

## Shibboleth

The gospel of John is unique among the four gospels. Matthew shows the Jews that Jesus is their Messiah; Mark shows the Romans that Jesus is the suffering servant; Luke shows the Greeks that Jesus is the perfect man. Matthew starts with a genealogy, Mark and Luke begin with the ministry of John the Baptist. But John, who writes some 60 years after the birth of the New Testament church, starts differently ...

**John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

**John 1:14** And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

From his opening sentence, John is on a mission to prove that Jesus Christ is exactly who He said He was – the True and Only God in a body of flesh. 90% of John's gospel is unique. There are no parables in John. John is very selective about the miracles he records – some are unique only to him, such as the raising of Lazarus – and the ones he does record are twinned with Jesus' teaching. Only in John does Jesus talk at such length about His identity. And that's why John is the only gospel writer who intentionally records the "I Am" statements of Jesus: **I am** the bread of life, **I am** the light of the world, **I am** the door, **I am** the good shepherd, **I am** the resurrection and the life, **I am** the way, the truth and the life. It's invisible in English versions of the Scriptures, but obvious in the ancient languages – "Ego Eimi." A carpenter from Nazareth was using the ancient name of God revealed to Moses at the burning bush – "I AM THAT I AM" – and he was using it casually to refer to himself!

Theologians and denominations today may have missed it, but the Pharisees caught the meaning all too well (John 8) – that's why they took up stones to stone Jesus, and finally orchestrated His crucifixion!

- Before Abraham was, **I AM**
- If ye believe not that **I AM**, ye shall die in your sins
- When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that **I AM**

He spoke His name – His rightful name – at a well, and a nameless woman's life was changed forever; He spoke His name during a storm, and a disciple named Peter was empowered to walk on the raging waves; He spoke His name in a garden at midnight, and an entire battalion of soldiers fell to the ground like so much cordwood.

**I AM THAT I AM or I AM** – The original form spoken to Moses by God Himself, carrying in it the concepts of being Eternal and Self-Existent, a being who is Omnipotent, Omnipresent, and Omniscient.

**YHWH or YAHWEH** – This name comes from four consonants (YOD, HEH, VAV, HEH) in Hebrew, and is called the TETRAGRAMMATON. Because ancient Hebrew was written only in consonants, those who read it aloud had to supply the vowel sounds. To actually translate this name into English, we would say, "The Eternal." And in the English language, we would use the consonants **JHVH** or pronounce **JEHOVAH**.

**Leviticus 24:16** And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death.

The Jews, after returning from the Babylonian captivity (450 BC) began to reverence the name "Yahweh" so greatly that they outlawed the very use of it, first for the common people, later for the priests. Finally, only the high priest was allowed to say it, and then only on the Day of Atonement. When Simon, who was the last high priest permitted to use it, died in 270 BC, a total prohibition against saying the name came into force among the Jews. "Adonai" became the substitute word.

**ADONAI or ADON** – This was a Hebrew word meaning "Lord," used as a substitute for YHWH. When it was read, the Jewish congregation would reply "HA SHEM" or "THE NAME." This eventually became the only way the Jews would refer to the proper name of God.

**BY THE TIME OF JESUS' EARTHLY MINISTRY, THE JEWS HAD NOT HEARD THE PROPER NAME (YHWH) OF THE GOD THEY WERE SERVING FOR OVER 300 YEARS!**

That is why John's gospel is so striking! Suddenly, a carpenter from Nazareth is casually using the proper name of God – the name they have not been allowed to say for over 300 years – to describe Himself! **But Jesus had a right to use God's name because HE WAS GOD!** The Jewish religious leaders were outraged – they understood who Jesus was claiming to be, even if some modern theologians do not!

**The Hebrew "code" which is obscured in English was painfully obvious to the Jewish religious leaders every time Jesus spoke! The phrase "I Am" (Greek: "Ego Eimi"), appearing to us as just another pronoun and verb, identified Him to them as YAHWEH!**

**And this becomes exponentially more important at the crucifixion!**

Much Old Testament poetic literature was written in what might be called CODED form; this made it easier to memorize. In Psalm 119, each of the 22 sections is labeled by one letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each of the 8 verses in that section starts with that letter. In Lamentations, each of the chapters is a poem with a similar "acrostic" pattern.

To put it bluntly, the Jewish scholars missed absolutely nothing – not even the finest detail – in regard to the Holy Scriptures. It is absolutely astonishing that they could know so much about God's divine arrangement and completely miss God's divine atonement! One of the "details" that the Jews were absolutely fanatical about was the name of God. But when God came in flesh using His name they crucified Him!

**Leviticus 21:10** And he that is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes;

**Mark 14:61-64** But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, **I am**: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.

