 40 years in the wilderness between the Exodus from Egypt in 1446 B.C. and the invasion of Canaan, some 40 years later in 1406 B.C., according to our chronology. As we learned in our study of Numbers, dissent and rebellion against both Moses and God characterized those years.

Fittingly, the seven controversies here in John 7 mirror structurally and thematically the tension and turmoil of those wilderness years, remembered at the feast of Tabernacles, which is about to begin.

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That is a **REALLY** good observation!

Nicely done, John!

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Jacob Jordaens, *The Four Evangelists* (oil on canvas), c. 1625-1630.
Louve Museum, Paris.



Let's look at each one:

1. **Controversy with Jesus' brothers;**
2. Controversy over Jesus' identity;
3. Controversy over Jesus' teaching;
4. Controversy over whether Jesus is the Messiah;
5. Controversy over Jesus' arrest;
6. Controversy over the Spirit; and
7. Controversy over the origin of the Messiah.

“After this, Jesus moved about within Galilee; but he did not wish to travel in Judea, because the Jews were trying to kill him. But the Jewish feast of Tabernacles was near. So his brothers said to him, ‘Leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. No one works in secret if he wants to be known publicly. If you do these things, manifest yourself to the world.’ For his brothers did not believe in him. So Jesus said to them, ‘My time is not yet here, but the time is always right for you. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I testify to it that its works are evil. You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, because my time has not yet been fulfilled.’ After he had said this, he stayed on in Galilee.”

(7: 1-9)

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Humm. Who are these “brothers” who ridicule Jesus?



I didn't know Jesus had brothers!

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That's a very good question!

The word “brothers” is ἀδελφοί [*adelphoi*, a masculine plural noun], and the usual meaning refers to a blood brother or sister. This is how it is used throughout the New Testament. In addition to Jesus’ “brothers” and “sisters” (mentioned in Matthew 12: 47, 13: 55; John 7: 5; Acts 1: 14; and Galatians 1: 19), the term is used of Simon and Andrew (Mark 1: 16), James and John (Mark 1: 19), Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus (John 11: 1-2), Paul’s sister (Acts 23: 16), and Nereus and his sister (Romans 16: 15). Jesus himself uses the term to mean blood brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 27, 32), the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16: 28), and his sayings about the betrayal of brother by brother (Mark 13: 12).

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In addition, ἀδελφοί is also used to denote “fellow Christians” who are not related by blood some 30 times in Acts and 130 times by Paul in his letters.

Since the term can be used to denote both blood brothers and sisters, as well as people joined together in a covenant relationship, the context in which the term occurs must determine its exact meaning.



In Matthew 13: 55 the “brothers” of the Lord are carefully distinguished from Jesus’ disciples and his other followers:

“Is he not the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother named Mary and his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. Are not his sisters [ἀδελφαί, the feminine plural of ἀδελφοί] all with us?”

It is these very people, along with his mother Mary, who in Mark 3: 21-22 travel from Nazareth to Capernaum *“to seize him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind.’”*

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It is important to understand that in the time and culture of Jesus' day, most people lived in large, extended families, not autonomous nuclear families. Such extended families included grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters, cousins, nieces and nephews.

St. Jerome took this into account when he proposed that the "brothers" of the Lord we meet in Scripture are Jesus' "cousins," male relatives in his extended family.

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Yet, the “brothers” and “sisters” of the Lord continue to generate often-heated controversy in some denominational quarters. Here’s the long and the short of the issue:

All Christians accept the virgin birth of Jesus.

- **Roman Catholics**, following St. Jerome, view the “brothers” of the Lord as cousins in Jesus extended family;
- **Orthodox Christians** view the “brothers” of the Lord as Jesus’ half-brothers, sons of Joseph by his deceased 1st wife; and
- **Protestants** view the “brothers” of the Lord as Jesus’ blood brothers born after Jesus’ virgin birth.



Whatever position you take, the “brothers” in this scene—those relatives who know him best—clearly mock Jesus.



That’s not very nice of them!

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“After this, Jesus moved about within Galilee; but he did not wish to travel in Judea, because the Jews were trying to kill him. But the Jewish feast of Tabernacles was near. So his brothers said to him, ‘Leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. No one works in secret if he wants to be known publicly. If you do these things, manifest yourself to the world.’ For his brothers did not believe in him. So Jesus said to them, ‘My time is not yet here, but the time is always right for you. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I testify to it that its works are evil. You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, because my time has not yet been fulfilled.’ After he had said this, he stayed on in Galilee.”

