Week 1: Samuel

In the Name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. One God. Amen.

Old Testament Historical Context

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)

The Holy Scripture opens with the Creation of the World in the book of Genesis. From the very first chapter, we see the creation of mankind in the Image of God, according to His Likeness. You and I are made in the Image of God. But soon after, we have the fall of man. And man continues to sin and separate himself from God, even to the point that God wipes mankind from the face of the earth, except for one righteous man and his family - Noah. And from Noah, the Lord makes a new creation. From Noah's descendants will come the great man of faith - Abraham, the man after God's own heart - King David, and the Messiah Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ; the Incarnate Word of God. God in the flesh.

The Holy Scripture lays out a single thread, from the Creation of the World and the Fall of Man, to the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of the Son of God. And as we read the Scripture, while it presents historical facts and narratives, we can see that thread. We can see the Love of God for all mankind, we can see the Promise of God and its fulfillment, we can see the Wisdom of God and those whom He gave it to. We can see the Spirit of God coming upon flawed characters, and working in them and through them. We can see the Acceptance of God of the repentant man no matter his sin. God has revealed Himself to us through His Holy Scripture. He speaks to us through His words, but we must read and study and understand and meditate on them, in order to hear His voice.

In the book of Genesis, we read about the patriarchs - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jacob has twelve sons who become the fathers of the twelve tribes. Jacob and his family go to Egypt during a famine in the land, while his son Joseph had become vizier or second-in-command to Pharaoh.

In Exodus, we read that the Israelites were prosperous and multiplying in Egypt. And when a new Pharaoh came, who did not know Joseph, he saw them as a threat and enslaved them. They were in Egypt about 400 years when the Lord sent Moses to deliver them from Egypt. And this is the meaning of the word Exodus. In Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, the Israelites receive the Law from God, build the Tabernacle, and are wandering through the desert for about 40 years until they reach the Promised Land. Then, in the book of Joshua, Joshua (the disciple of Moses) leads them to take conquest of the land and to distribute it among the twelve tribes.

In the book of Judges, the key verse that is repeated several times is that "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." The Israelites would fall into idolatry or sexual immorality and be taken by another tribe like the Midianites or the Philistines or the Ammonites. Then God would raise up for them a Judge - typically, someone who could lead

their military to victory. And they would come out and give thanks to God and promise not to fall again... and then promptly fall again. And the cycle would repeat. This lasted about 400 years and gave us Judges like Deborah, Gideon, Samson, Jephthah and culminated with the last judge - Samuel the priest and the prophet.

And this is where our story will begin in the book of 1 Samuel. We will read about the origins of Samuel and the prayer of his mother for a child, and his upbringing in the Tabernacle.

Who wrote 1 Samuel? The traditional view is that the Prophet Samuel wrote the first part of the book. He dies about halfway through the book, so clearly he didn't write the rest of it (or even 2 Samuel). But we attribute the rest of 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel to be written by the prophets Nathan and Gad. They were the two main prophets at the time of King David. We call these two books 1 and 2 Samuel according to the Hebrew tradition, but according to the Greek tradition, they are called 1 and 2 Kingdoms... so if you are using an Orthodox Study Bible, they will be called 1 and 2 Kingdoms. This is because they show the beginnings of the Kingdom of Israel.

1 Samuel starts with the birth of Samuel and ends with the death of King Saul. 2 Samuel starts with the enthronement of King David and ends with the death of King David. After that, the books of 1 and 2 Kings show us King Solomon and his sons and the split of the kingdom until the time of exile. So in our study during this fast, we will focus on three main characters - Samuel, Saul, and David.

The events of 1 Samuel take place about the year 1100 BC.

If you're not familiar with these characters and stories, that's OKAY! We will learn together and grow together. Please ask questions - privately or in the group. Whatever you feel comfortable with.

May the Lord fill us with His wisdom and His patience, and may this Great Fast and this Bible Study be a source of edification for us, for our salvation.

Glory be to our God, forever. Amen.

