

# Kingdom Judgment

## *Daniel 5*

Daniel 4 ends with a joyful conversion of a pagan king! This chapter ends with a triumphant word of worship to the LORD: *“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”* (Daniel 4:37 [ESV](#))

Wow! What an amazing work of God’s grace in a person who was once so cruel, so full of himself, so immoral, so UNGODLY. Yet this is what God does! In mercy and love, He loves to save those that are lost. He loves to bring spiritual life in the dry desert of the human heart.

**At this point in Babylon, we might think that this country would have a long history of blessing from God and be an honor to God.** But when Daniel 5 opens, Nebuchadnezzar has been dead for a short 23 years. **His grandson Belshazzar is now ruling from the capitol city and trouble for Babylon is everywhere.**

**The once mighty empire is being challenged by the Medo-Persian King Cyrus.** Cyrus and his army have been very successful in recent months in defeating the Babylonian army . . . this is something that NEVER happened while Nebuchadnezzar **reigned for 43 years** . . . such defeat was unthinkable so solid was this nation. **Yet the Medes and Persians have won battle after battle and their army is now surrounding the capital city of Babylon.**

But even with this danger literally at his gates, Belshazzar is not worried. He believes his capitol city to be impregnable. He has enough food to last 20 years inside the city. So they will not starve. He has the mighty Euphrates river flowing through the city so they will never thirst. The walls of the city are too tall to climb and too thick to break down. The moat around the city is so wide that an army cannot come near.

Belshazzar is so very UNCONCERNED about the army that is camping outside the walls of his city that he decides to throw a **big party. And what a party it was!** The date is October 12, 539 B.C. The bash is wild and festive. Belshazzar has music and food and dancing and laughter. He brings all of his wives and concubines to the party along with 1000 of the important people of the city. **This is a night of drunken debauchery and depraved. One secular historian called this party an “orgy of wine”. Herodotus**

**Belshazzar thinks,** *“What will make this night more than another night of drunken sexual immorality? I know! Let us gather all the sacred worship vessels that my grandpa Nebuchadnezzar took from the Temple in Jerusalem. Let us use*

*THOSE cups and candlesticks and ornaments to praise our gods and make this a spiritual frenzy of worship! That will be fun!"* And this is what Belshazzar does. He does what his grandpa did not do, nor his uncle, nor his dad when they reigned over Babylon. He pokes his finger in the eye of the LORD God by using the sacred vessels made for the purpose of worship to the LORD and he uses them for dark, depraved devotion to his false gods. **For some dark purpose, Belshazzar wants to openly mock the LORD.**

**As an aside,** *"In the ruins of Nebuchadnezzar's palace archeologists have uncovered a large throne room 56 feet wide and 173 feet long which probably was the scene of this banquet."* **This is a very big room filled with drunken partiers dancing to the music. Everything is going as Belshazzar WANTED them to go . . . all worried about the enemy at the gates is gone . . . just fun and pleasure. UNTIL.**

**UNTIL . . .** the finger of a giant hand appear. The music abruptly stops playing. The drinking stops. The immoral relationships stop. The dancing stops. Everyone now stands still as statues.

Everyone likely think that they are hallucinating from the wine . . . **but everyone is seeing the same phenomena!** Nothing like this has EVER been recorded in human history. A giant hand floats over to the wall opposite the lampstand so that all can see it. **The giant hand then begins to write a message on the wall.**

Belshazzar begins to quake with terror at the sight. The color drains from his face as he turns white with fear. His knees knock together and give out. He falls like a ragdoll into the chair. He shouts, **"Wise men, enchanters, fortune-tellers come near me! Whoever can read this writing and tell me what it means will be dressed in purple robes of royal honor and will have a gold chain placed around his neck. He will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom!"**  
(Daniel 5:7 [NLT-SE](#))

One by one the wise men of Babylon pass by but none of them could read the writing on the wall! They try . . . but none can know the message that the hand of God writes for all to see. Seeing they do NOT see.

