

Book of Isaiah



Chapter 31

Theme: Declaration That God Will Deal With The Final Assyrian

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Chapter 31

Isaiah is a prophet in the court of Hezekiah, the king. They are fearful of the Assyrians, which have been conquering the country. Judah, headquartered in Jerusalem, has turned to Egypt for help. Often, Egypt is used as an idiom for the “world”, pharaoh being an idiom for the ruler of this world, Satan.¹

In chapter 31 the prophet warns God's people again not to look to Egypt for help but to trust the Lord to defend Jerusalem. So pressing is the danger, and so evident is the likelihood of the Israelites turning to Egypt, that Isaiah continues to warn Judah of the futility of such a measure. In the future Israel will turn to the wrong ally. They will accept the Antichrist, and God is warning them about it here. God will judge those who turn to outside help instead of to Him.²

The first five verses constitute a prologue to this "woe" and deal with imminent disaster followed by later deliverance.

Without any particular break in the thought Isaiah continues his denunciation of those who look to Egypt for aid.

¹Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because *they are* many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD!

Woe #5 of 6 (28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:4; 31:1; 33:1).

Chariots: 600 of Pharaoh (Ex 14:7); 1200 of Shishak (2 Chr 12:3).

Sennacherib = means sin multiplies its brothers. (Sin was their name for the moon god.)³

Certain ones in Judah were always willing to trust in Egypt for help in times of trouble, and God hated this. It caused the people to depend on man instead of God. Here the Lord pronounced woe upon those who favored Egypt. Their fivefold rebellion:

1. They ignored God and depended on Egypt for help.
2. They depended on horses and trusted in their strength.
3. They trusted in chariots.
4. They trusted in their numbers.
5. They trusted in horsemen.⁴

¹ Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

² Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

³ Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

⁴ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

Two things Judah refused to do:

1. Judah refused to look to God for help.
2. Judah refused to seek the Lord.⁵

This is the fifth woe. It is pronounced on those who go down to Egypt for help.

This has a message for you and me. Woe to you and woe to me when we turn away from God and turn to some materialistic or human help. Don't misunderstand me -- He doesn't intend that you launch out into space and hang there. God expects you to be reasonable. But in the final analysis God wants top priority as far as giving help is concerned. My friend, where do you go for help? To your banker? To your preacher? Every now and then I receive a letter from someone who asks me what he should do in a given situation. Well, I don't know what to do with many problems that arise in my own life! Although it is nice to ask others for advice, in the final analysis we must go to God for help. The psalmist wrote: "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God (Ps. 20:7).

Materialistic philosophy says that it is smart to trust in the stock market or your investments, that it is smart to look to "Egypt." Most of us have some "Egypt" upon which we depend for help. The real source of Israel's difficulty was that they did not look to God, nor did they seek Him. Since they did not trust Him, they turned frantically to some outside, physical display of power.⁶

It was wrong for Judah to look to other nations for military help. (1) They were trusting in human beings instead of God. Judah sought protection from those who were powerless when compared to God. Both Egypt and Judah would fall as a result of their arrogance. (2) They were serving their own interests instead of God's, and thus they did not even consult him. They violated God's stipulation in Deuteronomy 17:16. (3) They did not want to pay the price of looking to God and repenting of their sinful ways. When we have problems, it is good to seek help, but we must never bypass God or his previous directions to us.⁷

1-3: This woe (see comments on 3:9) was pronounced on those who went to Egypt for help (cf. 30:1-2), and who relied on Egyptian horses (cf. 30:16) and chariots instead of on God. Both actions—going to Egypt and acquiring horses—violated God's stipulations in the Deuteronomic Covenant (Deut. 17:16). Since God does not go back on His words, He would judge the nation for her disobedience. The Egyptians could not help Judah (cf. 30:3, 5, 7) for they were weak men. Only God could ultimately protect them from their enemies. If Judah persisted in seeking an alliance with Egypt, both countries would meet disaster.⁸

The prophet condemned those in Judah and Jerusalem who were relying on the brute strength, the military might, and the trained personnel of Egypt to provide security for their nation (cf. Deut. 17:14-20). Going down to Egypt to secure these things revealed a lack of trust in the Holy One of Israel who had long ago proved His sovereignty over Egypt. Rather, the people should have simply looked to the Lord and cultivated a relationship with Him.

