

END-TIMES ISSUES



#82 Commandment #4 – The Eternal Sabbath rest.

GOD DOESN'T TELL US TO KNOW ALL THE END-TIME DETAILS. HE TELLS US TO BE READY.

A N D B E Y O N D I

1

GOD HAS DESIGNED WHAT WE CAN SEE TO TEACH US ABOUT WHAT WE CANNOT SEE!

What is:
present-time
physical
visible

*is intended
to-teach-us
about*

What is:
future
spiritual
unseen

We learn these things in Scripture.

- The [future/spiritual/unseen] things are not always revealed at the same time that the [present-time/physical/visible] things occur. They are sometimes revealed *later* (and sometimes in a series of steps).
- But the issue is this: God *reveals* these connections. We don't *invent* them!

2

EXAMPLES:

Creation (which is visible)	→	God (who is invisible)
People, created in the "image of God"	→	God (to a limited degree and, because of sin, imperfectly)
Manna	→	Dependence on God
Rainbow	→	No more <i>flood</i> judgments (the next will be <i>fire</i>)
Circumcision	→	Sign/seal of Abraham's trust in God; we need this type of trust
Shepherd/sheep	→	God is <i>our</i> shepherd
God promises Abraham the land	→	Not yet fulfilled; implies a fulfillment in eternity
Bronze snake that the people were to look to, for healing	→	The need to look to Jesus, for salvation

Teaches us about

3

TODAY: The eternal concept of "Sabbath rest."

The promised land – Canaan
Rest in the promised land
TEMPORARY

Teaches us about
←-NOTE THE DIFFERENCE-→

An *eternal* promised land
Eternal rest
ETERNAL

In the Old Testament, what did they know about what happens after death?

- They didn't know as much as we do;** but they knew *something*. As time progressed, God continued to reveal more about future events.
- They had a different focus,** mainly on how people were to live *in this present life* (not on what would happen afterwards). God's people knew that, *in this present life*, God was worthy of being followed; and they could trust him in whatever might happen in *eternity*.

4

OUR GOAL: To see how the concept of "eternal rest" develops in Scripture.

- Certain situations were intended to teach people about this concept (just like the examples previously given).
- The amount of revelation about this issue increased, as *it was needed*. We have the fullest expression of it in the New Testament.

- Today, we know about the eternal rest that God has reserved for us in the eternal kingdom, on the future new earth.
- God used various events in the past to teach people about this. And he did so step-by-step.
- Even though people in the past didn't know as much as we know, it did not hinder them from being saved. They knew they needed to trust God. They knew how to live *now*. They knew that how they lived would in some way influence whatever occurred after death (even if they didn't know what that "whatever" might be).

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- As additional revelation was given** by God, it was fully compatible with *previous* revelation. What people knew in the past was sufficient for them *at that point in time*, and did not contradict what we know today.

EXAMPLES:

- ✓ **Adam** did not need to know about what would happen after the flood judgment (Genesis 6-8). Nor did he need to know much about what Jesus would accomplish (though he knew God would be doing "something" – Genesis 3:15).
- ✓ **Those living in the centuries just before Jesus** came to earth *needed* to know more about what would happen. They also began to be told more about what would happen *after* that event... but they *didn't* need to know as much as we do.
- ✓ **Today**, we have a better understanding of *the kingdom of God*, and we have more revelation about end-time events... which is the next thing we have to be ready for.

Having additional knowledge *doesn't* guarantee a better *response* to it. But it *does* increase our judgment, if we ignore it.

6

OVERVIEW:

- **The account of God's rest:** ① It's significance as far as God's actions are concerned, and ② How it was to influence the way people lived.
- **Abraham's awareness of the "afterlife":** ① A future ("heavenly") land, and ② God's ability to resurrect the dead. (This awareness was built on Abraham's *trust* in God's promises, when he compared them to his own, seemingly contradictory, life situations.) These "afterlife" issues are the context in which our future rest will occur.
- **Numbers 14:** People who lost the opportunity to enter the promised land (where they would have, in theory, experienced "rest"). This event would be the basis for what God would later teach us.
- **Psalms 95:** This psalm uses the event in Numbers 14 to teach us about a greater "rest" – God's rest. We also see a potential, limited application to the people who lived when the temple was present in Jerusalem.
- **Hebrews 3-4:** We learn how the Old Testament accounts pointed to the eternal rest we will someday experience. This is based on the Old Testament information (which isn't changed or cancelled).

7



As time progressed, God revealed more and more about this eternal rest.

But new revelation did **NOT** cancel what was revealed previously.

Receiving new information is like opening doors.