(7: 1-9)

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But they will believe in him! After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, we read in Acts 1: 13-14 that Jesus' disciples, who had witnessed his ascension, went back to Jerusalem and . . .

“when they entered the city they went up to the upper room where they were staying. Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alpheus, Simon the Zealot and Judas son of James. All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.”

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Later, in the A.D. 50s, after St. Paul had traveled through the territory of Galatia on his 2nd missionary journey (A.D. 50-52), he writes an epistle to the churches he founded in Galatia, in which he says that sometime after his conversion on the road to Damascus he . . .

“went up to Jerusalem to confer with Cephas [Peter] and remained with him for fifteen days. But I did not see any other of the apostles, only James the brother of the Lord.”

(Galatians 1: 18-19)

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It is this James who becomes the leader of the mother church in Jerusalem and who makes the final decision at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 regarding Gentiles in the church:

“After they [the Council] had fallen silent, James responded, ‘My brothers . . . it is my decision . . . that we ought to stop troubling the Gentiles who turn to God’”

(Acts 15: 13, 19)

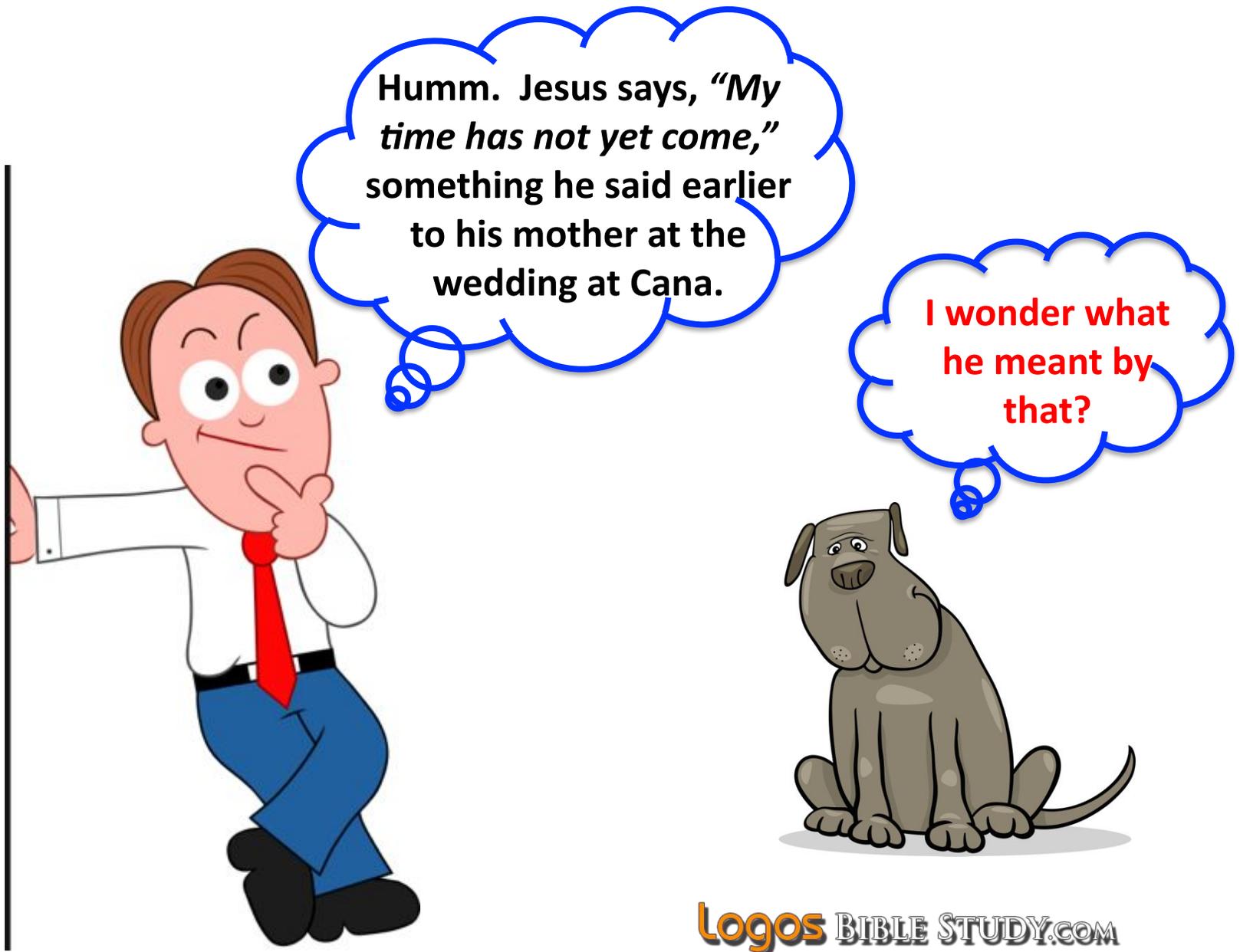
And it is this James who authors the *Epistle of James* in the New Testament.