⁵ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

⁶ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

⁷ Life Application Study Bible.

⁸ The Bible Knowledge Commentary

". . . when any people feel that special weapons can relieve them of dependence upon God, they are on the road to destruction." (Oswalt p. 571)⁹

Isaiah confronts Judah with two sins: the sin of trusting in Egypt and their military might, and the sin of not looking to the Holy One of Israel. Judah felt they had a reason to trust in chariots (because they are many). Judah felt they had a reason to trust in horsemen (because they are very strong). But they couldn't seem to find a reason to trust in the LORD!

"They did not, of course, abandon faith per se. Everybody lives by faith. It is part of the human condition. Financiers trust market forces, militarists trust bombs, scientists trust nature's regularities. Jerusalem's leaders trusted Egypt." (Motyer)

How much better to have the heart of the Psalmist in Psalms 20:7 : Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. And our trust should only be in the LORD "He that stands with one foot on a rock, and another foot upon a quicksand, will sink and perish as certainly as he that stands with both feet on a quicksand." (Trapp)¹⁰

The siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib is still the topic at the heart of these predictions as will be noted in verse 8 below where the fall of the "Assyrian" is mentioned again having been introduced in the last chapter . Thus the warning to avoid looking for help from Egypt is to be seen in this historical context. It may also be that Egypt was the straw on which Shebna was placing his trust. He may have tried to defect to the Egyptians and seek their help at this time when he was captured by the Assyrians instead, to his own and his family's disgrace.¹¹

²Yet he also is wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back his words: but will arise against the house of the evildoers, and against the help of them that work iniquity.

Five facts about God:

1. He is wise -- cannot be deceived.
2. He will bring (allow) evil -- as result of sin.
3. He will not lie -- call back His words.
4. He will rise against the house of evildoers.
5. He will rise against all workers of iniquity.¹²

Yet He also is wise and will bring disaster: Though Judah couldn't seem to find a reason to trust God, the reasons were there, and Isaiah calls them to remember the reasons. They should trust God more than the Egyptians or their armies because He also is wise and will bring disaster . . . He will arise against the house of evildoers.

Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses are flesh, and not spirit: Judah was also wrong about their trust in Egypt. The Egyptians and their armies were not as mighty as they seemed to be. All the LORD must do to topple them, along with all who trust in them, is to stretch out His hand.¹³

⁹ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www.studyight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-31.html>

¹¹ <http://www.moellerhaus.com/isa30-32.htm>

¹² Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

¹³ <http://www.studyight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-31.html>

The house of evil doers are those nobles who seek political answers by seeking an alliance with Egypt. The Egyptians who have accepted bribes are those who offer help.¹⁴

The politicians in Jerusalem who advocated alliance with Egypt undoubtedly considered their policy wise (cf. 5:21; 19:11-15; 28:14-15; 30:1-2). But Isaiah, in irony, pointed out that the Lord, who purposed disaster for those who refused to trust Him, was the truly Wise One. He would be faithful to His Word to oppose the party of evildoers and those wicked "helpers" in whom the Judeans trusted.¹⁵

³Now the Egyptians *are* men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD shall stretch out his hand, both he that helpeth shall fall, and he that is holpen shall fall down, and they all shall fail together.