With each failure to be able to understand the message, Belshazzar becomes more shaken. A knot is twisting in his gut. A headache penetrates his skull. His throat grows dry. His breath quickens. And now all the leaders of Babylon at the banquet are shaking with fear too!

The queen mother did not attend this banquet. She is perhaps the daughter or even the wife of Nebuchadnezzar. One thing we do know about her is that she

remembers Daniel. When she hears about giant hand and the message on the wall she rushes into the banquet hall and says, *““Long live the king! Don’t be so pale and frightened. There is a man in your kingdom who has within him the spirit of the holy gods. During Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, this man was found to have insight, understanding, and wisdom like that of the gods. Your predecessor, the king—your predecessor King Nebuchadnezzar—made him chief over all the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers of Babylon. This man Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, has exceptional ability and is filled with divine knowledge and understanding. He can interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means.””* (Daniel 5:10-12 [NLT-SE](#)) Interesting that the queen calls him by his Hebrew name!

**Truth: Too often man does not seek the wisdom from the LORD until disaster strikes. Too often we search for answers to our problems from the empty wisdom of this world.** Only then do we turn to the LORD. Often the wisdom of the LORD comes too late to help us because we have neglected it for too long a season. What a warning for us all!

So Daniel is brought before Belshazzar. The king asks him, *“Are you Daniel, one of the exiles brought from Judah by my predecessor, King Nebuchadnezzar?”* (Daniel 5:13 [NLT-SE](#)). Daniel is now an old man in his seventies. He had been taken from his home as a teen some 66 years earlier.

Belshazzar continues, *I have heard that you have the spirit of the gods within you and that you are filled with insight, understanding, and wisdom. My wise men and enchanters have tried to read the words on the wall and tell me their meaning, but they cannot do it. I am told that you can give interpretations and solve difficult problems. If you can read these words and tell me their meaning, you will be clothed in purple robes of royal honor, and you will have a gold chain placed around your neck. You will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom.”* (Daniel 5:14-16 [NLT-SE](#))

*“Daniel answered the king, “Keep your gifts or give them to someone else, but I will tell you what the writing means.”* (Daniel 5:17 [NLT-SE](#))

You see, Daniel knows that the rewards this world offers are short-lived and not valuable. He is not moved by all the treasures of Babylon. He values one thing and one thing alone . . . the pleasure of His LORD. **He knows that only the LORD can give him a reward that is lasting and precious.**

Daniel then does something incredibly bold! He begins to remind Belshazzar of his grandpa's story. It is likely that Belshazzar is familiar with this story and yet Daniel tells it to remind him that only the LORD is God and that He is the One who sets up kings and who removes them.

*"Your Majesty, the Most High God gave sovereignty, majesty, glory, and honor to your predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar. He made him so great that people of all races and nations and languages trembled before him in fear. He killed those he wanted to kill and spared those he wanted to spare. He honored those he wanted to honor and disgraced those he wanted to disgrace. Daniel 5:20 But when his heart and mind were puffed up with arrogance, he was brought down from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. He was driven from human society. He was given the mind of a wild animal, and he lived among the wild donkeys. He ate grass like a cow, and he was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he learned that the Most High God rules over the kingdoms of the world and appoints anyone he desires to rule over them." (Daniel 5:18-21 [NLT-SE](#))*

OUCH! The message had to sting. Here Belshazzar is literally with a sacred cup of the LORD in his hand using it for profane behavior. And Daniel reminds Belshazzar who the Lord is and what the LORD does to those who defy Him!