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“After this, Jesus moved about within Galilee; but he did not wish to travel in Judea, because the Jews were trying to kill him. But the Jewish feast of Tabernacles was near. So his brothers said to him, ‘Leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. No one works in secret if he wants to be known publicly. If you do these things, manifest yourself to the world.’ For his brothers did not believe in him. So Jesus said to them, ‘My time is not yet here, but the time is always right for you. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I testify to it that its works are evil. You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, because my time has not yet been fulfilled.’ After he had said this, he stayed on in Galilee.”

(7: 1-9)

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Humm. Jesus says, "*My time has not yet come,*" something he said earlier to his mother at the wedding at Cana.

I wonder what he meant by that?



I'm glad you asked!

The Greek word for “time” in 7: 6, 8 is *καιρός* (kahee-ros’), and it carries the sense of “time as opportunity,” derived from *κάρα*, “head” or “summit,” as in something “coming to a head,” a very graphic term. John’s gospel refers here to Jesus’ passion; that is, to his crucifixion, burial and resurrection.

In John 2: 5, the wedding at Cana text, the word “hour” is *ώρα*, a more specific work referring to a moment of time, as in “it is time to go.”

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That's really interesting how
the meaning of a scriptural text
can depend, not on theology,
but on the subtleties of word
choice and grammar!
John is a master at this!

And you can't
really capture it
in translation.



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Now, on to our 2nd controversy:

1. Controversy with Jesus' brothers;
2. **Controversy over Jesus' identity;**
3. Controversy over Jesus' teaching;
4. Controversy over whether Jesus is the Messiah;
5. Controversy over Jesus' arrest;
6. Controversy over the Spirit; and
7. Controversy over the origin of the Messiah.

“But when his brothers had gone up to the feast, he himself also went up, not openly but [as it were] in secret. The Jews were looking for him at the feast and saying, ‘Where is he?’ And there was considerable murmuring about him in the crowds. Some said, ‘He is a good man,’ [while] others said, ‘No; on the contrary, he misleads the crowd.’ Still, no one spoke openly about him because they were afraid of the Jews.”

(7: 10-13)

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In this scene Jesus changes his mind and secretly goes up to Jerusalem for the feast. Perhaps his brothers were right, after all.

In Jerusalem the religious leaders are looking for him, expecting him to arrive. They have already formed their opinion about him: he is a troublemaker, a rabble-rouser, a dangerous person to have in Jerusalem at a pilgrimage festival, when the air crackles with incipient rebellion and huge crowds have packed the city, with the Roman authorities on high alert.

The people, on the other hand, are divided: some say he's a good man; others say that he misleads the people and ought to be shunned.



Now, to our 3rd controversy:

1. Controversy with Jesus' brothers;
2. Controversy over Jesus' identity;
3. **Controversy over Jesus' teaching;**
4. Controversy over whether Jesus is the Messiah;
5. Controversy over Jesus' arrest;
6. Controversy over the Spirit; and
7. Controversy over the origin of the Messiah.

“When the feast was already half over, Jesus went up into the temple area and began to teach. The Jews were amazed and said, ‘How does he know scripture without having studied?’ Jesus answered them and said, ‘My teaching is not my own but is from the one who sent me. Whoever chooses to do his will shall know whether my teaching is from God or whether I speak on my own. Whoever speaks on his own seeks his own glory, but whoever seeks the glory of the one who sent him is truthful, and there is no wrong in him. Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?’ The crowd answered, ‘You are possessed! Who is trying to kill you?’

“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘I performed one work and all of you are amazed because of it. Moses gave you circumcision—not that it came from Moses but rather from the patriarchs—and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. If a man can receive circumcision on a sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I made a whole person well on a sabbath? Stop judging by appearances, but judge justly.’”

(7: 14-24)

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We have three distinct controversies here:

- 1) Jesus knowledge of the Scriptures;**
- 2) Jesus' accusation that the "Jews" are trying to kill him; and**
- 3) Jesus' defense of his curing the sick man at the Pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath.**

Let's take them one at a time.