Two reasons trust in Egypt is vain:

1. They are men, not God.
2. Their horses are flesh, not spirit. The idea is that God is Spirit; therefore, He can do infinitely more than men and horses combined.¹⁶

He that helps and he that is helped: He that helps is Egypt who has been invited to fight against Assyria and save Jerusalem by the unfaithful leaders who are the ones helped by the flawed succorer. Both fail together.¹⁷

The contrast between the relative strength of humans and God is stark. "To us 'flesh' seems so substantial, because visible and tangible, while 'spirit' may seem ethereal. . . . Nothing could be further from biblical thinking, as a glance at passages like Zechariah 4:6 and John 3:5-8 will disclose."

Yahweh would stretch out His hand in powerful judgment to defeat the helpers (Egypt) as well as the helped (Judah) because they trusted in human power rather than in God (cf. Deut. 4:34; 7:19; John 4:24).¹⁸

⁴For thus hath the LORD spoken unto me, Like as the lion and the young lion roaring on his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, *he* will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so shall the LORD of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof.

God will come down to earth and fight like a lion for Jerusalem.

¹⁴ <http://www.moellerhaus.com/isa30-32.htm>

¹⁵ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

¹⁶ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

¹⁷ <http://www.moellerhaus.com/isa30-32.htm>

¹⁸ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

[come down to fight for mount Zion] Come down Himself, not send an angel to do this (Isa. 63:1-5; Dan. 7:13-14,22; Zech. 14:1-5; Mt. 24:29-31; 25:31-46; 2Th. 1:7-10; 2:8; Jude 1:14-15; Rev. 19:11-21).¹⁹

4-5: God assured the people that His greatness would protect them from the terrifying Assyrian threat. As a lion meets up with a flock of sheep and is unafraid of a number of shepherds, so the Lord was not afraid of the Assyrians. He promised to do battle on Mount Zion, and like birds flying overhead He would shield Jerusalem and not let it fall into the enemy's hands.²⁰

As a lion roars . . . So the LORD of hosts will come down to fight for Mount Zion: Again, their trust in Egypt for protection against the Assyrian invasion was both foolish and unnecessary. God would protect Mount Zion if Judah trusted Him or not!²¹

Come down....Zion: This is not a prophecy of a future event in our time as some myopic seers conclude. Zion is not only a symbol of the perfected state to which the nation should arrive when the Messiah has appeared, it is also a the name of a literal place. Here is described what the whole context has been referring to, that is, the tenacity of YHWH who is to deliver the city from what appears to be certain destruction by superior forces by direct intervention. YHWH will not be "run off" in the same way that a lion will not be run off from his kill by the noise of a crowd of people.²²

⁵As birds flying, so will the LORD of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing over he will preserve it.

Hovering versus flying.

The Hebrew word for "passing over" is *pasoah*, an allusion to the miracle of Passover (*pesah*, Heb.). The Lord will repeat again the miracle of Passover and rescue His people.

In recent years this has often been interpreted as Gen. Allenby taking Jerusalem in 1917 without firing a shot, with airplanes were flying overhead; but this isn't the reference, for the other predictions remain to be fulfilled in the future (see Fall of Judah and Egypt). This refers to the Lord and the heavenly armies descending at the second coming with literal angels flying to destroy the armies then surrounding Jerusalem (Joel 2; Zech. 14:1-5; Mt. 24:29-31; 25:31; 2Th. 1:7-10; Jude 1:14-15; Rev. 19:11-21).²³

The Lord will defend and preserve Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah, as we shall see. God assures them that it is a sure thing that the Assyrians will not take the city of Jerusalem.²⁴

¹⁹ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

²⁰ The Bible Knowledge Commentary

²¹ <http://www.studyight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-31.html>

²² <http://www.moellerhaus.com/isa30-32.htm>

²³ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

²⁴ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Like birds flying about, so will the LORD of hosts defend Jerusalem: The picture is of a mother bird protecting her young. So, God will defend Jerusalem with the ferocity of a lion, and also with the tender care of a bird. The combination of the two images is powerful.

