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DOCUMENT 226

Caravans of Sorrow

A Covenant Deep Dive into the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade

Applying the Covenant's Own Law of Servitude, Kidnapping, and the Sojourner to Twelve Centuries of Desert Bondage, Castration, and the Erasure of Lineage

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REACHING JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

✡ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	☪ ISLAM
The eved (עֶבֶד) of Torah is bounded by six-year release and forbids permanent mutilating bondage. No Torah provision anywhere authorizes castration of a captive; Vayikra 22:24 explicitly bars a castrated animal from the altar, reflecting the Torah's revulsion toward the mutilation this trade systematized on human boys.	European Christian scholarship largely neglected this trade's scale until the 20th-21st century, in contrast to the extensive documentation given the Transatlantic trade; recent historians (Segal, Lovejoy, Austen) have worked to correct this imbalance and recover the record examined in this document.	Classical Islamic law forbids castration (a point Islamic jurists themselves affirmed) yet the practice persisted across centuries of Muslim-governed Saharan and Mediterranean markets by evasion — buying already-castrated captives or using non-Muslim intermediaries to perform the operation.

DOCTRINAL AUTHORITY — STANDING RULE OF MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

The sole binding authority of Miqdash Bethel Covenant Institution is the *Tanakh* — the written covenant of **Yahweh**. No Talmudic tractate, Church council decree, papal encyclical, hadith collection, or extra-biblical tradition carries doctrinal weight equal to or greater than the written Torah. Where any tradition conflicts with the written covenant, the written covenant governs without exception. The Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an are cited as historical reference and comparative witness — never as superseding authority. Miqdash Bethel uses the Written Tanakh as

its sole source for four reasons: it is the only text Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all recognize as originally given by **Yahweh**; it predates and underlies the Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an, so testing those traditions against it follows the evidentiary direction of **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15** — the earlier witness governs the later commentary; every later tradition that departs from the Tanakh does so by addition or reinterpretation, never by overturning the text itself, so the text remains the fixed standard; and **Yahweh**'s own words declare the covenant unchanging (Malachi 3:6; Tehillim (Psalms) 119:89), making the written covenant — not evolving institutional interpretation — the only stable ground for doctrine. All three great covenant traditions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — are addressed simultaneously and equally in every Miqdash Bethel document, because **Yahweh**'s covenant belongs to every nation that will receive it. The **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15** two-or-three-witness evidentiary standard governs all textual claims in this document.

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This document applies the sole authority of the written *Tanakh* to the historical record of the trans-Saharan slave trade — the nearly two-thousand-year overland movement of enslaved sub-Saharan Africans across the Sahara Desert to markets in the Maghreb, Egypt, and beyond. **Yahweh** (יהוה) and **Elohim** (אֱלֹהִים) appear in bold throughout. Hebrew book names are given with English in parentheses. Hebrew transliterations appear in ***bold italic*** with English meaning in parentheses at every occurrence. Scripture references are bold. Three audiences are addressed simultaneously: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Rabbinic commentary, the Qur'an, and hadith are cited as historical and comparative reference — never as binding authority. This document is the fifth in a planned covenant series on the world's historical slave trades, following Document 222 (Arab-Islamic trade generally), Document 223 (Transatlantic), Document 224 (Indian Ocean), and Document 225 (Mediterranean/Barbary). Document 222 touched the trans-Saharan route briefly as one artery of the wider Arab-Islamic system; this document gives the trans-Saharan trade its own dedicated treatment, with particular attention to a subject requiring careful, honest, and non-sensationalized treatment: the trade's distinctive demographic profile, its systematic practice of castration, and the resulting near-total erasure of visible descendant communities in the receiving societies — a stark contrast to the Americas. Every specific figure in this document (mortality rates, price premiums, gender ratios) is presented with its scholarly range and level of contestation stated honestly, per the Devarim 19:15 evidentiary standard governing this entire series; where sources disagree sharply, this document says so rather than presenting a single number as settled fact.