“When the feast was already half over, Jesus went up into the temple area and began to teach. The Jews were amazed and said, ‘How does he know scripture without having studied?’ Jesus answered them and said, ‘My teaching is not my own but is from the one who sent me. Whoever chooses to do his will shall know whether my teaching is from God or whether I speak on my own. Whoever speaks on his own seeks his own glory, but whoever seeks the glory of the one who sent him is truthful, and there is no wrong in him. Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?’ The crowd answered, ‘You are possessed! Who is trying to kill you?’

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At the time of Jesus, literacy was nearly universal among Jews. You can't be a people of the book if you can't read the book! One of the local Rabbi's jobs was to teach young boys to read and write, and boys demonstrated their ability at 12 or 13 years old by reading from the Scriptures at synagogue (what we would call their *bar mitzvah*—remember Jesus being “lost” at the Temple at 12 years old?).

But Jesus' knowledge of Scripture vastly outpaced such rudimentary education. And yet, the “Jews” know that he had never studied with any of the great Rabbis of Jerusalem.

So, where did he get this knowledge?

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Of course, we know who he is: God incarnate; but the people don't know that, so they're baffled by his ability and by his insight into Scripture.

It's easy if you're God!



I must add, however, that none of us can take that position today. As a teacher—or as a student—the Holy Spirit can—and will— guide us in our efforts, but that doesn't excuse us from the hard work of studying the word of God—its languages, geography, anthropology, culture, literature and theology.

As St. Paul says in 2 Timothy 2: 15-

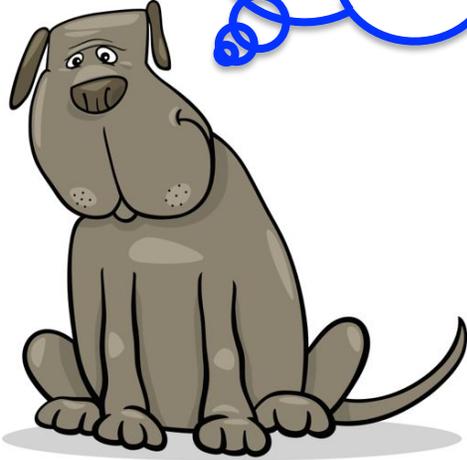
“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

(KJV translation)

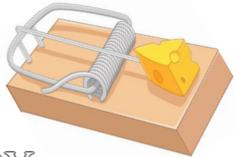
“When the feast was already half over, Jesus went up into the temple area and began to teach. The Jews were amazed and said, ‘How does he know scripture without having studied?’ Jesus answered them and said, ‘My teaching is not my own but is from the one who sent me. Whoever chooses to do his will shall know whether my teaching is from God or whether I speak on my own. Whoever speaks on his own seeks his own glory, but whoever seeks the glory of the one who sent him is truthful, and there is no wrong in him. Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. **Why are you trying to kill me?**’ The crowd answered, ‘**You are possessed! Who is trying to kill you?**’



Again, we know that the “Jews” are plotting to kill Jesus: we were told so in 7: 1. But the crowd doesn’t know that. They claim that he is “possessed,” or pathologically paranoid.



You’re not paranoid if what you fear is true!



That’s right!

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“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘I performed one work and all of you are amazed because of it. Moses gave you circumcision—not that it came from Moses but rather from the patriarchs—and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. If a man can receive circumcision on a sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I made a whole person well on a sabbath? Stop judging by appearances, but judge justly.’”

(7: 14-24)

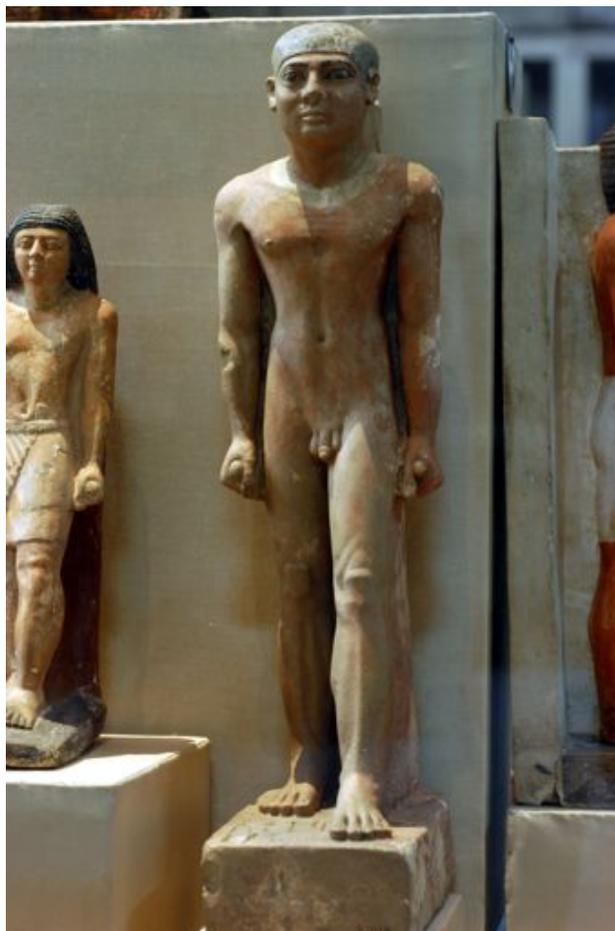
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*From the tomb of Ankhmahor, Vizir to Pharaoh Teti," Old Kingdom, c. 2340 B.C.
Sakkara, Egypt.*