*"You are his successor, O Belshazzar, and you knew all this, yet you have not humbled yourself. For you have proudly defied the Lord of heaven and have had these cups from his Temple brought before you. You and your nobles and your wives and concubines have been drinking wine from them while praising gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone—gods that neither see nor hear nor know anything at all. But you have not honored the God who gives you the breath of life and controls your destiny! Daniel 5:24 So God has sent this hand to write this message." (Daniel 5:22-24 [NLT-SE](#))*

How bold are the LORD's messengers when they are faithful ambassadors . . . when they are willing to speak truth to power . . . when they are fearless in the face of ridicule and rebuke!! May the courage of Daniel be ours in the face of a world that does not want to hear the message of the LORD!

Daniel now explains the handwriting on the wall,

*"This is the message that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN.*

*This is what these words mean:*

*Mene means 'numbered'—God has numbered the days of your reign and has brought it to an end.*

*Tekel means 'weighed'—you have been weighed on the balances and have not measured up.*

*Parsin means 'divided'—your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians.'" (Daniel 5:25-28 [NLT-SE](#))*

*"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18 [ESV](#))*

*Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was dressed in purple robes, a gold chain was hung around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.*

This is surprising. I would expect a drunken king being so rebuked would become angry and order Daniel to be executed. Perhaps in his fear, he started to soften. If Belshazzar was softening, it was too late for him.

When Daniel receives Belshazzar's rewards, he thinks to himself, *"Thanks a lot buddy. To have robes and a chain that will shortly be taken from me. The be placed as third highest ruler over a kingdom that is only going to last another hour. What are these?"* How typical of the honors of this world!

**Application: Let us seek the honors of heaven and not the honors of this world. To trade eternal reward for temporal gain is a fool's errand.**

*Daniel 5:30 That very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed.*

Historians tell us that the Persian commander entered the impregnable city by diverting the waters from the Euphrates so that the river levels fell and the armies were able to walk under the city walls.

*Daniel 5:31 And Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of sixty-two." (Daniel 5:29-31 [NLT-SE](#))*

**"One of the most amazing spectacles in this world is how little men really profit from the judgments of God." [Note: Charles Feinberg, p. 69.]**

**Question: What would God have us learn from this tragic story in Daniel 5?**

*"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." (Romans 15:4 [ESV](#))*

**Main Idea: Only God's measure upon our life means anything. Let us not trust in ourselves, but in Christ alone who makes us acceptable in God's sight.**

This morning we consider:

**The Mutiny Our Heart Makes**  
**The Message God Sends**  
**The Measure God Uses**  
**The Mastery God Decrees**

### **The Mutiny Our Heart Makes**

**Belshazzar squandered a spiritual advantage that his grandpa Nebuchadnezzar gave to him.** His grandpa EXPERIENCED the power of the LORD in a way that brought him low. His grandpa EXPERIENCED the judgment of the LORD in a way that brought him to the end of himself. His grandpa EXPERIENCED the mercy and grace of the LORD in a way that lifted him out of disaster. AND his grandpa told him his testimony. What a great gift!

So the Gospel came to Belshazzar in a very personal way, yet Belshazzar turned away from the Gospel with energy and enthusiasm. Belshazzar was not merely a mild idolator. He was a zealous idolator who wanted to defy the most High God.

**Principle: Many despise the spiritual privilege that God gives them through His grace bestowed in their family.**

If we listen to the story of Belshazzar and think, *“How could he have been so hard hearted and foolish? After having a grandfather who gave testimony to the greatness of the LORD, how could he have turned so hard in rebellion against God? How could that happen”* . . . if we ask those questions, we miss the instruction that the LORD has for us in this story. If we ask those questions, we do not understand much about our own hearts.

A person informed by God’s Word does not look at Belshazzar and say, *“Tsk. Tsk. What a buffoon.”* We look at Belshazzar and say, *“Apart from the grace of God, his heart is my heart too!”* Friends, do you recognize what is fundamentally true about your inner world?

**Truth: At the root of our souls, we are rebels against the LORD. At our core we are blind to God’s greatness and holiness.**

**Only by KNOWING this truth about ourselves will we ever look to the LORD for His mercy and grace to save us from ourselves.**

Listen to the instruction of the LORD about our souls.