“As birds flying; which come from above, and so cannot be kept off; which fly swiftly and engage themselves valiantly and resolutely, when they perceive that their young ones are in eminent danger.” (Poole)

“The Lord of Hosts will be strong as the lion that growls over his prey . . . and He will be sweet and soft and gentle as a mother-bird.” (Meyer)²⁵

Pass over: [pasoach] from "Pesach" meaning "The Passover" not the ordinary word for "passing over" which is [a-vor]. "A-vor" is used in verse 9 as "pass over" to describe the Assyrian retreat and return to their own land. The word "pesach" confers the same action by God that was carried out with the Israelites during the 10th plague of Egypt when the plague struck the Egyptians but the same plague which visited the whole area "passed over" the Hebrews. This word for "Passover" carries with it a pretermission of guilt and punishment, that is, a forgiveness before the transgression. The punishment is deserved but the "death angel" passed over. All the same eerie things accompanying the Egyptian Passover were experienced by the Israelites but not the plague which came with them. Thus, in the same way, the city would have seen and heard the miraculous visitation from heaven vividly described in the last few verses of chapter 30, which describes the visitation as being visible and audible.²⁶

God defends Zion, saving it suddenly. Cf. 29.1-8. 'Protecting' (Heb "pasoah"): The same verb describes God's protection of Israel in Egypt (Exod. 12.13, 23). The noun "pesah" (Passover) is from the same root, and originally meant "to protect," not "to pass over" (see Exod. 12.11 n.).²⁷

6Turn ye unto *him* from whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted.

This is the invitational command for Judah to turn to God against whom all Israel had revolted. This will be obeyed at the very end of the tribulation when God pours out a spirit of grace and supplication upon the Jews at Jerusalem (Isa. 66:6-7; Zech. 12:10 -- Zech. 13:1; Mt. 23:37-39; Rom. 11:25-29). This will result in the cleansing of Israel from idols (Isa. 31:7).²⁸

6-7: Since Judah would be rescued by God (v. 5), Isaiah called on the nation to turn back to Him. Eventually they would throw their idols away (cf. 30:22) in favor of the true God. Therefore Judah ought to throw them away now. Their future hope in the kingdom should change their present behavior. The future reality should have an ethical impact on their lives.²⁹

Return to Him: Because of how great God is, because of how terrible the alternatives to serving Him are, we should feel compelled to return to Him. Repentance means turning towards God,

²⁵ <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-31.html>

²⁶ <http://www.moellerhaus.com/isa30-32.htm>

²⁷ The Jewish Study Bible

²⁸ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

²⁹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary

and away from anything we have put in God's place (idols of silver and idols of gold - sin, which your own hands have made).³⁰

Many Israelites had been seriously unfaithful to the Lord, and Isaiah appealed to those of them in Judah to return to Him with their heart, not just because he had announced coming judgment.³¹

6-7: This is the first passage in which Isaiah calls on the nation to repent since 6.9, where God ordered Isaiah not to engender penitence among the Judeans (see 6.9-10 n.). As the prophecies of Isaiah draw to their close (ch 33 or 34 is the last ch of the collection of Isaiah's own prophecies), this order in ch 6 seems to be rescinded. The reversal of 6.9-10 is made even more clear later in this poem, in 32.3-4.³²

⁷For in that day every man shall cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which your own hands have made unto you *for* a sin.

Someday these people would throw their idols away, recognizing that they were nothing but human-made objects. Idols such as money, fame, or success are seductive. Instead of contributing to our spiritual development, they rob us of our time, energy, and devotion that ought to be directed toward God. At first our idols seem exciting and promise to take us places, but in the end we will find that we have become their slaves. We need to recognize their worthlessness now, before they rob us of our freedom.³³

"In that day" points to the eschatological revival of Israel (cf. 2:20). The Judahites of Isaiah's day needed to return to the Lord, because in the future, Israel as a whole would do so. The time for decisive action was now.³⁴

⁸Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, not of a mighty man; and the sword, not of a mean man, shall devour him: but he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be discomfited.

sword of Angel (2 Kgs 19:35) slaughtered 185,000! (Cf. Elisha, servant: Syrian host 2 Kgs 6:17.)