As the door opens, you see more. But that doesn't *change* what's on the other side (though you may understand it better).

8

OVERVIEW:

- **God's rest:** First introduction of the concept.
- **Abraham:** The resurrection / a future land.
- **Numbers 14:** People not entering the land.
- **Psalms 95:** The land is a picture of God's rest.
- **Hebrews 3-4:** How it all fits together.
- **Eternity:** When we experience it.



Increasing revelation is like a door opening up.

The light increases... but it's still the same light.

9

GOD'S REST – GENESIS 2:2-3.

And by the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on that day **He rested from all His work.**

Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on that day **He rested from all the work of creation** that He had accomplished.

Genesis 2:2-3 (BSB)

- This passage is the foundation for two issues: *God's rest*, and *people's rest*. We will start with the second (which is *not* our primary focus).

Humans: created to follow God's example.

We were created in God's image. What God is like – his moral nature and certain attributes and actions – are to be a pattern for how we live. Being *created*, we cannot reflect God's nature *completely*; but we were made to do it *accurately* (though with the limitations of a created being). Sin has caused us to do it *imperfectly*; but that was *not* the way God created us.

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Genesis 2:2-3 and our rest.

- God made the Sabbath for *us*.

Then [Jesus] said to them, "The Sabbath was **made for people**, not people for the Sabbath. "

Mark 2:27 (NET)

- Adam was present when God *defined* the nature of the Sabbath. Centuries later, God reaffirmed its significance to Israel.
- In the Sabbath, God introduces a *weekly cycle* for humans: six days of work (which was to be done for the glory of God), and one day of rest from that work (with the focus directed more toward God).
- On the eighth day, this cycle would begin again – repeating each seven days. It would be a weekly reminder of what *God* did. →

As a concept, the "Sabbath" was *not* tied to the seventh day. There were *other* days, also set apart for rest from one's daily work, and for having a greater focus on God.

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Genesis 2:2-3 and God's rest.

- In one sense, God is *always* at work. Jesus (as God) is also at work... holding creation together!

But Jesus answered them, "To this very day **My Father is at His work**, and I too am working."

John 5:17 (BSB)

... in Him **all things hold together.**

... **upholding all things** by His powerful word.

Colossians 1:17b; Hebrews 1:3b (BSB)

- But as far as the act of *creating* is concerned, God is finished. On Day 8, he did not start again. He has *rested* from this task, and this rest is *permanent*.
- As we shall see, this is the type of rest that God invites us to *share* with him. Yet it isn't until thousands of years later, that God reveals this fact to us. (Since this is related to *eternity*, knowing it wasn't immediately necessary.)

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ABRAHAM: CANAAN AND THE ETERNAL PROMISED LAND.

★ Our main focus is on eternal rest. But the land issue is important, because it has to do with the place where this rest will occur. ★

- **A FUTURE LAND (AND LIFE)** – Though Abraham did not know as much as we know today, there were some basic concepts that he *did* come to recognize, as he considered the things that God said and did. This includes: ① a future promised land, and ② the ability for God to raise the dead back to life.
 - ✓ God promised to give the land to not only to Abraham's *offspring*, but to *Abraham himself* (Genesis 13:15) – and this giving of the land would be "forever." Yet Abraham would *die* before it happened.
 - ✓ Abraham believed this promise, even though he would not see it fulfilled before he died. This implied the need for a *future* life, when the promise would be fulfilled.

13

All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring **forever**.

Genesis 13:15 (NIV)

"I will establish My covenant as an **everlasting covenant between Me and you** and your descendants after you, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

And to you and your descendants **I will give the land where you are residing—all the land of Canaan—as an eternal possession;** and I will be their God."

Genesis 17:7-8 (BSB)

- ✓ Abraham believed God's promise.
- ✓ Yet in his lifetime, *he had no place to call his own, except for a tomb that he purchased for his wife (purchased by him, not given by God).*
- ✓ Did God fail to keep his promise? Not according to the book of Hebrews! It's just a temporary delay... until *eternity* arrives.

14

- ✓ Because God is *still* going to keep his promise and give Abraham the land, the author of Hebrews can say:

By faith he dwelt in the promised land as a stranger in a foreign country. He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

All these people died in faith, without having received the things they were promised. However, they saw them and welcomed them from afar.

Now those who say such things show that they are seeking a country of their own.

If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for **He has prepared a city for them.**

Hebrews 11:9-10, 13a, 14-16 (BSB)

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- **A FUTURE RESURRECTION** – God also promised that Abraham's offspring would be through *Isaac* ... and then God told Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice to him.