Monday - 1 Samuel 1

Today we read 1 Samuel 1. The first character we meet is Elkanah, a man of the tribe of Ephraim and he has two wives - Hannah and Peninnah. I want to make a note here that from the beginning of the Scripture - even in Genesis 2, God ordains marriage as being between one man and one woman. The closer that we get to the New Testament, the more the Lord emphasizes having one wife. And in the New Testament, the Lord talks about marriage saying "because of the hardness of your hearts." Why? In all of the stories with more than one wife, you find many problems - Jacob's wives Rachel and Leah were jealous of each other, despite being sisters. Sarah, when she gave her servant Hagar to her husband, Abraham, got jealous of her after. And we'll see the same here.

Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. And she was very grieved by this, and naturally it didn't help that Peninnah would provoke her because of her jealousy. But Elkanah was a good man and a devout man - every year he would go to worship God at Shiloh. Shiloh was a city in the land of Ephraim which is where the tabernacle was erected in the time of Joshua. And until now

in the time of Samuel, the tabernacle is there.

So he would go up every year to worship and there he would meet the priest Eli and his two sons Hophni and Phinehas. And he would offer sacrifices and whenever a sacrifice was offered, a portion of it would burn, another portion would be reserved for the priest, and a last portion would be given to those who offered the sacrifice. It's a shared meal with the Lord. So Elkanah would take from his portion and divide it among his family and give double what everyone else got, to Hannah. He is a good man - he didn't treat his wife differently because she couldn't bear children. He didn't think in a worldly way about his name or his inheritance. He didn't just tell her with his words that he loves her (although he did do that) but he showed her by his actions. And even when she grieves on the day of the feast, he doesn't rebuke her but he speaks to her with good words, he gives her a chance to vent and speak her problems, and he wants her to know that he loves her.

And here we will have our first interpretation from this chapter - the Fathers of the Church see Peninnah as a type of the Old Testament, and Hannah as a type of the New Testament. Penninah represents outward fruitfulness by her many children. She also came first - in that she had children first. Her children came naturally without a miracle or anything supernatural. Hannah, on the other hand, represents barrenness that is fruitful by grace. She comes later and bears a child with patience. And her son Samuel will, himself, be a type of Christ.

So Hannah, after being comforted by her husband Elkanah's words, goes and eats and drinks, but she was still bitter. The true comfort can only come from God, and not from anyone else. We read that "she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the Lord." Let's try to memorize this verse. When we are in despair, when things are hard, when things are confusing... pray to the Lord. When I am in the midst of tribulation or sin or addiction or guilt - when I am in the belly of the whale - let me pray to the Lord. She raises her heart to Him in humility and makes a promise - if You give me a son, I will dedicate him to You and he will be Yours. She is ready to give him to the Lord all the days of his life... despite how hard it would be. She is ready to consecrate him as a Nazirite.

One lesson that we can take from her prayer is that it was not meant to be seen by others, but spoken in her heart - only her lips moved. The prayer of the heart is more precious than that of the tongue - sometimes I only pray when others are around, like when I'm at church or in youth meeting or in OCCM or something. Eli the priest was so unaccustomed to seeing this high level of spiritual prayer and fervency in prayer, that he accused her of being drunk. But she responds to him with respect and reverence, as to a priest of God. And at the word of Eli the priest who said "Go in peace and the God of Israel grant your petition" - then she was comforted. This is the comfort from God through the mouth of the priest.

Finally, in the last section of the chapter, Hannah conceives and brings forth her son - Samuel. The name Samuel means "The Lord hears." She weans him and brings him up until such time that he is old enough to go to the Tabernacle; then she takes him with a sacrifice and dedicates him to the Lord. And this is a hard thing. She leaves him at the altar for the Lord, her son, her only son whom she loves, the joy of her heart, her baby who she just spent several years rearing. She knows she will only see him once a year. She knows that she will miss him. But the Lord comes before all, and her promise to the Lord comes before all. And we'll see in the next chapter that the Lord gives her three more sons and two daughters.

These are some meditations and interpretations from today's chapter. I encourage you to share with us anything you learned or benefited from. Make sure you read the chapter! Even if you listened to this recording, nothing can substitute the reading of the Scripture.

