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A Biblical Study of *Yahweh*: The Forgotten Divine Name and Its Implications for Indonesian Christians in Their Use of God's Name

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Abstract

The name *Yahweh*, the proper and covenantal name of the God of Israel, carries deep historical, theological, and devotional significance. However, its usage has diminished or been forgotten among many believers, including Christians in Indonesia. This study examines the biblical, historical, and linguistic factors contributing to the obscurity of *Yahweh* in contemporary Christian worship, especially in the Indonesian context. Drawing from texts such as Jeremiah 23:23–32, the research highlights the spiritual and doctrinal implications of neglecting God's revealed name. The findings emphasize that recovering the understanding and reverence for the name *Yahweh* is vital for fostering a deeper relationship with God and for enhancing theological clarity in the church. The study also suggests that Indonesian church leaders play a key role in reintroducing this biblical truth through teaching and liturgy, thereby strengthening the foundation of Christian identity and worship.

Keywords: *Yahweh*, *Elohim*, *Theos*, Christian worship

INTRODUCTION

The translation of the divine name—commonly represented by the Tetragrammaton (יהוה, *YHWH*)—has long posed theological, linguistic, and practical challenges for Bible translators across languages and traditions. The rendering of this sacred name in Christian Scriptures has varied widely, shaped by doctrinal perspectives, translation philosophies, and cultural-linguistic contexts (Tov, 2012; Barr, 1961).

In various English Bible translations, different transliterations are used to preserve the sanctity or phonetic integrity of the name *YHWH*. Some translations opt for *Yahweh*—such as the *New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)*, *Rotherham's Emphasized Bible*, and *The Book of Yahweh (TBoY)*—reflecting a commitment to linguistic accuracy based on scholarly reconstructions. Others, influenced by ecclesiastical tradition and familiarity, employ the form *Jehovah*—such as the *American Standard Version (ASV)*, *Young's Literal Translation (YLT)*, the *Modern King James Version (MKJV)*, and the *Darby Bible* (Martinez, 2010; Gertoux, 2002).

The Indonesian context also presents a diverse picture. While mainstream Indonesian Bibles (e.g., *Lembaga Alkitab Indonesia* [LAI] editions) predominantly render *YHWH* as "TUHAN" (in uppercase to distinguish it from "Tuhan"), several regional Bible versions preserve a closer transliteration. For instance, Javanese uses "Yehuwah," the Toba Batak version uses "Jahowa," and the Pakpak and Simalungun translations also retain "Jahowa." More recent Indonesian translations, such as the *Indonesian Literal Translation (ILT)* and the *Indonesian Modern Bible (IMB)*, as well as the *Catholic Pastoral Edition of the Sacred Scriptures for the Christian Community*, opt for the transliteration "Yahweh."

These variations reflect broader theological and missiological considerations, including reverence for the divine name, cultural intelligibility, and liturgical tradition. However, the marginalization or complete omission of the name *Yahweh* in mainstream Christian use—especially in public worship and theological discourse—raises questions regarding the implications for Christian identity, doctrinal clarity, and biblical literacy in Indonesia.

This study therefore seeks to explore the historical and theological significance of the name *Yahweh*, investigate the reasons for its neglect, and assess its implications for contemporary Christian worship and theology in Indonesia. By revisiting the Scriptural emphasis on the divine name (e.g., *Exodus 3:15*; *Jeremiah 23:26–27*), the research

underscores the importance of reclaiming this sacred name as part of the Church's witness to God's self-revelation.

While some modern Bible translations such as the *New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)* and *The Emphasized Bible* (Rotherham) retain the name *Yahweh* to reflect linguistic and theological fidelity to the Hebrew text, many mainstream English translations—including the *King James Version (KJV)*, *New International Version (NIV)*, *English Standard Version (ESV)*, and *Revised Standard Version (RSV)*—continue to follow a long-standing translation tradition that began with the *Septuagint* (LXX), the earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. In the LXX, the Tetragrammaton (יהוה, *YHWH*) was rendered as *Κύριος* (*Kyrios*, "Lord"), and this practice was later adopted by the *Latin Vulgate* using *Dominus*. The English tradition inherited this through early translators such as John Wycliffe (1382) and William Tyndale (1530), who used *LORD* to represent *Dominus* in their English Bibles. This convention is now deeply embedded in most Protestant Bible versions (Smith, 2017; Tov, 2012).