*“What is man, that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?” (Job 15:14 [ESV](#))*

*“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:6 [ESV](#))*

*“If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” (Psalm 130:3 [ESV](#))*

**What happens when we fail to believe God’s truth about the sinfulness of our own soul?**

1. We condemn others harshly without a heart of mercy.
2. We become blind to the rebellion that is building in our own hearts.
3. We live without awareness of our own specific sins and specific confession of our own sin becomes infrequent.
4. While confession of our own sin becomes infrequent, conversation about others’ sin becomes familiar.
5. We miss the filling of God’s Spirit that brings love, joy and peace to our hearts.

**Application: Let us say, “I am Belshazzar. Apart from the LORD’s grace in my life, I am Belshazzar . . . I am prone to wander from the LORD . . . I am prone to disobey the commandments of the LORD . . . I am prone to defy the majesty of the LORD. O LORD, rescue me by your grace!”**

Friends, there is mutiny against the LORD in each of our hearts. Let us KNOW that to be true so that we can seek the LORD to prevent that mutiny from breaking out and destroying our lives.

**The Mutiny Our Heart Makes**

**The Message God Sends**

**God speaks to us in His love and concern for us. Our God is not silent. In Belshazzar’s day, the LORD spoke through His prophets . . . prophets like Daniel. In our day, the LORD speaks to us through His Son.**

*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.” (Hebrews 1:1-2 [ESV](#))*

We have such an advantage over Belshazzar. He had Daniel, but we have Jesus! God’s Son now speaks to us.

**And how are we to listen to Jesus?**

*“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12 [ESV](#))*

**We have a gift from the LORD that is more clear, more full, more complete, more potent than a finger writing on a wall! We have the Word of God!**

**Listen again to the message that God gives through Daniel.**

*O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled.*

*20 But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him. 21 He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will.*

***22 And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, 23 but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven.** And the vessels of his house have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.” (Daniel 5:18-23 [ESV](#))*

**Note that Belshazzar was an enthusiastic worshipper. But he was zealous about worshipping false gods. The party was religious in its nature.** “They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.” (Daniel 5:4 [ESV](#))

**Why be religious at all?** Answer: Because the worship of false gods always aligns with the desires of our flesh. And here is the big problem. **The worship of the**

true God always aligns with the denial of our flesh. And this is why our flesh hardens when God speaks to us.

Hebrews 3-4 records a quotation from Psalm 95 THREE TIMES! Same verse . . . Psalm 95:7-8 THREE times.

*Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness," (Hebrews 3:7-8 [ESV](#))*

Why three times?

**Principle: When God speaks, He often speaks conviction upon our behaviors and attitudes. When God speaks conviction, our natural response is to deflect his voice and become hardened to it.**

Question: If the LORD speaks a word of conviction to you today, is your heart soft to receive it? Remember that God's conviction is always about turning away from some sin that we love. Is our heart soft or hard? **Are we ready to respond even if it means turning from something we strongly desire?**

**Note that God held Belshazzar accountable for the message God gave to him through his grandpa. 22 And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, 23 but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven.**

I believe that God has spoken to each of you here this morning. He holds you accountable for what He has spoken to you and shown to you.

*Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you." (Matthew 11:20-22 [ESV](#))*

**Application: When God speaks to us, let us not harden our hearts! When God speaks to us, let us have ears that hear what the Spirit is saying.**

**The Mutiny Our Heart Makes  
The Message God Sends**

## The Measure God Uses

*"Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed. And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. This is the interpretation of the matter: MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."" (Daniel 5:24-28 [ESV](#))*

**Each of these words refer to measures of weight. The meaning is explained by Daniel:**

MENE: God has decreed that the number of years allotted to Babylon has expired. Times up!

TEKEL: God weighed Belshazzar and found him "light" and deficient. He was given truth about God and he willfully turned away from it. His life and actions do not measure up in God's court.