Blessed Holy and Great Fast to you and God bless you

Tuesday - 1 Samuel 2

Today we read 1 Samuel 2. This chapter is split into four sections, starting with the prayer of Hannah. It is a beautiful prayer full of thanksgiving and glorifying God. She says "My heart rejoices in the Lord" - so often, we pray in a time of need or a time of pain or a time of lack, or even in a time of sin. But when the Lord delivers us, do we ever go back and pray? I pray to pass an exam and when I pass, I forget about God. I passed because I studied. I pray to overcome an illness, but when I overcome, I forget about God; the medicine worked! Hannah prayed for a child and when the Lord gave her one, she went back and thanked Him.

In verse 2, she prays: "No one is holy like the Lord, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God." This is a form of prayer called Glorification. To glorify God is a high form of prayer - it's not focused on making requests or even on being thankful, but it is simply worshipping God BECAUSE He is Holy. BECAUSE He is worthy of praise. One of the best ways that we can learn this form of prayer is by attending the Midnight Praises on Saturday night.

Much of her prayer is reminiscent of St Mary's prayer in Luke 1. And this tells us that St Mary must have been well-versed in the Scriptures! For example, St Mary in Luke 1 says: "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty." Hannah says: "He brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes." It's very similar, if not identical, language.

Final point I want to say is that we read this prayer of Hannah during Bright Saturday. We will read it because that night carries a theme of death to life. We hear Hannah say "The Lord kills and makes alive." Even the dead womb, the Lord has raised - she says "Even the barren has borne seven." (5). It is a wonderful prayer.

The second part of this chapter is a contrast between Eli's sons and Samuel. Eli's sons were wicked and disregarded the things of God and lied and cheated and committed sexual immorality. We read in verse 17 and 18 - "Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord. But Samuel ministered before the Lord, even as a child, wearing a linen ephod." See the sharp contrast? The sins of the young men, the sons of Eli the priest, were very great - but Samuel ministered before the Lord. It would have been easy for Samuel to say "I'll go with the flow" or "everyone else is doing it" or any number of excuses, but he did not. He persevered to live a life of righteousness and service despite what everyone - even the sons of the priest - was doing.

Hannah continued to be faithful to God, offering the yearly sacrifice. And she continued to be faithful to Samuel, her son. Every time she would visit him, she would make him a new robe. And the Lord rewarded her faithfulness by giving her more children - three sons and two daughters.

Finally, the last verse I will share with you is verse 26: "And the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favor both with the Lord and men." This verse parallels the last verse of Luke 2: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." I mentioned yesterday that Samuel is a type of Christ - besides a simple parallel like this one, Samuel is entrusted (because of his faithfulness) with more responsibility in the nation. And he is judge, prophet, and priest. Just as Christ held all the offices - as Judge, Prophet, Priest, and even King.

I want to encourage you to read the Scripture and to read these chapters with us. Blessed Great Fast, God bless you.

Wednesday - 1 Samuel 3

Today we read 1 Samuel 3. And the key verse in this chapter is: "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears."

Samuel goes to lie down in the evening and sleep, and the Lord calls out to him for the first time. But he doesn't yet recognize the voice of the Lord, so he thinks it's Eli calling him. And he goes to Eli and Eli says no, I didn't call you. Go back to sleep. This happens three times... and then Eli realizes what's happening and tells Samuel to respond with this verse: "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears."

We should all memorize this verse. We hear many voices in our day to day lives... we may hear God's voice, we hear our own voice, we hear the voice of others around us, we hear the voice of the media and advertisements, we even hear the fake voice of AI. Everyone and everything is competing for my attention. How do I distinguish these voices? How do I filter out all the noise and hear the voice of God? Eli gave Samuel good advice - "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears."

Whenever I read the Scripture, let me read it with this mindset: "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears."

Whenever I enter the Church, let me come in with this attitude: "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears."

Whenever I am discerning a decision, let me use these words: "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears."

Whenever I sin, or I am in a conflict, and I feel the rebuke of the Holy Spirit, instead of quenching this feeling, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears."