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

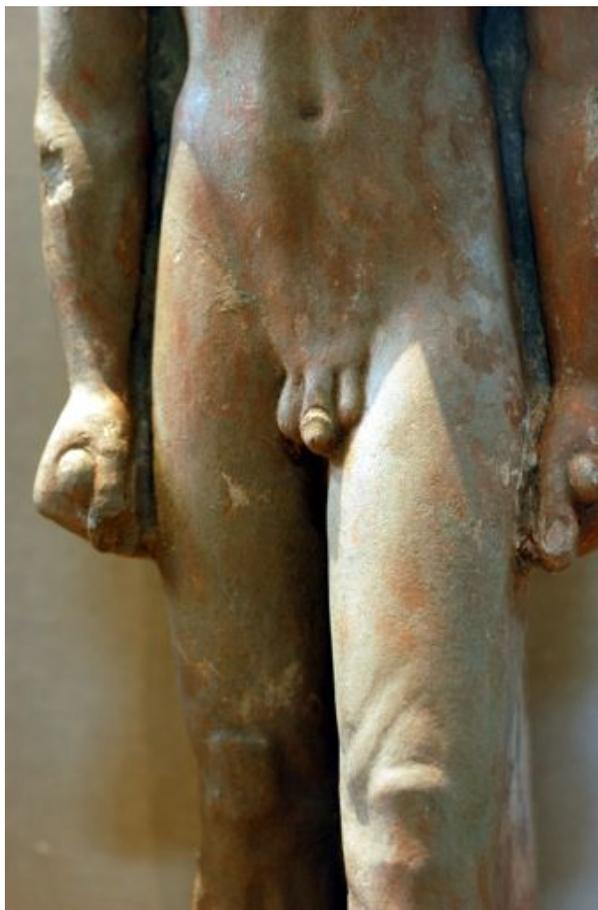
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***From the “Tombs of the Nobles”, Sakkara, Egypt, Old Kingdom, c. 2400 B.C.
Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Egypt.***

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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***From the “Tombs of the Nobles”, Sakkara, Egypt, Old Kingdom, c. 2400 B.C.
Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Egypt.***

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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Jesus compares his healing the sick man at the pool of Bethesda to the “Jews” celebrating a *“brit milah”* (or a “bris”; that is, a circumcision) on the Sabbath.

He goes on to say:

“If a man can receive circumcision on a sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I made a whole person well on a sabbath?”

Don’t miss the hidden humor here: “If you make a “whole” man a “partial” man on the Sabbath, why can’t I make a “partial” man “whole” on the Sabbath!”



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On to our 4th controversy:

1. Controversy with Jesus' brothers;
2. Controversy over Jesus' identity;
3. Controversy over Jesus' teaching;
4. **Controversy over whether Jesus is the Messiah;**
5. Controversy over Jesus' arrest;
6. Controversy over the Spirit; and
7. Controversy over the origin of the Messiah.

“So some of the inhabitants of Jerusalem said, ‘Is he not the one they are trying to kill?’ And look, he is speaking openly and they say nothing to him. Could the authorities have realized that he is the Messiah? But we know where he is from. When the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.’ So Jesus cried out in the temple area as he was teaching and said, ‘You know me and also know where I am from. Yet I did not come on my own, but the one who sent me, whom you do not know, is true. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.’ So they tried to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. But many of the crowd began to believe in him, and said, ‘When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man has done?’”

(7: 25-31)

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And so, the controversy continues. The people know that Jesus is from Galilee; the Messiah will be from Bethlehem in Judea, the town of David (we know from Luke's gospel that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but the crowd certainly does not).