TANAKH BOOKS CITED IN THIS DOCUMENT

DIVISION	BOOKS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Torah	Bereishit (Genesis), Shemot (Exodus), Vayikra (Leviticus), Devarim (Deuteronomy)	Foundation text — the covenant's own law of servitude, kidnapping, and the sojourner
Nevi'im (Prophets)	Yeshayahu (Isaiah), Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah), Yechezkel (Ezekiel), Amos, Nachum	Prophetic witness against oppression, man-stealing, and merchant exploitation
Ketuvim (Writings)	Tehillim (Psalms), Iyov (Job), Mishlei (Proverbs)	Wisdom witness to the dignity of the bondsman and the cry of the oppressed

I. WORD STUDY — BONDAGE, MUTILATION, AND THE BLEMISHED BODY

I-A. Eved (עֶבֶד) and Avad (עָבַד) — H5650 / H5647

The Hebrew noun ***eved*** (עֶבֶד) — Strong's **H5650** — derives from the verbal root ***avad*** (עָבַד) — **H5647** — "to work, serve, labor, worship," as established across this series. The trans-Saharan trade's own Arabic vocabulary distinguished categories of bondage by role and body: ***khadim*** (خادم, "servant/attendant," frequently applied to eunuchs specifically), ***jariya*** (جارية, a female slave/concubine), and ***ghulam*** (غلام, a male youth slave, often military). This document's central subject — castration — requires its own Hebrew word study below, since the Torah addresses bodily mutilation directly and repeatedly.

I-B. Saris (סָרִיס) — H5631 — and the Torah's Own Category for the Castrated

The Hebrew ***saris*** (סָרִיס) — **H5631** — is the Torah's own word for a eunuch or castrated official, a term the Tanakh uses without ambiguity (e.g., Potiphar's title in **Bereishit (Genesis) 37:36**, and the court officials of Babylon and Persia throughout **Daniel** and **Esther**). The Torah's own legal witness on the castrated body is explicit and negative on two fronts. First, **Vayikra (Leviticus) 22:24** forbids an animal that is ***ma'ukh*** (מָעוּךְ, crushed), ***katut*** (כָּתוּת, bruised/cut), ***natuk*** (נָתוּק, torn), or ***karut*** (כָּרוּת, cut) in its reproductive organs from being offered as a sacrifice — a direct textual statement that the deliberate mutilation this trade inflicted on human beings was, in the Torah's own value system, not even fit to be inflicted on an animal brought near **Yahweh**'s altar. Second, **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 23:1** restricts the castrated man's standing in the assembly under the Mosaic administration — a restriction the Torah itself later reverses in its own prophetic development (**Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 56:3-5**, promising the ***saris*** who keeps covenant "a monument

and a name better than sons and daughters" in **Yahweh**'s house), demonstrating that the Torah's own trajectory moves toward inclusion and dignity for the castrated person even while never once authorizing the act of castration itself.

II. THE COVENANT'S OWN LAW OF SERVITUDE, KIDNAPPING, AND BODILY INTEGRITY

This section restates, briefly, the Torah standard developed at length across Documents 222-225, and adds the bodily-integrity texts most directly relevant to this document's central subject.

II-A. The Death Penalty for Man-Stealing (Shemot 21:16; Devarim 24:7)

"Whoever steals a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death." (**Shemot (Exodus) 21:16**) The Torah's verdict on the raiding and caravan-purchase apparatus that supplied this trade for nearly two millennia.

II-B. The Law of Bodily Injury to a Bondservant (Shemot 21:26-27)

"If a man strikes the eye of his servant... and destroys it, he shall let him go free for the sake of his eye. And if he knocks out the tooth of his servant... he shall let him go free for the sake of his tooth." (**Shemot (Exodus) 21:26-27**) The Torah's servitude law imposes automatic, mandatory manumission as the penalty for a master who permanently injures even a minor part of a bondservant's body — a tooth, an eye. Applied to the deliberate, often fatal mutilation this document documents, the Torah standard is unambiguous: this is not a regulable practice with a proper procedure, but a categorical violation the Torah's own lesser cases already condemn at a small fraction of this severity.