The Lord tries to speak to us every day in various ways - it might be through Scripture. Through my Bible reading, or even through a verse I come across while scrolling Instagram. It might be through goodness - when good things happen to me or around me and I orient my mind to God who is good. It might even be through rough times or difficulties - when I'm swallowed by a whale and I call out to the Lord. "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears."

And so Samuel does this. And the Lord starts to speak His message to him. So this is the beginning of Samuel's role as a prophet - and he is about 12 years old at this point.

Why did Samuel hear the voice but not Eli? As we mentioned yesterday, because he was faithful in his ministry, the Lord entrusted him with greater ministry. His heart was ready to hear the word of God, whereas Eli's was not. Now he will function as a prophet, called by God. The word prophet means "messenger." One who delivers the message of God to the people. And the first message that the Lord gives Samuel to deliver is about Eli's sons. Because they have defiled the house of the Lord, because they have misled the people, because they have committed much sin and iniquity and led the people astray, and because their father, Eli, failed to restrain them despite other warnings from God, they will die.

He delivers God's message to Eli and Eli responds: "It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him." This response shows us his piety. Despite his faults and his failure to discipline his sons, he is pious.

Finally, the last verse I want to comment on: "So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground." The Lord supports His servants. If we attach ourselves to the Lord, and we are like Samuel - "The Lord was with him." So the Lord will support us - when my will becomes aligned with His will, when I am filled with His grace, when I am struggling and doing my best to grow and to repent, the Lord will support me and will make my endeavor successful.

Don't forget to read the chapters, dear beloved. And let the word of God fill you. And before you read any of these chapters say these words with a prayerful heart: "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears."

Thursday - 1 Samuel 4

Our reading today is from 1 Samuel 4. And these next few chapters will be reminiscent of the book of Judges. Remember from our overview, that we are still in the time period of the Judges. Samuel himself is the last judge, as we will see in a couple of chapters. As we mentioned in the first recording on Monday, the key verse in the book of Judges was: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." The Israelites would fall into idolatry or sexual immorality and be taken by another tribe like the Midianites or the Philistines or the Ammonites. Then God would raise up for them a Judge - typically, someone who could lead their military to victory. And they would come out and give thanks to God and promise not to fall again... and then promptly fall again. And the cycle would repeat.

In this chapter, Israel goes out to battle against the Philistines. They did not seek the counsel of God as to whether or not they should do this. But they just went out and fought, and the Lord was not with them, so they were defeated. 4,000 Israelites killed. So what did they do? They said "ah we should go bring the Ark of the Covenant from the Tabernacle and when we take it to battle, the Lord will fight for us." And so they did that... they sent for the Ark, and the two sons of Eli - Hophni and Phinehas - bring the ark and come to battle. And they went into battle... and were defeated again. Even worse this time - 30,000 Israelites killed. And among them, Hophni and Phinehas died - fulfilling the prophecy we read in the last chapter. And the Ark of the Covenant was captured and taken away.

My beloved, the message from the Scripture here is to seek the guidance of the Lord before making any decision. We briefly discussed it in the last chapter... but let me seek the guidance of

the Lord. Before I accept a new job. Before I start a new business or endeavor. Before I choose a school to go to. Before I start a new service. Before I choose a spouse. These are all big decisions. Let me seek the guidance of the Lord. Let me pray. Let me read the Scripture. Let me go and sit with Abouna. Let me take the advice of someone who is older, who is wise and who is spiritually mature. Let me see what God's will is. Maybe this new job will take me further from God... maybe there is sin in it. Maybe there is something I'm not seeing. Maybe it's not God's will in my life - His will is for me to do something more edifying, or something bigger and better, or something greater. Sometimes I make decisions on my own, trusting in my own wisdom - I go out to fight the Philistines, and then I am surprised when I find myself losing 30,000 soldiers. May the Lord give us wisdom.