- ✓ Abraham believed God's promise (about Isaac), even at a time when God's command seemed to contradict it.

When Scripture says he "feared" God (Genesis 22:12), it doesn't mean he was afraid of him. Rather it implies that he *trusted* and *obeyed* God, because he was convinced that God would keep his promise, *even if it meant raising Isaac from the dead.*

- ✓ When Abraham tells Isaac, "God will provide a lamb" (Genesis 22:8), it does not necessarily mean that he expected God to provide *an animal* for a substitute. *Isaac*, who God had *provided* to Abraham, could have been the "lamb."

Note that Abraham did not stand around looking for a substitute animal. (This would have actually been an act of disobedience!) Rather, it was only *after* Abraham was ready to plunge the knife into his son, that God stopped him.

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- ✓ Because of these things, the author of Hebrews can say:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac on the altar. He who had received the promises was ready to offer his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "Through Isaac your offspring will be reckoned."

Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and in a sense, he did receive Isaac back from death.

Hebrews 11:17-19 (BSB)

- ✓ God *did* provide a substitute (Genesis 22:13) and many people view it as a "picture" of what Jesus Christ, the "Lamb of God" would do: die for our sins, as *our* substitute (John 1:29).

As the years progressed, many more things would be revealed in the Old Testament, about eternity and what happens after death. But our main focus is on the "rest" issue. →

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NUMBERS 14 – THE "PICTURE" THAT WILL TEACH US ABOUT REST.

- When it was time for Israel to enter the promised land, they refused to trust God, and said that they wanted to go back to Egypt. This was the culmination of *ongoing* rebellion and dissention.
- Because of this, God threatened to destroy the entire nation. But Moses interceded in prayer, asking for God to forgive them. God *did* forgive them – they were not immediately killed-off – but there would *still* be consequences for those who had rebelled.

"I have pardoned them as you requested," the LORD replied.

"Yet as surely as I live and as surely as the whole earth is filled with the glory of the LORD, not one of the men who have seen My glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness—yet have tested Me and disobeyed Me these ten times— **not one will ever see the land** that I swore to give their fathers. None of those who have treated Me with contempt will see it."

Numbers 14:20-23 (BSB)

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GOD'S REST – PSALM 95:11 (COMPARED TO NUMBERS 14).

- Verses 1-7a** are an invitation to worship God. Why? Because he is King over all creation, and because he is our "Shepherd."
- Verses 7b-11** are a warning to not be like those in the past, who constantly rebelled, and were thus *excluded* from God's "rest." This is a reference to the events recorded in Numbers 14.

Today, if you hear His voice,
do not harden your hearts ...
[as your ancestors did.]

So I swore on oath in My anger,
"They shall never enter **My rest**."

Psalm 95:7b-8a, 11 (BSB)

←

Their
rebellion is
described in
vs. 8b-10.

- The exhortation is for us to make the decision "today" to NOT be like them. *Don't wait to decide later!*

Note the change in wording:

- Psalm 95:11** refers to the final rebellion and punishment that meant the people would have to wander in the wilderness for 38 more years (for a total of 40 years), while waiting for everyone above 20 years of age to die. *But there are differences between what the psalm says and what the original account says:*

"... not one will ever see
the land ..."

Numbers 14:23a (BSB)

"They shall never enter
My rest"

Psalm 95:11b (BSB)

- The first part of the quote says basically the same thing, though using different words. ["Not one of them will ever" = "They shall never."]
 - But the concept of "my rest" introduces something that is *not* in the original passage. Since the psalm indicates an application of the original issue to the hearers of Psalm 95, we know that it *includes* (or applies to) the original situation – which referred to the promised land of Canaan. *But there seems to be something more.*

★ Do other Scripture passages link the concept of "rest" (or "a resting place") to the promised land? ★

- YES – FOR PEOPLE.** They do not focus on "rest" for God.
 - ✓ The promised land was, obviously, the place where they would rest from their journey through the wilderness. But most, if not all, passages describe it as a place of rest from *enemies*. Rest from war.
 - ✓ We also learn that this rest was *temporary* in nature. As a nation, they kept returning to rebellion – which meant periods of time when they had *no rest* from war.
- We have to conclude...**
 - ✓ While it is true that the original generation that left Egypt *forfeited* the "rest" (i.e., the *land*) that God had offered them, there is no passage which tells us that God considered the promised land to be *his* place of rest.
 - ✓ We also have an additional problem: When the warning was given in Psalm 95, the people were *already living in the land*. So, it couldn't be a warning that they wouldn't be allowed to enter it!

