

But I Say to you ...

Why Pilate wrote YHWH: The significance of four letters

By Diana Mitchell, 8/1/2026, 8/25/2026

John 19:19 in Koine Greek: Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων

According to John 19:19, Jesus' crime was written in Hebrew, Greek, AND Latin by Pilate. That was the language of the people being governed, the common language at the time thanks to Alexander the Great, AND last, but not least, the native tongue of Pilate.

At first, the Jews wanted JESUS crucified for committing what they called a capital offense against them, which was, according to John 19:7, the fact that "he made himself the Son of God." Then, in John 19:12, the Jews warned Pilate that if he let JESUS go, it would be an act of sedition against Caesar, which was a capital offense. It's only after the Jews accused Pilate of sedition that he sat down at the judgment seat (John 19:13), and did what, according to John 19:12, he did not want to do. He turned JESUS over to be crucified.

People assume that because the sign above JESUS' head on the cross was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin that that was the order Pilate wrote the words in, but remember, he governed a people who would not even say the name of their GOD (YHWH), and his native tongue was Latin. What if Pilate wrote in his native tongue, Latin, first (*Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum*), but placed the Hebrew on the sign first for a reason? The initialism of the sentence in Latin formed four letters: INRI. Four letters. The initialism of the inscription in Hebrew, "Jesus, the Nazarene, AND the King of the Jews, ישוע הנצרי ומלך היהודים, formed four letters, too: YHWH.

When they accused Pilate of committing sedition in 19:12 if he let JESUS go, their veiled threat made it personal for Pilate in the sense that, your enemy is now my enemy, and he gave up all hope of saving JESUS. Therefore, knowing his own innocence regarding any charge of sedition, with his sign, in one fell swoop, Pilate vindicated himself as being a friend, and not an enemy, of Caesar and of Rome; affirmed JESUS' innocence; mocked the Jewish leaders; AND, he left a message for the world to see almost 2000 years later: It was indeed YHWH who hung on the Cross ... for all who, as Pilate had done, accept his sacrifice. Consider that with his statement in John 19:11 to Pilate, JESUS literally offered Pilate a conscious-freeing way out before he knew he needed one in 19:12, AND in addition, JESUS saved Pilate, Herod, the members of the Sanhedrin who disagreed with the Hebrew verdict, the Romans who carried out the death sentence, and Judas, from future condemnation. None of them handed JESUS over to Pilate for crucifixion.

Now, whatever the Jews reported to Rome, they could not leave out the sign Pilate posted to make sure everyone who passed by knew he had killed the rival "King of the Jews." In other words, Pilate used his sign as a military feat that also countered any claims of sedition against himself. AND, even though Pilate's Hebrew may not have been grammatically correct on the

sign, he could not have cared less about their grammatical sensibilities. What was important to Pilate was that the inscription, “Jesus, the Nazarene, AND the King of the Jews, YHWH, sent a message to the Jewish leaders: You are not controlling things here. His inscription was probably also engineered to make sure they would come back to see him, giving him the opportunity to defiantly tell them face-to-face in John 19:22, “what I have written, I have written.” In other words, after their veiled threat to report him to Rome with performing an act of sedition—a baseless charge, no amount of pressure from them was going to make Pilate rewrite the inscription above JESUS’ head. What they had done to JESUS in charging the innocent with guilt, was not going to happen to him. Had Pilate added any thing to the sign at their request, it would have destroyed the initialism of YHWH.

Pilate, clearly a Matthew 5:25 strategist, played their game better than they had themselves. They literally handed him the knife to kill their god, AND smash all of their hopes of getting rid of him against THE ROCK. Who knows, maybe it was even his new friend, Herod, who explained to him the significance of four letters.

Why the “Son of GOD” title in John 19:7 is sacred.

That title was a reference to Daniel 7:13-14 and 7:27-28. These verses refer to the “Son of man” and to GOD, respectively. What troubled Daniel in 7:28 was the fact that the man that the people brought to “the Ancient of days” in 7:13 in order to compare the two, were one and the same being. They were both GOD (7:14, and 7:27)—the only being whose dominion is “everlasting.” Daniel was obedient in writing about what he had seen, but it troubled him so he “kept the matter in his heart” (Daniel 7:28), meaning that he probably never said what he had written out loud, or discussed it with anyone because ... how could a man be GOD???

Please note: All quoted Scripture is from the King James Version (KJV).