"Not of a mighty man" -- God says it is not because you are going to be strong enough to drive them away. You won't. God will deal with the Assyrians. Jerusalem's confidence should be in the Lord.

This is a great chapter to read for our own help and strength.³⁵

³⁰ www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-31.html

³¹ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

³² The Jewish Study Bible

³³ Life Application Study Bible.

³⁴ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

³⁵ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Then -- when God comes to earth and defends Jerusalem (Isa. 31:4-5), when Israel turns to Him as a nation and is converted in a day, and when all idols have been destroyed in Judah (Isa. 31:6-7); then the Assyrian (Antichrist) will be destroyed and his young men discomfited (Dan. 7:11,21-22; 8:23-25; Mic. 5; 2Th. 2:8; Rev. 19:19-21). All this points to an Assyrian in the future, not in the past. He will be one destroyed when the Messiah comes (Mic. 5). The sword he is to be destroyed with is not that of an ordinary man, but of Christ (Rev. 21:11-21).³⁶

[discomfited] Hebrew: *mac* (HSN-<H4522>), to burden; tax; force to labor; levy; make tributary.

8-9: Isaiah affirmed again (cf. 30:31) that Assyria would fall, but only because of God's work (by a sword that is not of man). The Assyrian commanders, seeing Judah's battle standard and their soldiers being slaughtered (by the Angel of the Lord; cf. 37:36), would be terrified. The fire may refer to the fire of the altar of burnt offering that burned continually, and the furnace is literally a baking oven. By protecting Judah, God would see that the fire on the altar continued to burn.³⁷

Then Assyria shall fall by sword not of man: This was fulfilled exactly. The Assyrian army devastated almost the entire land of Judah, and camped on the outskirts of Jerusalem, waiting to conquer the nation by defeating the capital city. But 2 Kings 19:35 describes how God simply sent the angel of the LORD, and killed 185,000 Assyrians in one night. When the people woke up, there were 185,000 dead Assyrian soldiers. It was a victory that had nothing to do with the sword . . . of man. God was more than able to protect Judah and Jerusalem.³⁸

Verses 8 and 9: There is a play on words here between this word translated "flee" (*nas*) in this verse and the word "ensign" (*naes*) in the next verse. As in verses like this where there is a play on words we expect to find the LXX to be at great variance with the Hebrew text because they properly understood that the "play on words" is mystical and contains more revelation than "meets the eye." The LXX translation of verse 9 is as follows: "They shall be captured with a stone or as with a pointed stick and they will be dismayed. The ones fleeing will be captured. Blessed is He who has a seed in Zion and a dwelling in Jerusalem." ("He" is YHWH) The translation does not correspond to the Hebrew text at all. Some had written me from a Hebrew forum in which I posted verses in Isaiah in which a "play on words" in the Hebrew text provided the "raison d'etre" for LXX translators to use great latitude in their translation in those verses containing this alliteration. I had proposed this, that is, that there is a mystical content in the use of Isaiah's "play on words" that can not be transmitted in translation which the LXX translators used as a license to vary greatly from the Hebrew text and give a broad interpretive translation rather than follow the text, to which if one were true to, would not render the IDEAS in the text if a word for word rendering were followed. In Isaiah 31:8 and 9 the play on words is on a homonym of n-s or nun samech translated "flee" in verse 8 and "ensign" in verse 9. Also because verse 9 is an obvious "Shekina" passage that adds even more to the mystical aspect of this particular passage. The subject of the discussion is the Assyrian king and his army who are to flee in humiliated fear. The KJV is very true to the Hebrew text and other versions (NASV, NIV, ASV, NIV, etc.) (although having great variety in 9a) are identical with the KJV in the rendering