The Revised Standard Version (RSV) explicitly defends this practice in its preface: "For two reasons the Committee has returned to the more familiar usage of the King James Version: (1) the word 'Jehovah' does not accurately represent any form of the Name ever used in Hebrew; and (2) the use of any proper name for the one and only God, as though there were other gods from whom He had to be distinguished, was discontinued in Judaism before the Christian era and is entirely inappropriate for the universal faith of the Christian Church." (RSV Preface)

This translation tradition has also shaped Bible versions in non-Western contexts, including Indonesia. The *Alkitab Terjemahan Baru* (New Translation Bible, ITB) by Lembaga Alkitab Indonesia (LAI), which has become the dominant version used by churches, theologians, and Christian publishers, follows the same convention by replacing *YHWH* with "TUHAN" (LORD) and, in certain cases, with "ALLAH" to render *Elohim*. Thus, Indonesian Christians are largely unfamiliar with the name *Yahweh*, as it is not present in the ITB. In passages where *YHWH* appears in the Hebrew Tanakh, the ITB renders it as "TUHAN," while *Elohim* is rendered as "Allah," not as "Ilah" or another generic term for deity.

This widespread practice has theological implications. It has led many Indonesian Christians to identify "Allah" as the name of God rather than understanding it as a general title or category of deity (*elohim*, *theos*). Consequently, the covenantal and personal nature of God's name, *Yahweh*, as revealed in texts such as Exodus 3:15 and Jeremiah 23:27, has been obscured. This neglect stands in contrast to theological scholarship emphasizing the importance of *YHWH* as the distinctive name of the God of Israel—the name by which He entered into covenant with His people (Fretheim, 2005; Smith, 2002).

Sharon W. Betters (2017) underscores this in her theological reflections: "The God of the Bible is not a nameless force; He is *Yahweh*, the covenant-making and covenant-keeping God who reveals His name as an expression of His relational commitment to His people."

In the New Testament, Indonesian Christians unanimously affirm the name of Jesus Christ (*Yesus Kristus*), whose Hebrew-Aramaic form *Yeshua* means "Yahweh saves" or "Yahweh is salvation" (cf. Matthew 1:21). This etymological and theological link between *Yeshua* and *Yahweh* is affirmed by various scholars and biblical encyclopedias (e.g., Kaiser, 1997; Dulle, 2005; Trimm, 2010). Thus, a clearer recognition of *Yahweh* in the Old Testament enriches Christian understanding of the continuity between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament message of redemption.

Literature such as *The Book of Yahweh*, *The Aramaic English New Testament*, and works by Jason Dulle further explore the inseparable relationship between *Yahweh* and *Yeshua*, arguing that the full theological identity of Jesus as the embodiment of *Yahweh* is crucial to Christian confession.

In light of these theological and translational dynamics, it becomes imperative for Indonesian Christians to reevaluate the place of the divine name *Yahweh* in Scripture, worship, and doctrinal teaching. While reverent traditions should be respected, reclaiming *Yahweh* as the name by which God chose to reveal Himself to Israel—and by extension to the world—can deepen theological understanding, strengthen biblical literacy, and enhance the personal and covenantal nature of Christian worship.

This condition is profoundly illustrated in *Jeremiah 23:23–32*, where the people of *Yahweh* in the time of the prophet Jeremiah had forgotten the divine Name due to the misleading influence of false prophets. These prophets, through fabricated dreams and deceptive visions, led the nation away from the covenantal Name of *Yahweh*, replacing it with foreign concepts and ultimately causing the people to forget *Yahweh's* identity—just as their ancestors had done under the influence of *Baal worship* (Jer. 23:27). The continuity of this theological amnesia—this "red thread" of forgetting the Divine Name—is not only a historical reality in ancient Israel but also echoes strikingly in contemporary Christianity in Indonesia.