★ Does God have *any* connection to the land of Israel? ★

- YES – AS ITS OWNER.** He often calls it "my land."
 - ✓ He holds *Israel* accountable for what they do in the land. When they reject God, he judges them appropriately.
 - ✓ He also holds *other nations* accountable for what they do in the land – especially when it involves their mistreatment of Israel.
 - ✓ Examples: 2 Chronicles 7:20; Isaiah 14:25; Jeremiah 2:7; 16:18; Ezekiel 36:5; 36:20; Joel 1:6; 3:2.
- For that matter, God owns the entire earth (and all its inhabitants).** This is the basis for future judgment.

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it; ...

Psalm 24:1a (NIV)

The "land" concept is sometimes expanded in other ways – to something *greater* than an original reference, but not *contradicting* it. Example: The meek will inherit the *land* (Psalm 37:11) and the *earth* (Matthew 5:5).

★ Does God *need* a place to rest? ★

- We've already seen that God *rested* from his work of *creating* (Genesis 2:2-3). But that does *not* mean he has a "resting place"!

"Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
Where is the house you will build for me?
Where will my resting place be?
Has not my hand made all these things,
and so they came into being?"

declares the LORD.

Isaiah 66:1b-2 (NIV)

- Even so, Psalm 95 suggests at least the possibility of some type of "rest" that people can participate in.

Could this "rest" (or "resting place") refer to the temple?

- This psalm appears to be an exhortation for the people to come to the *temple* for worship, and to prepare their hearts for the occasion. Those who defiantly rejected God would not be allowed to enter.
- But it is God's "resting place"?
 - ✓ As we have already seen, the temple – and even all creation – cannot "contain" God, or be his "resting place."
 - ✓ At the same time, Jerusalem and/or the temple is described as God's "resting place" – but only in the sense that the ark of the covenant (and the mercy seat on top of it, where God's *visible glory* resided) would stay in the *temple*. It would "rest" – i.e., *not* be moved from place to place, as it had been, when it was in the portable *tabernacle*.
- Rest at the temple is probably an application of this passage; but it still doesn't completely fit.** After all, it was possible for a secretly-rebellious person (i.e., a hypocrite) to walk onto the temple grounds. Yet the psalm refers to a situation where they *would never* have access.

Ultimately, we have to go back to the Genesis account of God's rest – a rest that *never ends*.

- These various events and admonitions *teach* us about this "rest" – though sometimes their full explanation is given later in Scripture.
- ✓ **The weekly Sabbath** (Exodus 20:8-11) became a reminder of it.
- ✓ **Excluding the rebels from the land** (Numbers 14:21-23) is a picture of the type of person who won't be there. It shows a connection between one's conduct and one's later experience.
- ✓ **Psalm 95** shows that the concept has a wider application than just the event in Numbers 14. And though the Psalm may have a significant application to people who are going to the temple, it is worded in such a way that suggests there is *more* involved.
- ✓ By the time we get to the New Testament, these various factors are brought together, and explained in **Hebrews 3-4**.
- In all ages, people had the knowledge they needed, so that they could respond properly. But we have *more* revelation; so our judgment will be more severe, if we reject what we know (Hebrews 2:1-4).

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GOD'S REST – HEBREWS 3-4.

- **Background:** The book of Hebrews was written to Christians who were going through trials, and needed encouragement. The author of Hebrews shows that *Psalm 95* applies *even under the New Covenant*.
- **The author begins by quoting Psalm 95:7b-11.**
 - ✓ NOTE: This quote is based on the *Greek* translation of the psalm. It does not give the *names* of the locations mentioned in Psalm 95:8 (= Meribah and Massah), but gives the *meanings* of those names (= quarreling/rebelling and testing). This explains the main difference between this quote and the Psalm passage, and shows that it is actually an *accurate description*, which communicates more meaning to the reader than the *names* themselves would.
- **Here is the main argument:** Don't be the way these people were! Instead, encourage each other, as long as "today" exists. If you do this (holding firmly to your faith in Christ), you will *share* in Christ (and thus, share in his blessings and his kingdom). It's those who *don't* trust (and obey) God, who are excluded from God's rest.