Yet, the crowd's ignorance is glaring when they claim that "*when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from*" (7: 27). Everyone knows that the Messiah will be from Bethlehem. Duh!

But, Jesus cryptically comments that he is from "above," and that the Father sent him.

We should note that no one lays a hand on Jesus because his "hour" has not yet come (7: 30). The word is ὥρα, a moment of time, as in "it is time to go," projecting a sense of imminence and urgency.



Now, our 5th controversy:

1. Controversy with Jesus' brothers;
2. Controversy over Jesus' identity;
3. Controversy over Jesus' teaching;
4. Controversy over whether Jesus is the Messiah;
5. **Controversy over Jesus' arrest;**
6. Controversy over the Spirit; and
7. Controversy over the origin of the Messiah.

“The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring about him to this effect, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent guards to arrest hm. So Jesus said, ‘I will be with you only a little while longer, and then I will go to the one who sent me. You will look for me but not find [me], and where I am you cannot come. So the Jews said to one another, ‘Where is he going that we will not find him? Surely he is not going to the dispersion among the Greeks to teach the Greeks, is he? What is the meaning of his saying, ‘You will look for me and not find [me], and where I am you cannot come?’”

(7: 32-36)

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As Jesus said he is from “above,” so here he says that he will be returning to the one who sent him. What’s more, they (the “Jews”) will not be able to come, since they do not believe in him or accept him.

Throughout this entire conflict, the dualism of understanding/ignorance, belief/unbelief and acceptance/rejection dominate the scene, scraping and grinding as the scene lurches forward.



The 6th controversy:

1. Controversy with Jesus' brothers;
2. Controversy over Jesus' identity;
3. Controversy over Jesus' teaching;
4. Controversy over whether Jesus is the Messiah;
5. Controversy over Jesus' arrest;
6. **Controversy over the Spirit;** and
7. Controversy over the origin of the Messiah.

“On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and exclaimed, ‘Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says:

‘Rivers of living water will flow from within him.’

He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive. There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.”

(7: 37-38)

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As we know from our study of Leviticus 23 and Numbers 29, the feast of Tabernacles (or *Sukkoth*) is a fall festival, celebrating the final harvest of the year; it also remembers the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. Tabernacles follows the 10-day sequence of “High Holy Days”: *Rosh Hashanah* (the beginning or “head” of the year); 10 days of repentance (much like a mini-Lent); and *Yom Kippur*, the day of atonement. This 10-day sequence is a time of reflection, repentance, getting right with God and starting anew.

Tabernacles follows five days after *Yom Kippur*. An 8-day festival, it is a time of joy, a time of celebrating God’s forgiveness and recalling the gifts he has given so abundantly throughout the previous year.

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Each day of Tabernacles the temple trumpets sounded, and on the 8th day a priest would descend to the pool of Siloam, dip a golden pitcher into the water, bring it to the temple and pour it into one of the silver basins by the altar, commemorating the the miraculous stream of water that gushed forth from the rock at Meribah during the wilderness years (Exodus 17: 1-7). The Mishna reads:

“He who has not seen the rejoicing at the [water drawing ceremony], has never seen rejoicing in his life!”

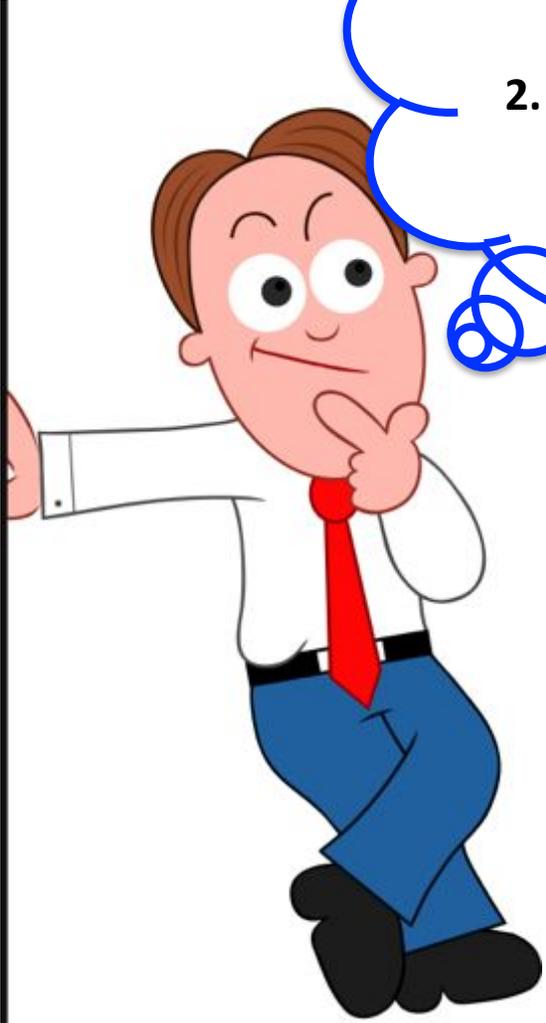
(Sukkah 5: 1)