II-C. The Sojourner and Fugitive Protection Laws (Shemot 22:20-21; Devarim 23:15-16)

"You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt." (**Shemot (Exodus) 22:20**) "You shall not hand over to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you... you shall not oppress him." (**Devarim (Deuteronomy) 23:15-16**) As throughout this series, these texts stand opposed to a system built on permanent foreign subordination rather than protected sojourner status.

III. HISTORICAL WITNESS — SCOPE AND DURATION

The trans-Saharan trade is among the longest-running slave systems in world history, operating from roughly the 8th century (following the Arab conquest of North Africa) through the early 20th century — nearly twelve centuries of continuous overland caravan traffic. Scholarly estimates

of the total number transported vary but converge on a broad range: historians Ralph Austen, Paul Lovejoy, and Ronald Segal each place the total between approximately 6 and 10 million Africans crossing the Sahara over this period, with John Wright's independent reconstruction from Arabic chronicles and European consular reports arriving at just over 6 million. These totals do not include those who died during capture, in transit before reaching the caravan routes, or during the desert crossing itself — losses discussed in Section VI below.

IV. THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE TRADE — WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND THE MINORITY OF MEN

Unlike the Transatlantic trade — which, per Document 223, exported enslaved Africans to the Americas at a ratio favoring men roughly two-to-one (approximately 181 men per 100 women, per Lovejoy's figures) for plantation field labor — the trans-Saharan trade ran in the demographic opposite direction. Historian Paul Lovejoy's widely-cited figure holds that nearly two-thirds of trans-Saharan captives were women; other genetic and historical reconstructions place the ratio at approximately two women for every man transported overall. Historian Ralph Austen has characterized the Transatlantic and trans-Saharan systems as having "largely complementary gender demands" — the Atlantic trade's plantation economy sought young male muscle, while the trans-Saharan trade's dominant demand was for domestic servants, entertainers, wet-nurses, and concubines, roles that in the receiving Mediterranean and Middle Eastern households were overwhelmingly filled by enslaved women and girls. This is a structural, not incidental, feature of the trade — a direct function of what the receiving societies wanted enslaved people to do.

V. THE MALE MINORITY — CASTRATED EUNUCHS AND INTACT LABORERS

V-A. Two Categories of Enslaved Men

Because adult men constituted a minority of the trade's total volume, historians conventionally divide the male captives who did complete the crossing into two categories: those castrated to become eunuchs, and those who remained intact for labor, military, or other roles. Castration was not universal among enslaved males — it was a targeted practice applied to a subset selected specifically for eunuch roles — but within that male minority, the eunuch category was numerically and commercially significant enough to be treated by historians as a defining feature of the trade's male demand, distinguishing it sharply from the Transatlantic trade (Document 223), where castration was not a systematic commercial practice.

V-B. Who Was Castrated, and Why: The Harem and the Palace

Boys selected for castration were typically operated on young — commonly cited at around age eight to eleven, on the historical (though disputed) assumption that younger boys survived the procedure at higher rates than grown men. The resulting eunuchs (Hebrew ***saris***, Arabic ***khasi*** خصي or ***tawashi*** طواشي) filled two principal categories of high-status, high-trust role across North African, Middle Eastern, and Ottoman courts: as harem guards, entrusted with the private quarters of royal and wealthy households precisely because they could not father children with the women inside; and as palace administrators, tutors, and court officials, a role in which their inability to found a rival dynasty made them, paradoxically, more trusted by ruling houses than free-born courtiers with heirs and family ambitions of their own. Eunuchs rose to genuine positions of political power in some courts — most notably the Ottoman Empire's Chief Black Eunuch (***Kizlar Agasi***), one of the most powerful offices in the imperial palace by the 17th century.

V-C. Islamic Law's Own Prohibition, and Its Evasion

Classical Islamic jurisprudence itself prohibited castration as a mutilation forbidden by hadith tradition — a prohibition paralleling, though independently arrived at from, the Torah's own revulsion documented in Section I-B above. The trade evaded this prohibition through two documented mechanisms: purchasing captives already castrated by non-Muslim intermediaries or by traders operating outside Islamic legal jurisdiction (a practice recorded at Coptic Christian monasteries in Egypt and among certain African societies performing the operation before sale), and simply declining to enforce the prohibition against the economic incentive it created. This is a pattern this series has now documented twice — a stated religious-legal prohibition (compare Document 209's karet penalty for replicating the holy anointing oil, or Document 222's Qur'anic manumission exhortations) coexisting for centuries with a lucrative practice that violated it, sustained by evasion rather than repeal.