In modern Indonesian Christianity, most believers are unfamiliar with the name *Yahweh*, due to the dominance of Bible translations such as the *Alkitab Terjemahan Baru* (LAI, 1974), which consistently replaces the *Tetragrammaton (*יהוה*)* with titles like "TUHAN" or "ALLAH." This textual and theological omission reflects a similar pattern of neglect and substitution found in the ancient context of Jeremiah's time.

This parallel—between the historical forgetting of *Yahweh* in the Hebrew Bible and the modern obscuring of His name in Indonesian Christian practice—is what motivates this study. The research titled: "A Biblical Study of *hwhy (Yahweh)*, the Forgotten Divine Name in Jeremiah 23:23–32, and Its Implications for Indonesian Christians Who Use the Title 'God'" seeks to explore the theological, historical, and practical significance of reintroducing the personal name of God, *Yahweh*, into the faith vocabulary and worship of Indonesian Christians.

METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative approach utilizing literature-based analysis (library research), focusing on the primary biblical text *Jeremiah 23:23–32* as the main data source, supported by secondary literature including scholarly commentaries, linguistic tools, and theological analyses. The methodological framework consists of three main components: textual analysis, commentary review, and comparative interpretation.

1. Textual Analysis Method

The core of this study lies in the close reading and linguistic analysis of the Hebrew text of *Jeremiah 23:23–32*, based on the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), which serves as the standard critical edition of the Hebrew Bible. This involves parsing each Hebrew word to identify its grammatical features, including: 1) Lexical root 2) Part of speech 3) Gender 4) Number (singular/plural) 5) Person 6) Verb stem (binyanim) 7) Syntactic function (independent/bound forms) 8) Literal translation (into English and Indonesian).

By conducting this detailed morpho-syntactic analysis, the study aims to uncover both the **literal meaning** (denotative sense) and the **theological implications** (connotative sense) of

the text. This analysis contributes to establishing what this research refers to as **Study Findings-1a** (textual structure and form) and **Study Findings-1b** (semantic and theological meaning).

Such a method corresponds with established practices in biblical studies as proposed by scholars like *Francis I. Andersen and A. Dean Forbes* (2008) in their syntactic database analysis, and *Bruce K. Waltke & M. O'Connor* (1990) in their foundational grammar of Biblical Hebrew.

2. Review of Biblical Commentaries and Exegetical Sources

To enrich and critically evaluate the insights from the primary text, the research also engages with major academic commentaries and theological works from both historical and contemporary authors. This includes but is not limited to the works of: 1) *John Bright, Tremper Longman III, Walter Brueggemann* on the Book of Jeremiah 2) *Michael S. Heiser* on the divine name and biblical theology 3) *James Barr* on the semantics of biblical language

These sources are analyzed in dialogue with the primary text to offer interpretive depth and a balanced exegetical perspective. They also assist in framing the research questions theologically and hermeneutically.

3. Comparative Method

The study applies a comparative approach to examine how the divine name *YHWH* (יהוה) is rendered across major biblical translations—including the **Septuagint (LXX)**, **Vulgate**, **King James Version (KJV)**, **Revised Standard Version (RSV)**, and **Alkitab Terjemahan Baru (ITB)**—and how these translational choices influence theological understanding, particularly in the Indonesian context.

This cross-textual comparison helps address the research objectives by: 1) Tracing the tradition of substitution (e.g., *YHWH* replaced by *LORD* or *Allah*) 2) Highlighting theological shifts due to translational practices 3) Evaluating the implications for Christian worship and doctrine in Indonesia

As argued by *Tov (2012)* and *Schmid (2008)*, comparing ancient textual traditions and modern translations is essential to reconstruct theological intent and reception history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides a comprehensive discussion of the validity of each of the five core research problems. It also addresses the emergence of novel findings and concludes with an analysis of the use of the name "Allah" in Indonesian Christian scriptures, as it pertains to the theological implications of this study.

1. Validity Support for the First Research Problem

The first research question investigates whether *Yahweh* is indeed the proper name of the biblical God based on *Jeremiah 23:23, 24, and 29*. Based on the confirmed validity of Indicators 1, 2, and 3, this study concludes:

Yes, Yahweh is the proper and personal name of the biblical God as evidenced in Jeremiah 23:23, 24, and 29.