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- **The concept of "today":** This means the promise of Psalm 95 is *still available* for us – *if* we are willing to trust God.
 - ✓ The way it is expressed in the psalm shows that it wasn't fulfilled when the people entered the land of Israel. Otherwise, the exhortation of Psalm 95 would not have been made (Hebrews 4:8).
- **Additional observations:**
 - ✓ The phrase "my rest" refers to *God's* rest in Genesis 2:2-3, and is called a "Sabbath rest," in Hebrews 4:9. It does not refer to a specific *day*, such as *Saturday*, but to a *never-ending* rest that resembles *God's* rest (Genesis 2:2-3).
 - ✓ Israel, as a nation, never succeeded in entering that *complete* rest.
 - ① Those who rebelled didn't enter. Yet
 - ② even when they were in the land, rest occurred only to a limited degree (definitely not permanent). Also,
 - ③ the very fact that it was being offered, and includes the word "today" shows that it did not reach its ultimate fulfillment. This means that the invitation to enter that rest still exists, and we should make every effort to enter it! (The only other option is to perish.)

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TODAY, JESUS OFFERS *YOU* REST!

★ Not merely physical or temporary rest, but spiritual and eternal rest! ★

- **In the New Testament, it's usually called "salvation" or "eternal life" – and for those who receive it, it begins NOW!** The fullest expression of this eternal life won't be experienced until Jesus returns; but *even now* we can experience some aspects of it.

Whoever believes in the Son **has** eternal life, ...
John 3:36a (NIV)

**THIS IS
PRESENT
TENSE!**

- **Even now, we can have *rest* for our souls!** But we have to be willing to learn to follow Jesus – which includes turning away from sin.

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and **you will find rest for your souls**. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30 (BSB)

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- **Our future rest includes rest from our "work"** – including rest from the trials and struggles that are part of our present lives.

For whoever enters God's rest also **rests from his own work**, just as God did from His.

Hebrews 4:10 (BSB)

[In the book of Revelation, about people who die in the Lord...]

"... they will **rest from their labors**, for their deeds will follow them."

Revelation 14:13b (BSB)

Following Jesus is sometimes difficult.

The world fights you, and your own flesh (influenced by your old sinful nature) joins them in the battle against you.

But it sure is better than the alternative of *not* following Jesus!

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What type of *REST* are we invited to join?

- Resting in Christ does not mean passively doing nothing (just as *God's* rest doesn't mean passively doing nothing). Rather, it involves a *change in focus*, and includes:
 - ✓ **Peace with God.** The war is over, because of what Jesus did for us (to deal with *our* hostility). *This begins immediately.*
 - ✓ **Victory over Satan and life's trials.** *This will begin when we enter Jesus' presence.* (But even now, we have power to respond rightly.)
- **It also includes:** a willingness to *follow* Jesus, to *grow* in obedience, *repentance* when we sin, *trust* in God in all things, *choosing* God's ways, when confronted with a choice, and *relying* on God, when resisting sin and the devil. It involves letting *God* control your life, instead of fighting to control it *yourself*!
- The more we do these things, the greater our experience of rest will be, *now*! But our *fullest* experience of this rest will be in eternity, in the "heavenly country," in God's presence forever.

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- Like Abraham and others who trusted God in the past, we are "strangers and foreigners on earth" (Hebrews 11:13b). But we have something great to look forward to: A place where we *really* belong!

[They admitted] that they were **foreigners and strangers on earth**.

People who say such things show that they are **looking for a country of their own**. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.

Instead, they were **longing for a better country—a heavenly one**. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for **he has prepared a city for them**.

Hebrews 11:13b-16 (NIV)

- What is this city? This is the *real* (yet future) city where *God* resides!

... the city of the living God, **the heavenly Jerusalem**.

Hebrews 12:22b (NIV); also described in Revelation 21.

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Regarding our *pursuit* of this **REST**:

- ⇒ **Pursuit of this rest is an expression of the "Fourth Commandment principle."** It's also related to the first three commandments, as well as to the "greatest commandment" regarding love for God.

Jesus declared, "**Love the Lord your God** with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is **the first and greatest commandment**."

Matthew 22:37-38 (BSB)

- Pursuing this *eternal sabbath* is an *every-day* activity – involving a daily pursuit of repentance, spiritual growth, fighting sin, etc. It is an every-day focus on **RELYING ON GOD**, which makes these other things possible.
- This pursuit is also related to our *weekly* expression of sabbath-day principles, as we acknowledge our *need* for God and focus on *satisfying that need* (which is an ongoing process).
- So our "MISSION" for this week (and *all* weeks) is...

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Our Mission: **RELY ON GOD!**

Pursue the eternal Sabbath!

When we began to look at the Fourth Commandment principle, we observed how the Heidelberg Catechism summarized it.

The second part of its description was about the *eternal Sabbath* – and it's a good summary of how we can fulfil this goal!

Second,
that every day of my life
I rest from my evil ways,
let the Lord work in me through his Spirit, ...

... and so begin in this life
the eternal Sabbath.

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Credits

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