V-D. The Price of a Eunuch: Contested but Consistently High

Sources disagree sharply on the exact price premium eunuchs commanded — figures in the historical and popular literature range from roughly seven times to as much as fifteen times the price of a non-castrated male captive — but every source consulted for this document agrees on the direction and rough magnitude: eunuchs were consistently the most expensive category of enslaved person in these markets, a luxury commodity rather than an ordinary labor unit. This premium reflected not the eunuch's labor value but the scarcity created by the procedure's lethality, addressed directly in Section VI below.

V-E. Non-Castrated Male Laborers

The remaining enslaved men — the majority of the male minority — were left intact because their intended roles required physical capability rather than placement in domestic or harem settings. Historical sources document these men working the trans-Saharan salt mines of the central Sahara (notably Taghaza and Bilma, among the most lethal labor environments the trade produced), the copper and other mineral workings of Egypt and the Maghreb, agricultural labor on date-palm plantations of North African oases, and military service — most famously as the core of Morocco's ***Jaysh al-Bukhari*** ("Army of Bukhari"), an entire standing army constituted of enslaved and formerly enslaved black African soldiers under Sultan Moulay Ismail (r. 1672-1727), and more broadly as frontline infantry and auxiliary forces for regional Saharan and Sudanic rulers across the trade's history.

VI. MORTALITY — THE DESERT CROSSING AND THE CASTRATION PROCEDURE

VI-A. Mortality in the Desert Crossing

The trans-Saharan route itself was frequently lethal independent of any deliberate mutilation. Scholarly estimates of en-route attrition during capture and the desert crossing commonly cluster around 20 to 25 percent, with some reconstructions suggesting the crossing alone could reduce a cohort by half or more in the most severe cases — heat, dehydration, starvation, and the sheer distance of routes such as the roughly 1,000-mile crossing from the Niger Bend to Morocco combined to make the march itself a mass-casualty event independent of any other factor. Historian estimates place cumulative transit deaths across the trade's full duration in the range of 2 to 6 million people, a toll layered on top of, not separate from, the total-transported figures in Section III.

VI-B. Mortality from the Castration Procedure Itself

The castration procedure's own mortality rate is among the most disputed figures in this trade's historiography, and this document states that dispute plainly rather than adopting a single number as settled. Popular and some historical accounts cite death rates as high as 90 percent (a 10 percent survival rate) for castrations performed in sub-Saharan and West-Central African contexts, reflecting the absence of antiseptic technique, uncontrolled hemorrhage, and infection in the pre-modern surgical conditions under which the operation was performed. Other frequently cited figures place mortality closer to 60 percent. Major academic treatments of the subject caution that precise mortality figures are difficult to establish from the surviving record and should be treated with caution regardless of which number is cited. What is not disputed across sources is the

direction of the evidence: the procedure carried very high lethality by any pre-modern surgical standard, and this lethality — not labor value — is what historians identify as the primary driver of the eunuch price premium documented in Section V-D.