PERES: The one kingdom of Babylon will be "broken in two" "divided" so that now one part of Babylon will be ruled by the Medes and the other part of Babylon will be ruled by the Persians.

**Let us think for a moment about the middle word "TEKEL".**

The people of that day bought and sold various goods with various vendors. The vendor would have bags of wheat or grapes or olive oil. And it was important for each person to verify whether they were getting what they paid for. So a scale would be used. Today, we trust the companies who sell goods to be honest and accurate about the measurements we see marked on bottles, cans, and bags of goods. But the picture here is of a person who says that they are selling a pound of olives and then the buyer puts the olives on a scale and finds that the pound of olives that they purchased is really only 14 ounces. They would say, "Tekel". Found light. **Unacceptable.**

**Here the picture is of God placing Belshazzar on a scale. And when Belshazzar is weighed to see if he is a 16 ounces to the pound kind of guy, he falls short. His life is "deficient" and "unacceptable".**

The LORD tells us that HE will weigh each of our lives.

*"because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."*  
(Acts 17:31 [ESV](#))

*"on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."*  
(Romans 2:16 [ESV](#))

*"And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."* (Hebrews 4:13 [ESV](#))

How will we be found when we are weighed in God's balance? Many think, "I believe that I will be OK." Perhaps you know that you have committed some sins, but that you also have committed some acts of righteousness. Perhaps you are hoping that your good works will outweigh the bad and that you will not be found lacking on that future day.

Friends, God declares TEKEL over every soul. The measure He uses is not the measure we use. We weigh ourselves alongside others. We may think, "Well, the LORD has to open His heaven to SOME people. And I am at least in the top half of my class." We also weigh ourselves with our scale of righteousness. And we find that the scales balance! But one HUGE problem! God does not use the scale we use. God's measure is NOT human righteousness, but HIS righteousness.

*"None is righteous, no, not one;"* (Romans 3:10 [ESV](#))

*"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"* (Romans 3:23 [ESV](#))

### **Who passes God's measure of righteousness?**

*"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe."* (Romans 3:20-22 [ESV](#))

*"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* (2 Corinthians 5:21 [ESV](#))

### **The Mastery God Decrees**

*That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old."* (Daniel 5:30-31 [ESV](#))

**What a sobering word!** Man is not ultimate. Man is not great! The LORD alone rules from heaven over all the affairs of men. Our next breath is from the LORD. And one day the LORD will take us from this world by His sovereign decree. He alone is master over our fate.

There is a famous poem written by William Ernest Henley that many love and adore. The Air Force Academy had our son memorize it when he was there. It is a poem that marks the spirit of Belshazzar.

Out of the night that covers me,  
     Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
 I thank whatever gods may be  
     For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
     I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
 Under the bludgeonings of chance  
     My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
     Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
 And yet the menace of the years  
     Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
     How charged with punishments the scroll,  
 I am the master of my fate,  
     I am the captain of my soul.

Friends, that poem lies to you. You are NOT the master of your fate. You are NOT the captain of your soul. You will not be found unafraid before Him whose eyes are like fire. Your knee will NOT be unbowed. Your soul is not unconquerable. Belshazzar thought all of these to be true . . . UNTIL . . . UNTIL God met him with His mastery.

*"And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment," (Hebrews 9:27 [ESV](#))*

Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? **For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay."** And again, **"The Lord will judge his people."** **It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."** (Hebrews 10:28-31 [ESV](#))

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. **The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."**" (Revelation 11:15-18 [ESV](#))

*"Though the mills of God grind slowly; Yet they grind exceeding small;  
Though with patience He stands waiting, With exactness grinds He all."  
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

## **Conclusion:**

**Has God ever gotten your attention? He often uses unusual circumstances to get the attention of the most hardened of souls.**

**What will you do when God awakens you to His power and holiness?**

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.'" (Luke 12:13-21 [ESV](#))

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