#### AT THIS MOMENT THE HIGH PRIESTHOOD PASSES TO JESUS!

Jesus has enraged the Sanhedrin repeatedly by using the unutterable name of God, but this time He has done it in a court of law. They rush their prisoner to Pilate and demand that He be crucified. Even though Pilate is seemingly impressed with Jesus, they force him to carry out the execution through political pressure. Pilate is powerless to save the Nazarene, even though he wants to.

**John 19:19-22** And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.

In an unusual move, Pilate himself writes an inscription and has it placed on the cross of Jesus. In three languages (Hebrew, Greek and Latin) it says: "**Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.**" Just another epitaph to the Greeks and Romans. But as "many of the Jews" begin to gather and read the inscription over this Galileean, the Chief Priests suddenly see that they have a problem.

They rush to Pilate insisting, "Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews." Pilate's firm answer is, "What I have written I have written." Literally, he says, "What I have written, I will not change one bit!" What was the problem that so upset these scholars of the Law?

Written over Jesus' head in Hebrew was, "**Yeshua HaNazarei v-Melech HaYehudim.**" But to the Jewish leaders, the "Bible Code Experts," all they could see was the pattern of a condemning acrostic, as the first letter of each word (YOD, HEH, VAV, HEH) unerringly spelled out "**YHVH**" for all to see! **It was not a carpenter's blood that was being shed that day, but Yahweh's blood!**



**Acts 20:28** Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

Even after their enemy was dead, the Chief Priests were still nervous! They came to Pilate demanding Roman guards to secure the tomb until after the third day (Matthew 27:62-66). Pilate told them to use their own guards, and once again made a puzzling remark – "Go your way, make it as sure as you can." He is literally laughing at their efforts now – "Do your best to keep Him in the grave, but if THAT MAN said He's going to rise from the dead, He's going to rise from the dead!

John's gospel culminates with the inspired revelation of doubting Thomas in chapter 20 – when Thomas realized the significance of a mortal wound in the body of a living man, he immediately put a title of respect (KYRIOS – "SIR, MASTER") together with the absolute title of Deity (THEOS – "SUPREME DIVINITY"), exclaiming, "My Lord and my God!" in John 20:28.

**The New Testament Apostolics never used "KYRIOS" after this to address anyone except Jesus.**

**John 20:28-29** And Thomas answered and said unto him, **My Lord and my God.** Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

**John 1:11-12** He came unto his own, and his own **received** him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he **power** to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his **name**:

**(Can you see the New Birth buried in that verse?)**

**John is the gospel of the NAME, and also the gospel of the SPIRIT!**

**John 7:37-39** In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

**The “BELLY” bypasses the “BRAIN” ☺ because it is a work of God!**

*A study three years ago by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania found a neurological parallel between what worshipers experience when they speak in tongues and what actually transpires physiologically in the brain. Scientists took brain images from worshippers as they were speaking in tongues and as they were singing. Comparing the two images, the researchers discovered that the frontal lobes (the willful, thinking part of the brain) were quiet, as were the language centers. Scans of people practicing meditation or participating in other spiritual practices differed sharply. “We noticed a number of changes that occurred functionally in the brain,” comments Principal Investigator Andrew Newberg, MD, Associate Professor of Radiology, Psychiatry, and Religious Studies, and Director for the Center for Spirituality and the Mind at the university. “Our finding of decreased activity in the frontal lobes during the practice of speaking in tongues is fascinating because these subjects truly believe that the spirit of God is moving through them and controlling them to speak. Our brain imaging research shows us that these subjects are not in control of the usual language centers during this activity, which is consistent with their description of a lack of intentional control while speaking in tongues.”*

Speaking in tongues is a noncognitive, nonrational communication with God. It is not antirational, but is an immediate contact with God that does not include human words, nor can it be expressed in human words. This experience results in added faith in God, increased power and gifts for ministry, increased emotion and passion, and an enhanced awareness of God’s presence in the life of the Pentecostal believer.

*Ten years ago, Pentecostal scholar Vinson Synan presented a paper to the Evangelical Theological Society entitled, “Policy Decisions on Tongues As an Indicator of Future Church Growth.” Synan demonstrates that Pentecostals have been dramatically more successful in planting and growing churches than those who have rejected the Pentecostal understanding of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the necessity of speaking in tongues. His statistics are drawn from the development and spectacular success of Pentecostal missions in the 20th century. Other scholars are drawing similar conclusions.*

*Philip Jenkins, distinguished professor of history and religious studies at Pennsylvania State University, recently wrote a new book, The Next Christendom, in which he demonstrates that the growth patterns of the Pentecostals will make the 21st century a Pentecostal century. Pentecostal ministry is not slightly more effective. It makes a dramatic difference. The baptism in the Holy Spirit provides a significant amount of power for supernatural ministry resulting in striking accomplishments for the Kingdom.*

**JOHN’S DISTINCTIVES ARE OUR DISTINCTIVES – WE ARE THE PEOPLE OF THE NAME AND THE PEOPLE OF THE SPIRIT (AND WE ARE CRITICIZED SOUNDLY FOR OUR EMPHASIS ON BOTH!)**

John’s gospel was the last gospel written – to the CHURCH. It is the gospel of the ONENESS REVELATION, which is the ultimate revelation in the Scripture. It is the gospel of the HOLY GHOST, which is the ultimate power in the Scripture.