VII. WHY THIS TRADE ERASED LINEAGES — A DEMOGRAPHIC CONCLUSION

The combination of factors documented in this section explains a fact frequently noted by historians and geneticists studying this trade: the near-absence, relative to the Americas, of large, self-identifying descendant communities in North Africa and the Middle East tracing their ancestry to trans-Saharan bondage, despite a total transported population comparable in order of magnitude to the Transatlantic trade. Several compounding factors, each independently documented above, worked together toward this outcome. First, the demographic weighting toward women (Section IV) meant many captives were absorbed as concubines into existing households rather than forming distinct, self-reproducing enslaved communities of their own — their children, where they survived, were frequently raised within the master's household and lineage rather than a separate enslaved lineage. Second, the male minority that did survive to adulthood in bondage was disproportionately composed of castrated eunuchs (Section V), who by definition could not reproduce, combined with non-castrated laborers assigned to the trade's most lethal occupations — the Saharan salt mines chief among them (Section V-E) — with correspondingly high mortality and shortened lifespans. Third, transit mortality itself (Section VI-A) thinned every cohort before it ever reached a receiving market. Geneticists studying mitochondrial DNA lineages in North African populations have found evidence consistent with substantial sub-Saharan female-line genetic contribution over the trade's duration, alongside comparatively little evidence of stable, continuously self-reproducing enslaved-descended communities of the kind that developed in the Americas under the Transatlantic system's very different demographic and legal structure (examined in Document 223, including the 1662 Virginia partus sequitur ventrem statute that in effect manufactured hereditary chattel status generation after generation). The trans-Saharan trade's demographic architecture worked, whether by design or by consequence, toward absorption and erasure rather than the formation of a distinct, visible, continuing people.

VIII. THREE-RELIGION AUDIT — HOW EACH TRADITION ENGAGES THIS TRADE

ELEMENT	JUDAISM	CHRISTIANITY	ISLAM
Primary Legal Text	Vayikra 22:24 (no crushed/cut/torn animal at the altar) and Shemot 21:26-27 (mandatory manumission for injuring even a tooth or eye) together form the Torah's clear, if indirect, verdict against deliberate mutilation of a bondservant's body	Christian Europe was largely a bystander to this specific trade's core routes (Maghreb-Sudanic Africa), though European consular records and missionary/traveler accounts (cited by historians such as Wright and Austen) form part of the documentary base used to reconstruct its scope	Classical Islamic law prohibited castration outright as forbidden mutilation, yet the practice persisted for centuries by evasion within Muslim-governed markets — the gap named honestly in Section V-C
Historical Participation	No distinct Jewish role documented in this trade's core structure; not the organizing religious or political framework on either end of the route	European demand played essentially no role in this specific trade's core structure, distinguishing it from the Transatlantic and Mediterranean systems already examined	Muslim Maghrebi, Egyptian, and Ottoman markets were the trade's primary receiving end for nearly twelve centuries; Muslim and non-Muslim African intermediary societies operated the supply and caravan side
Covenant Departure	None documented — the Torah's own law was never the operative legal code for any actor in this trade	N/A — this trade's core structure falls outside the historical scope of Christian institutional participation examined elsewhere in this series	The gap between Islamic law's own explicit prohibition of castration and a centuries-long, market-sustained evasion of that same prohibition is the sharpest documented text-versus-practice gap in this entire series
Covenant Witness	The Torah's own trajectory on the castrated person — from the Mosaic-era restriction of Devarim 23:1 to the prophetic reversal and promised honor of Yeshayahu 56:3-5 — models a covenant	The comparatively late (20th-21st century) growth of Western scholarly attention to this trade's scale, addressed honestly in the How to Read section above, is itself a covenant-relevant historiographical fact	Modern Islamic legal and cultural consensus rejects slavery and castration alike; this document's naming of the historical evasion does not indict the classical legal text, which itself already forbade the practice

ELEMENT	JUDAISM	CHRISTIANITY	ISLAM
	community capable of extending dignity to those this trade mutilated, without ever sanctioning the mutilation itself		