When Eli finds out that his sons have died and the ark is captured, he fell over in his old age and he died. And the Scripture is very clear "when he had made mention of the ark of God, then Eli fell off the seat backward." It wasn't that his sons died... because, of course, he was waiting for this. It was told him by Samuel, the prophet of God, that that would happen. So he was not surprised. But what gave him shock was the capture of the Ark of Covenant. His daughter in law had the same shock and birthed her son prematurely, naming him Ichabod ("where is the glory?"). Eli understood and she understood that the glory of God had departed from Israel because of their sin and their corruption.

Friday - 1 Samuel 5

Our reading today is from 1 Samuel 5. In the last chapter, the Ark of the Covenant was taken by the Philistines and this sent a shockwave through the land of Israel. This is the Ark of God - this is the representation of God’s presence in their camp. And now it was gone.

In this chapter, we see what the Philistines did with the ark, and how God’s glory is revealed even among the Gentiles.

The Philistines took the Ark of the Covenant and put it in the house of their god, Dagon. Dagon is an idol that the Philistines worshipped and followed; a false god. But when the Ark of Covenant was placed in the same room as this idol, the idol fell. And they came and saw it and lifted it back up. And the next day, the idol had fallen again - this time, the head and hands of the stone idol were broken off.

This is reminiscent of the story of the Lord’s Entry into Egypt. In every city in Egypt that the Lord and the Holy Family would go, the idols of that city would fall. And just as in the Book of Exodus, when the Lord sent ten plagues on Egypt - the plagues corresponded with the Egyptian gods, and they were a very clear defeat of the Egyptian gods. So the Lord’s glory is revealed to the Gentiles.

This story has a very important message for us - good and evil cannot co-exist in my heart. Light and darkness cannot co-exist. God cannot co-exist in my heart with other gods. What gods do I have? I’m confident that no one listening to this message worships an idol made of stone… but do I worship money? Do I worship popularity? Do I worship my phone? Do I worship myself and my image? Do I worship my intelligence or my ambition for many degrees and certificates? A good litmus test for what I am worshipping is… what is my first thought in the morning? First thing I do every morning? What do I give priority to throughout my day? What consumes most of my time or

my thoughts throughout the day? If it’s not God, then it’s something else.

And what if this is my struggle? What if I AM obsessed with money, or addicted to social media or my image, or whatever else? What is the solution? The solution is to invite the Lord in my heart and let him tumble the idols - the Dagons - and let Him break their head and their hands.

This wasn’t the only thing that happened. God revealed His glory in the camp of the Philistines also by striking them with tumors and rat infestations. So they sent away the Ark to another city of the Philistines, and had the same problems! Struck with disease. So they sent it to the next city… but this city, recognizing what was happening, finally resolved that something must be done, and the Ark must be sent back. We’ll read the account of the return of the Ark in the next chapter.

Don’t forget to read daily! God bless you

Saturday - 1 Samuel 6

Today’s reading is 1 Samuel 6. In the last chapter, the Philistines decided to send the Ark of Covenant back to Israel. In this chapter, we will read about the manner by which they do so.

The first thing we read in this chapter is that the Ark spent 7 months in Philistine lands. This was for a couple of reasons:

1 - So that the Philistines would know that the plagues which came upon them were not by chance, but they were a direct result of the presence of the Ark of Covenant. They were from the One True God.

2 - So the Philistines would know that the God of Israel is stronger than their gods. He is the God of gods.

3 - So the Israelites would feel that their sins caused God to leave them, and this would lead them to repentance and to keeping His commandments.

Sometimes the Lord will allow me a prolonged tribulation in order to direct me in some way. Usually to repentance. Even Job, in the book of Job, he’s presented as blameless and upright, fearing God and hating evil… but he wasn’t perfect. So the Lord allowed him to endure tribulation and temptation, in order that He might refine him and adjust the pride in his heart - no matter how small it was.

I might find myself being rejected from some jobs, or not accepted in certain programs, or failing in my relationships - let me seek guidance from the Church to hear the word of God in my life. Maybe I need repentance or I need refinement.