This finding is reinforced by several authoritative scholarly sources:

- Botterweck & Ringgren affirm:
  "The Tetragrammaton YHWH is the personal name of the God of Moses... The form Yahweh is now accepted almost universally." (*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. 5, 1986).

- G.T. Manley emphasizes:
  "Strictly speaking, Yahweh is the only 'name' of God. Yahweh, therefore, in contrast with Elohim, is a proper noun, the name of a Person." (*The New Bible Handbook*, 1992).

- Clover notes:
  "Although God is referred to by many titles, only Yahweh serves as a true proper name. Titles such as *El*, *Elohim*, or *Adonai* are descriptive and should not be confused with the personal name Yahweh."

These references support the claim that *Yahweh* is not merely a generic title, but the covenantal name by which God revealed Himself to Israel.

2. Validity Support for the Second Research Problem

The second research question investigates whether there is evidence that prophets in the time of Jeremiah deliberately caused the people of Yahweh to forget His name (*Jeremiah 23:25–27*). Based on the confirmed validity of its indicators, the study finds: There is valid textual and historical evidence that certain prophets conspired to make the people forget the name Yahweh.

Supporting this conclusion, Clover (2018) explains: "These prophets substituted Yahweh's name with their own messages. Jeremiah condemns these religious leaders for replacing Yahweh with *Baal*, causing the people to forget the covenantal name." This aligns with *Jeremiah 23:27*, where Yahweh says, *"They think to make My people forget My name... as their fathers forgot My name for Baal."* The strategy of replacing Yahweh's name reflects both theological negligence and religious syncretism.

3. Validity Support for the Third Research Problem

The third question examines Yahweh's judgment of prophetic dreams in contrast to His authentic word. As evidenced in *Jeremiah 23:28–29*, Yahweh declares that: False dreams are like chaff, while Yahweh's word is like wheat—sustaining, purifying, and powerful like fire and a hammer that breaks rock. This distinction is crucial in understanding the authority of divine revelation. As *John Gillon* comments on Jeremiah 23: "The dreamers speak from delusion, not divine inspiration. The metaphor of chaff (worthless) versus wheat (valuable) highlights the futility of their words compared to Yahweh's living and active Word." This aligns with *Psalm 1:4* and *Matthew 3:12*, where the righteous are compared to fruitful wheat, while the wicked are discarded like chaff.

4. Validity Support for Further Research Questions

This document will continue to address the remaining research problems and provide theological and practical implications, including novel insights and the discussion of the term "Allah" in Indonesian Bibles.

5. Validity Support for the Fifth Research Problem
Research focus: Why do most Indonesian Christians know "Allah" but not Yahweh, and does this parallel Israel's historical forgetfulness of the divine Name?

5.1 Indicator 1: The ITB's Rendering of the Tetragrammaton
The *Alkitab Terjemahan Baru* (ITB) never prints the Tetragrammaton; it substitutes **TUHAN** and, in select contexts, **ALLAH**. Anwar Tjen of the Indonesian Bible Society (LAI) explains that LAI follows Jewish and LXX tradition, where *YHWH* is read as *Adonai* and rendered in Greek as *Kyrios* and in Latin as *Dominus.*[2] Consequently, Indonesian Christians absorb "Allah" as the default designation for God and rarely encounter *Yahweh*.

5.2 Indicator 2: Historical Translation Policy
The NRSV preface exemplifies the mainstream rationale: because the exact pronunciation of *YHWH* was lost and because the use of a proper name seemed theologically parochial, English translators kept the substitute LORD/GOD.[3] LAI aligns with this policy, reinforcing the absence of *Yahweh* in Indonesian ecclesial life.

5.3 Indicator 3: Counter-Arguments against Suppressing the Name
Scholars have challenged this tradition on both textual and theological grounds:

- **Text-critical evidence.** Early Greek fragments (e.g., Papyrus Fouad 266) retain יהוה in Hebrew script inside the Greek text, indicating that the original LXX did **not** translate the Name as *Kyrios.*[4]
- **Reformation perspectives.** The ASV (1901) and Reformers such as Martin Luther argued that suppressing *Yahweh* stems from "a Jewish superstition" and should not dominate Christian translations.[5]
- **Torah injunctions.** Deuteronomy 4:2 and 12:32 warn against adding to or subtracting from God's words; replacing *YHWH* with titles arguably violates this principle (Sugiyarto, 2019).[6]

5.4 Synthesis
Thus, as Israel once "forgot My Name for Baal" (Jer 23:27), modern Indonesian Christians have effectively forgotten *Yahweh* through the dominance of translation conventions that substitute TUHAN/ALLAH. Restoring the covenant Name in liturgy and catechesis could correct this theological amnesia and deepen biblical literacy.