IX. SEVEN COVENANT DECLARATIONS ON THE TRANS-SAHARAN SLAVE TRADE

#	COVENANT DECLARATION	BASIS
I	Man-stealing for commercial sale is a capital crime under the written covenant, regardless of which desert, market, or century organizes the trade.	Shemot (Exodus) 21:16; Devarim (Deuteronomy) 24:7
II	The Torah forbids even a crushed or cut animal at the altar. The deliberate castration this trade systematized on human boys falls under a standard the Torah will not tolerate even for a sacrificial animal — a fortiori it condemns the practice applied to a human being made in the image of Elohim.	Vayikra (Leviticus) 22:24
III	The Torah's own bodily-injury law grants automatic freedom to a bondservant for the loss of a single tooth or eye. No lesser standard than immediate release and full accountability applies to the far graver, frequently fatal mutilation documented in this study.	Shemot (Exodus) 21:26-27
IV	A stated religious-legal prohibition against a practice, honored in text but evaded in market practice for centuries, does not exempt the receiving society from the covenant's verdict. Naming Islamic law's own prohibition honestly (per Devarim 19:15) does not soften the historical fact of its centuries-long evasion.	Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15, applied to Section V-C
V	The Torah's own trajectory — from the Mosaic-era restriction on the castrated man's standing to the prophetic promise of Yeshayahu 56 that the covenant-keeping saris will receive a monument and a name better than sons and daughters — models the covenant community's proper response to those a trade like this one has mutilated: honor without ever sanctioning the mutilation itself.	Devarim (Deuteronomy) 23:1; Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 56:3-5
VI	Where the historical record itself is genuinely disputed — as with castration mortality rates and eunuch price premiums in this trade — the covenant community's own citation of history must state that dispute honestly rather than asserting a single number as settled fact merely because it is the most dramatic.	Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15 — two-or-three-witness standard applied to contested figures

#	COVENANT DECLARATION	BASIS
VII	The demographic architecture of a trade — who it took, in what proportion, and to what fate — is itself covenant-relevant testimony. A system's near-total erasure of the very people it enslaved is not a lesser crime than a system that left visible descendant communities; it is a different, and in some respects graver, one.	Historical record, Section VII above

X. APPLICATION — WHAT THE COVENANT COMMUNITY DOES WITH THIS RECORD

First: Name the mutilation for what it is, without sensationalism.

This document has stated contested figures — mortality rates, price premiums — with their disputed ranges rather than seizing the most dramatic available number. The covenant community's witness against this practice does not need exaggeration to be devastating; the range itself, even at its most conservative end, describes a level of deliberate, market-driven mutilation of children that the Torah's own texts condemn without qualification.

Second: Recover Vayikra 22:24 and Shemot 21:26-27 as direct, not merely inferential, texts.

These texts are rarely taught in connection with historical slavery, yet they are the Torah's most direct statements on bodily mutilation of the vulnerable. Teaching them by name alongside this history keeps the covenant community's moral vocabulary anchored in the actual written standard.

Third: Extend Yeshayahu 56's promise of honor to history's mutilated, not only its future ones.

The prophetic reversal in Yeshayahu 56:3-5 was spoken to living covenant-keeping eunuchs of Isaiah's own generation. Applied backward as historical memory rather than forward as prophecy alone, it offers the covenant community a framework for honoring, rather than merely mourning, the millions of boys and men this trade mutilated and erased.

Fourth: Hold every trade in this series to the same demographic honesty.

This document's attention to gender ratio, castration, and mortality should not be read as unique condemnation of one trade among the several this series has now examined. The same standard — honest demographic accounting, contested figures stated as contested, and the Torah's own text applied evenly — governs Documents 222 through 225 as much as this one.

XI. SCRIPTURE INDEX

REFERENCE	SUBJECT	SECTION
Bereishit (Genesis) 37:36	Saris (eunuch official) — Potiphar's title	I-B
Shemot (Exodus) 21:16	Death penalty for man-stealing	II-A
Shemot (Exodus) 21:26-27	Mandatory manumission for bodily injury to a bondservant	II-B
Shemot (Exodus) 22:20-21	Sojourner law	II-C
Vayikra (Leviticus) 22:24	No crushed, cut, or torn animal at the altar	I-B
Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15	Two-or-three-witness evidentiary standard	Throughout
Devarim (Deuteronomy) 23:1	Mosaic-era restriction on the castrated man's assembly standing	I-B
Devarim (Deuteronomy) 23:15-16	Fugitive-slave protection and sanctuary	II-C
Devarim (Deuteronomy) 24:7	Kidnapping and sale of a person — capital penalty	II-A
Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 56:3-5	Prophetic reversal — honor promised to the covenant-keeping saris	I-B

"Let not the saris say, 'Behold, I am a dry tree'... I will give them a monument and a name better than sons and daughters."

Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 56:3, 5 — The Written Covenant of Yahweh

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