³⁶ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

³⁷ The Bible Knowledge Commentary

³⁸ www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-31.html

of 9b in spite of the fact that the Hebrew text could be seen differently: the word ordinarily translated "light" as in "let there be light" is translated consistently by all the aforementioned "fire." And in spite of the fact that 8 and 9 in the LXX could not remotely be seen to come from the Hebrew text. I have proposed that it is Isaiah's use of "play on words" that prompts the wide latitude of LXX translator because they properly considered them "mystical" and containing "more than meets the eye." I propose this as one reason (among several) that accounts for variation and latitude in the LXX rather than the simplistic assumption that the LXX is translated from a different text than the one we and the Qumran community used and are using. A similar example can be seen in verses 32 - 35 of the last chapter. A further comment: The LXX is said to have originated about 285 BC but at least a few are aware that there was a re-editing of the LXX by Jewish scholars about 100 years after Christ because some of the translation, particularly the book of Daniel was so faulty and far from the original text, that the revision of the text into Greek was necessary. It is this historical revision of the LXX that also adds weight to the arguments above since it is a text which was not pre-Qumran which Daniel and other portions which needed revision were being compared to.³⁹

⁹And he shall pass over to his strong hold for fear, and his princes shall be afraid of the ensign, saith the LORD, whose fire *is* in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem.

[he shall pass over to his strong hold for fear] The Antichrist will flee to his place of refuge for fear, but he won't escape because of the brightness of Christ's glory. His flaming fire will reach the Antichrist and slay him (Isa. 31:8-9; Dan. 7:11; 2Th. 2:8; Rev. 19:20).⁴⁰

[his princes] His princes are the ten kings that will rule the ten kingdoms of his empire (Dan. 7:7-8,23-24; Rev. 17:8-17).

[ensign] The ensign of Christ (Isa. 11:10-12) who will war with the ten kings and Antichrist (Dan. 7:23-26; 8:25; Rev. 17:14).

[whose fire is in Zion] The fire refers to the perpetual flame on the altar of the Millennial temple that Christ will build and use as His capital building (Ezek. 43:7; Zech. 6:12-13).

[furnace in Jerusalem] The furnace refers to the baking oven (Lev. 2:4; 7:9; 11:35). Here it no doubt refers to the one which the bread of worship will be baked in at the Millennial temple. Both the fire and the furnace picture God as having a home in Jerusalem, and this prophecy predicts His defense of it in destroying His enemies under Antichrist.⁴¹

A banner was a rallying point for a battle. The princes would be too dispirited to rally for the cause. fire: For similar imagery, see 10:17, 18; 30:27, 30, 33.⁴²

³⁹ <http://www.moellerhaus.com/isa30-32.htm>

⁴⁰ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

⁴¹ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

⁴² The Nelson Study Bible

Afraid of the ensign: The banner or ensign is a visible sign held aloft to which a force can rally. The ensign of Jerusalem in this case is the visible appearance of pulsating light that was associated with the plague that visited the Assyrian camp. it is similar to the "Shekina" glory of self enfolding fire described by Ezekiel.⁴³

The rock of Assyria, her king (cf. 30:29), would panic, and her princes would tremble at the evidence of divine intervention. The Assyrians would face a fire in Jerusalem that they could not endure. The Lord's judgment on Sennacherib's army at Jerusalem in 701 B.C. was the beginning of the demise of the Assyrian Empire.³⁴⁹

A man kept a card in his office desk that read: Faith Is Living Without Scheming. In one statement, that is what Isaiah was saying to Judah and Jerusalem, and that is what he is saying to us today.⁴⁴

Psa. 20:6-9 Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven with the saving strength of His right hand. Some boast in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God. They have bowed down and fallen, but we have risen and stood upright. Save, O LORD; May the King answer us in the day we call.

⁴³ <http://www.moellerhaus.com/isa30-32.htm>

⁴⁴ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>