**John 14:18** I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

**John 14:12** Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

**John 20:30-31** And many other **signs** truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have **life** through his name.

**THE END ... OR IS IT?!**

Chapter 21 is really a mere postscript, adding the account of just one event. What could be so crucial to add after such a powerful conclusion?

**John 21:1-6** After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.

When Peter says, “I go a fishing,” he is not saying he wants to enjoy a day off – he is saying, “I quit!” After the resurrection, things have changed so much that he doesn’t want to do this “discipleship thing” any more. Jesus is no longer walking and talking with them like he did in the good old days; it’s so different now that Jesus is glorified – you never know where or when He’s going to show up! And there are too many disciples – Jesus has been appearing to 500 at a time, but Peter liked it better when it was just twelve. It’s just too much change in too short a time for an old-fashioned fisherman to handle!

Churches are usually known for being rigid, not innovative – and that’s a tragedy when we having the most revolutionary message on earth. The world around us is changing so fast that it’s hard to keep up – even the pace of change is accelerating. But what happens if most life-changing message to ever intersect human history gets locked behind doors of tradition?

It almost happened to the disciples ... but a resurrected Jesus forced them out of their comfort zone. They had been fishing all night, but they had caught absolutely nothing. They had quit hoping, and had settled down to accept the status quo. But the methods that had always seemed adequate in the good old days were now coming up empty. No fish! And now, Jesus calls to them from the shore, asking the question that irritates: Are you catching anything? Is it working? Reluctantly, they admit failure: No, it’s not working. Then comes the even-more-irritating command: **Change your method; cast your nets on the other side.**

The greatest danger is always at the edge (where the church meets the culture). But so is the greatest opportunity for rescue and redemption. The New Testament church lived “on the edge” – never safe, always one step from disaster if God didn’t intervene! Jude felt the tension:

**Jude 1:22-24** And of some have compassion, making a difference: **And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire;** hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. **Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling,** and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

The problem with living on the edge is that some people try to push you over and other people try to pull you back. It’s dangerous on the edge – people actually fall off the edge from time to time! But there is absolutely no chance for the church to impact our culture unless we get on the edge! Almost all of the growth in any church comes from the edge, because the trend is for Christians to disconnect from unsaved people the longer they are around church.

That’s not the way Jesus – the friend of sinners – did it. That’s not the way Paul – all things to all men – did it. They were not isolationists! They engaged their culture!

**Matthew 11:19** The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

**1 Corinthians 9:22** To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

Missionary C.T. Studd said, “Some want to live within the sound of Church or Chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell. That’s the spirit of Jude, of Paul, of Jesus, of the New Testament church! **And if you have that spirit you are going to be soundly criticized!**”

In ancient Israel, during a time of civil war, the Gileadites set up a blockade to catch the Ephraimites, who were fleeing after a defeat. The sentries simply asked each person who wanted to pass to say the word “shibboleth.” The Ephraimites, who had no “sh” sound in their language, pronounced the word “shibboleth” and were caught and slaughtered.

**Judges 12:5-6** And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay; Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.

Did you know that the word “shibboleth” means “harvest”? Did you know that everyone doesn’t say “harvest” the same way? Different churches and different pastors have different ideas about how to get the job done. **That’s okay, as long as the church doesn’t have a civil war over it.**

I am not called to reach your city, I am called to reach my city! Furthermore, I am not called to reach your generation, I am called to reach my generation! And the METHOD we need to use to accomplish that monumental task may be totally different! **BUT SO WHAT IF IT IS?!**

Today, a shibboleth refers to any “in-crowd” jargon, customs, or shared experiences that distinguish the group. For example, people about the same age who are from the same nation tend to have the same memories, priorities, likes and dislikes as others who shared their formative years.

**IT'S NORMAL TO SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY – BUT IF IT'S JUST  
“METHOD” LET'S NOT HAVE A CIVIL WAR OVER IT!**

**Can we just agree to say “harvest” differently and still work  
shoulder to shoulder to bring it in? Can we stop killing each other?!**

God wants to give us a two-fold miracle. He wants us to get ready for new methods, new approaches, new people. Cast your nets on the other side! The first miracle will be that the nets will be overflowing with fish! The second miracle is equally important – God is going to supernaturally strengthen the same nets we've always used so they won't break!

It will take a new **METHOD** to reach this generation, but it will be the same **MESSAGE** supernaturally empowered. And I don't care if you say “Shibboleth” or “Sibboleth.” **CAST YOUR NETS ON THE OTHER SIDE!**