This is the context for Jesus’ actions when, *“on the last and greatest day of the feast, [he] stood up and exclaimed . . .*

“Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: ‘Rivers of living water will flow from within him.’”

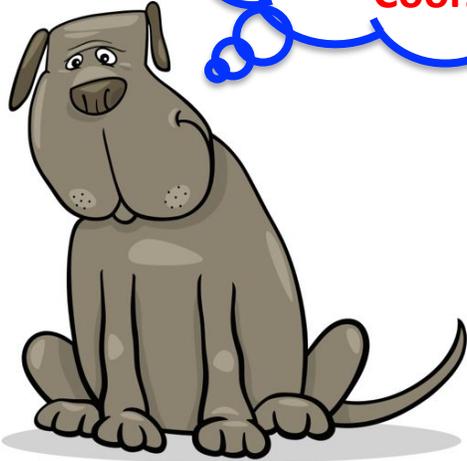
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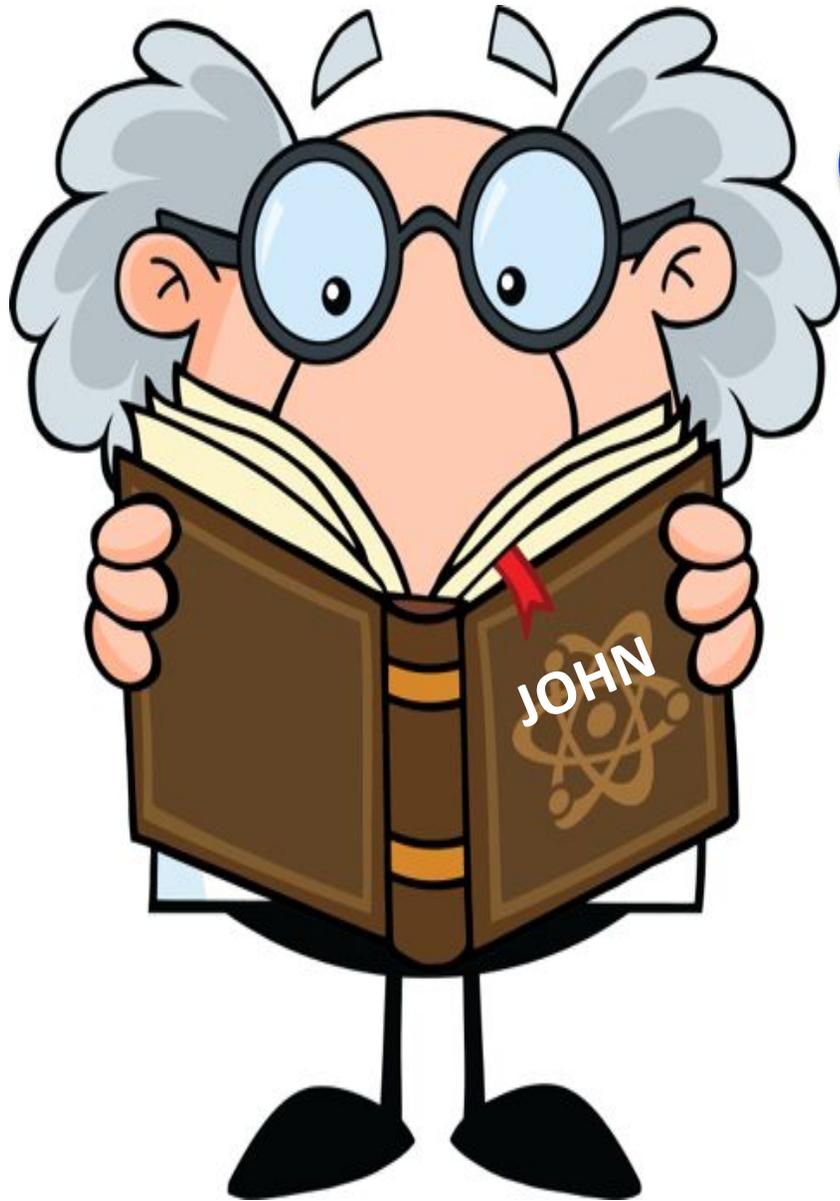


There are interesting correspondences here:

1. Jesus is the “one like Moses”—the Prophet to come.
2. As Moses struck the rock and people drank, so Jesus is the rock from whom people will drink.