Chapter Summary: Research Findings, Novelties, and Theological Implications

1. Summary of Supporting Findings from the Literature
Two key literature sources affirm the validity of Indicator-3 in the Fifth Problem Formulation:

- **Sugiyarto's Critique**: Emphasizes LAI's theological and linguistic mishandling of divine names—specifically the misuse of *Allah* for *Elohim* and the substitution of *YHWH* with *Tuhan/ALLAH*, which violates the original biblical intent.
- **Researcher's S2 Thesis**: Indicates that Indonesian Christians are unfamiliar with the name *YAHWEH* largely due to the prevalence of *Allah* in translations and common usage, leading to conceptual confusion and loss of divine name awareness.

These findings affirm the full validity of the Fifth Problem Formulation: "YAHWEH was forgotten because of 'Baal' in the time of Jeremiah and before that; now, YAHWEH is forgotten because of 'Allah'."

2. Fulfillment of the Five Primary Objectives

Through the validation of all five problem formulations and the three key indicators of the Fifth, the primary objectives of this study—tracing the loss of the divine name *YAHWEH* among Indonesian Christians due to translation and theological oversight—have been fulfilled.

3. Discovery of Two Novelties (Secondary Objectives)

a. First Novelty: The Inseparable Relationship Between *YAHWEH* and *YESHUA*

Textual Analysis and Parallel Comparison

- *Isaiah 45:21b-23* and *Philippians 2:9-11* both refer to universal worship directed toward *YAHWEH* (OT) and *YESHUA* (NT), suggesting identity continuity.
- *John 17:11-12*, *Matthew 1:20-21*, *Luke 1:30-31*, and *Matthew 21:9* show that the name *YESHUA* was given divinely and is rooted in the name of *YAHWEH*.

Linguistic and Etymological Insights

- *YESHUA* = *Ye* (abbreviation of *YHWH*) + *shua* (from *yasha*, meaning "saves").
- Therefore, *YESHUA* literally means "*YAHWEH is salvation*."

Supporting Literature

- Dulle, Douglas, and Clover affirm that *YESHUA* carries the sacred name *YAHWEH* in abbreviated form, emphasizing the deity of Christ in continuity with OT revelation.

First Novelty Validated The research successfully establishes that the name *YESHUA* in the NT is etymologically and theologically inseparable from *YAHWEH* in the OT.

b. Second Novelty: *YAHWEH* as the Singular, Saving Name of God

Argumentative Narrative

- The divine name *EHYEH* ("I AM") in *Exodus 3:14* is mirrored in *EGO EIMI* declarations by *YESHUA* in the NT (e.g., *John 11:25*), affirming divine identity.
- The title "*The First and the Last*" (*Isaiah 44:6*, *Revelation 1:17*) further links *YAHWEH* with *YESHUA*.

Literature Support

- Stack Exchange citation confirms that early Christian interpretation equated *YAHWEH* with the incarnate God, *YESHUA*.

Biblical Evidence

- *Zechariah 14:9*, *Joel 2:32*, *Acts 2:21*, *Romans 10:13*, and *Acts 4:12* all emphasize the salvific exclusivity of the Name *YAHWEH*, later fulfilled in *YESHUA*.

Second Novelty Validated *YAHWEH* is not just a historical or covenantal name but is central to the Christian proclamation of salvation, now revealed fully in *YESHUA HaMashiakh*.

4. Theological Implication: The Inappropriateness of the Term "Allah" in the Indonesian Christian Bible

Key Arguments:

1. **Semantic Mismatch**:
   - *Elohim* and *Theos* are generic titles; *Allah*, as noted in *Lane's Lexicon*, is a proper name, leading to theological misalignment.
   - Proper translation should use *Ilah*, not *Allah*.