The Philistines inquired of their priests and their fortune tellers to figure out what should be done about the Ark. They told them to return the Ark but not empty-handed. Return it with a trespass offering. And the trespass offering will be 5 golden rats and 5 golden tumors. Images of the plagues that were upon them, and one for each of the lords of the Philistines. You can imagine that this advice is coming from some knowledge of Israel’s history.

When Israel was struck with a plague of serpents, Moses commanded them to make a serpent of bronze. And so it was that they were saved from the serpants by a serpent. And of course, that's a symbol for us of the Cross and the Death of Christ - we are saved from death by His Death.

They also mention the Exodus from Egypt - the Israelites plundered the Egyptians on their way out, taking much gold and silver. And the Egyptians were WILLING to be plundered by them, and freely gave up their gold and silver.

So combining these two ideas, they make tumors and rats of gold and include them with the Ark. They put the Ark on a new cart, and it is pulled by two cows. And they say if these cows go straight to the Israelite land without veering right or left, then we will know this is from Israel's God. And to make it even harder, they locked up the calves of these cows so that they would be inclined to go towards their calves. But God, in His providence, guided the cows straight to the Israelite land of Beth Shemesh. And when the people there saw the Ark coming, they gathered around to see it, put it on a stone and started to look at what came with it.

Unfortunately, they did not handle the Ark in the way that Moses had taught them. They did not return it to the tabernacle, or even give it a dedicated space but they were haphazard in placing it on a stone in the open, in opening it and looking inside, etc. So the Lord struck to death many men of the Israelites. This was a worse punishment than the Philistines because they did not KNOW how the Ark was to be handled. And even despite that, they tried to handle it with reverence… but the Israelites who knew, did not do.

May the Lord have mercy on us if we approach His Holy things haphazardly. If we approach the sacrament of Eucharist haphazardly or come to the sacrament of confession with no intention of changing. Or even approach the sacrament of marriage without due diligence, guidance and prayer.

Don't forget to read the Scripture, my beloved. God bless you.

Sunday - 1 Samuel 7

Today's reading is 1 Samuel 7. At the end of the last chapter, the men of Beth Shemesh were punished because they haphazardly handled the Ark of Covenant. So they called the people of Kirjath Jearim to come and take it and they did. The Ark will stay here in Kirjath Jearim for the next 100 years or so, until when King David brings it to Jerusalem. But the people of Kirjath Jearim will treat the Ark with reverence - they don't open it or look inside, they put it high on a hill, at the house of a Levite, and they dedicated someone to watch over it night and day.

While it's at Kirjath Jearim, and the house of Israel laments, Samuel takes advantage of their lamentation to try and bring them to repentance. He tells them to put away their foreign gods and their Ashtoreths - Ashtoreth is a pagan goddess that was associated with sexual immorality in worshipping it. He says put away your Baals. Prepare your hearts for the Lord.

This is a message for us. I cannot serve God and myself at the same time. I cannot have false gods - like money, music, fame, an ungodly relationship, an addiction, etc. - I cannot have those false gods and at the same time worship the One True God. I would be fooling myself. But rather, when I

approach God, I need to prepare my heart. I need to put away those idols that are taking up all my time or my priorities, and turn to the Lord.

And so they did that. Samuel gathered them in Mizpah to pray on their behalf and intercede for them before the Lord. And we read in verse 6 that the sign of their repentance was that they FASTED. Which is a perfect tie-in to the Great Fast. We are in the Great Fast now, and we should ALL be fasting. And our fasting is not merely a diet based on what food I can or can't eat, but it's a representation of my REPENTANCE. "And they fasted that day, and said there, 'We have sinned against the Lord.'"

When the Philistines heard that the Israelites were gathered at Mizpah, they sent some of their officers to go and see. And the Israelites were afraid - but see how their repentance was a true change of mind. They turned to the Lord. And they turned to the priest of the Lord to intercede for them - "Do not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines."

So, Samuel, did the priestly duty and offered a sacrifice and prayed on their behalf. And the Lord helped them and subdued the Philistines all the days of Samuel.

And we see that in this chapter, Samuel comes into his role as Judge of Israel. In verse 15: "And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life."

Don't forget to read the Scripture!

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