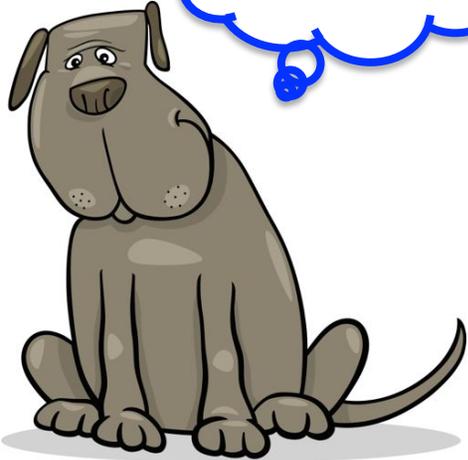


And the water that comes forth is the Holy Spirit.
Cool!



That's very astute observation, young man! You get an A+.

And I get a bone?



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And now, our final controversy:

1. Controversy with Jesus' brothers;
2. Controversy over Jesus' identity;
3. Controversy over Jesus' teaching;
4. Controversy over whether Jesus is the Messiah;
5. Controversy over Jesus' arrest;
6. Controversy over the Spirit; and
7. **Controversy over the origin of the Messiah.**

“Some in the crowd who heard these words said, ‘This is truly the Prophet.’ Others said, ‘This is the Messiah.’ But others said, ‘The Messiah will not come from Galilee, will he? Does not scripture say that the Messiah will be of David’s family and come from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?’ So a division occurred in the crowd because of him. Some of them even wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. So the guards went to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, ‘Why did you not bring him?’ The guards answered, ‘Never before has anyone spoken like this one.’ So the Pharisees answered them, ‘Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the law, is accursed . . .

“Nicodemus, one of their members who had come to him earlier, said to them, ‘Does our law condemn a person before it first hears him and finds out what he is doing?’ They answered and said to him, ‘You are not from Galilee also, are you? Look and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.’”

(7: 39-52)

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And so, the debate about Jesus' identity and about whether or not he is the Messiah continues. No one in the crowd agrees on much of anything! That's typical of ignorant people asserting their opinions as facts, an annoying habit, especially when the topic turns to Scripture or religion!



“Some in the crowd who heard these words said, ‘This is truly the Prophet.’ [a repeated assertion, and one that is essentially true] Others said, ‘This is the Messiah.’ [Yes] But others said, ‘The Messiah will not come from Galilee, will he? [No] Does not scripture say that the Messiah will be of David’s family and come from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?’ [Yes] So a division occurred in the crowd because of him. Some of them even wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. So the guards went to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, ‘Why did you not bring him?’ The guards answered, ‘Never before has anyone spoken like this one.’ [They are awed at Jesus, not afraid of the crowds, as in the synoptics] . . .

“So the Pharisees answered them, ‘Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? [Yes, Nicodemus has] But this crowd, which does not know the law, is accursed. [True, they don’t know the law, but calling them ‘accursed’ is blatant arrogance] Nicodemus, one of their members who had come to him earlier, said to them, ‘Does our law condemn a person before it first hears him and finds out what he is doing?’ [Nicodemus does know the law, and he also believes in Jesus; his question is a reasonable response] They answered and said to him, ‘You are not from Galilee also, are you? [No, he’s not, but saying that is a way to discredit and mock Nicodemus] Look and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.’ [Wrong: both Jonah and Hosea are from Galilee]”



So, on it goes. In Chapter 7 of John’s gospel, opposition against Jesus intensifies, becoming sharper and plunging deeper. Until now, Jesus’ opponents have not had their say—they have not been “given the floor,” as it were—to articulate their thoughts and to carry on a substantive debate with Jesus.

Now they have their chance.

From now until the end of Jesus’ public ministry we will witness an ever-deepening hostility toward Jesus by virtually every outsider, a hostility that will reach its climax in Jesus’ trial, crucifixion and death.

Questions for discussion and thought

1. Why did Jesus decide not to go to Jerusalem for Tabernacles?
2. Why did he change his mind?
3. How did Jesus know Scripture without studying?
4. What does John mean by saying that Jesus' "hour" had not yet come?
5. What triggers Jesus to say, "*Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink*"?

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