2. **Biblical Prohibition Against Other Names**:
   - *Exodus 20:3* and *23:13* prohibit the invocation of other deities' names.
   - Using *Allah*—historically associated with pre-Islamic paganism and later Islamic theology—violates this command.

3. **Historical Context Misunderstood**:
   - Arab Christians may use *Allah* today, but evidence (e.g., the Zabad Inscription, 512 CE) shows they originally used *Ilah*.
   - *Allah* was the name of a pagan fertility god before Islam redefined it.
   - Therefore, it is implausible that early Arab Christians adopted *Allah* prior to Islamic influence.

4. **Translation Parallels**: A table summarizing linguistic correspondences affirms consistent proper name usage:

Role	Hebrew	Greek	English	Indonesian	Arabic
God's Proper Name 1	YAHWEH	IAUE	YAHWEH	YAHWEH	YAHWAH
God's Proper Name 2	YESHUA	IESOUS	JESUS	YESUS	YASUA
Title 1 (Generic)	ELOHIM	THEOS	GOD	ILAH	ILAH
Title 2 (Lord)	ADONAI	KURIOS	LORD	TUHAN	ROB

CONCLUSION

This study has successfully answered the five core research problems as formulated in the research questions. Each problem has been addressed through careful exegetical analysis and theological reflection based on the biblical text, particularly *Jeremiah 23:23–32*. The conclusions are as follows: First Problem Formulation. *"Is it true that YAHWEH is the proper name of the Biblical God based on Jeremiah 23:23, 24, and 29?"* Conclusion: Yes, *YAHWEH* is affirmed as the proper, covenantal name of the Biblical God, as reflected in Jeremiah 23:23, 24, and 29. This name distinguishes the God of Israel from other deities and emphasizes His immanence and transcendence. Second Problem Formulation. *"Is there valid evidence that during Jeremiah's time, the prophets of YAHWEH*

intentionally caused His people to forget the name YAHWEH?" Conclusion: The study found clear textual evidence that false prophets during Jeremiah's time deliberately led the people to forget YAHWEH's name, replacing it with deceitful dreams and misleading teachings (cf. Jeremiah 23:27). Third Problem Formulation *"How does YAHWEH assess the dreams told by self-proclaimed prophets compared to His true word?"* Conclusion: According to Jeremiah 23:28–29, the dreams of these prophets are likened to straw—worthless and unsubstantial—whereas YAHWEH's true word is like wheat, fire, and a hammer, powerful and transformative. Fourth Problem Formulation *"Why was YAHWEH angry with and opposed to prophets He did not send or command?"* Conclusion: YAHWEH expressed divine anger toward these prophets because they falsely claimed divine revelation, plagiarized His words, and misled the people, thereby undermining His authority and endangering the spiritual wellbeing of the community. Fifth Problem Formulation. *"Why do most Indonesian Christians today not know the name YAHWEH and instead refer to 'Allah' as their God? Does this reflect a historical repetition similar to the replacement of YAHWEH with Baal in ancient times?"* Conclusion: The widespread use of the *Terjemahan Baru* (ITB) Bible, which replaces the Tetragrammaton (YHWH) with "Tuhan" or "ALLAH," has contributed to a loss of awareness of the name *YAHWEH* among Indonesian Christians. This situation mirrors ancient Israel's loss of God's name through syncretistic influence (e.g., Baal worship). The adoption of the word *Allah* to translate *Elohim* and *Theos* without deeper theological clarification has obscured the biblical identity of God as *YAHWEH*.

In addition to addressing the problem formulations, this study also identifies two significant theological and linguistic contributions: First Novelty. The discovery of a close and inseparable relationship between the covenantal name *YAHWEH* (Old Testament) and *YESHUA* (New Testament) affirms that the redemptive identity of God is consistent across both Testaments. *YESHUA* (Jesus) is understood as "YAHWEH saves," a direct linguistic and theological affirmation of divine continuity and unity. Second Novelty. This study confirms that *YAHWEH* is the only personal name of the one true God who, throughout biblical revelation—from the Torah to the Gospels—loves humanity and acts to redeem them from sin and death. Even though He is revealed incarnationally as *YESHUA HaMashiach* in the New Testament, the divine identity remains unified and unchanged.

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