**Matthew 26:31-35**

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-26/matthew-2631-35/>

Jesus Predicts the Disciples’ Desertion

Jesus informs His disciples that they will abandon Him that very night. Peter assures Jesus that he will stick with Him even if everyone else runs away. Jesus tells Peter that he will deny him three times before dawn. Peter tells Jesus that He is wrong and assures His Lord that he is ready to die with Him. The other disciples say they are ready to die for Him also.

The parallel gospel accounts of this event are found in Mark 14:27-31, Luke 22:31-34, and John 13:36-38.

This conversation most likely took place on the night of Nisan 15 (late Thursday by Roman reckoning) along the streets of Jerusalem as Jesus and His disciples walked to the Garden of Gethsemane.

See [“The Bible Says Timeline of Jesus’s Final 24 Hours”](https://thebiblesays.com/tough-topics/a-timeline-of-jesuss-final-24-hours/) to learn more about the timing and sequencing of this event.

Matthew and Mark’s (Mark 14:27-31) accounts of this conversation are similar to each other in structure and many details. Luke and John record versions of this conversation that seem to have taken place before the one recorded by Matthew and Mark (Luke 22:31-34; John 13:36-38).

The fact that multiple variations of this conversation took place throughout the evening fits with what is commented about them in Mark’s Gospel,

“But Peter kept saying insistently, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!’”  
(Mark 14:31a)

This remark indicates that Peter was repeatedly bringing up and disputing the matter of his devotion and loyalty with Jesus throughout the evening. And Peter, who is one of the two main figures in these conversations, was Mark’s primary source for his gospel account. This means that Peter provided an exceedingly unflattering account of himself when Mark wrote how Peter kept disputing insistently. The willingness of the disciples to characterize themselves almost completely in an unflattering manner is one of many facts that demonstrate the veracity of the historical biblical account.

It seems the first version of Jesus and Peter’s exchange was recorded by Luke and John when Jesus and the disciples were having a conversation while they were still in the home where they had just eaten the Passover meal together (Luke 22:31-34; (John 13:36-38). Luke and John’s accounts include what Jesus and Peter said to each other on this topic **before** they left the house (Luke 22:39; John 14:31b).

Matthew and Mark record what appears to be a second or follow-up conversation between Jesus and Peter **after** they left the house as they were walking toward Gethsemane (Mark 14:26-31).

**A brief summary of John’s record of Jesus and Peter’s conversation**

(John 13:36-38)

At some point before they left the house (John 14:31b), Peter asked Jesus, “Lord where are you going?” Jesus answered, “Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later” (John 13:36). Jesus was referring to His death on the cross and work of redemption when He told Peter this. Per church tradition, Peter would later be crucified and follow His Lord in death, but this would not happen for many years to come. Peter apparently understood that Jesus was referring to His death and he then said to Jesus “Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You” (John 13:37). At this point Jesus said to Peter what He later would tell him again on the way to Gethsemane: “Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times” (John 13:38).

**A brief summary of Luke’s record of Jesus and Peter’s conversation**

(Luke 22:31-34)

This portion of the conversation may have taken place at a separate time from what John recorded, or it could be the same conversation with each writer sharing different details. But it is easy to imagine and insert what Luke recorded between Jesus’s question and prediction in John 13:38. In other words, Luke’s account may start just after Jesus asked Peter “Will you lay down your life for Me?” (John 13:38) and before He predicted Peter’s denial.

Jesus said: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-32).

Notice how Jesus called Peter by his given name of “Simon,” instead of his nickname, “Peter”; and notice how He repeated it, “Simon, Simon.” Jesus used Peter’s given name to draw Peter out of his own obstinate head and to call attention to the severity of what Satan wanted to do to him. Perhaps also Jesus used his given name which is derived from the Hebrew for “to hear” (“simeon”); by saying “Simon, Simon” which is Jesus saying “Listen, listen.” Jesus also said this to help Peter better recall the hope of Jesus’s love for him when he would be in utter despair after he denied the Lord and Jesus was dead and crucified.

In the moment, Peter did not seem to “Simeon”—to “hear” what Jesus was trying to tell him. He remained the hardheaded “stone” (Peter). Instead, he doubled-down: “Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!” (Luke 22:33).

Then Jesus first made His prediction: “I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me” (Luke 22:34).

It seems at some point after this exchange Jesus, Peter, and the other disciples left the house where they shared Passover to go to the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26; Luke 22:39; John 14:31b). And it was while they were walking to the Mount of Olives that a follow-up conversation (recorded by Matthew and Mark 14:27-31) between Jesus and Peter about these things occurred. Remember how “Peter kept saying [these things] insistently” (Mark 14:31).

**Matthew and Mark’s** **record of Jesus and Peter’s conversation** (Mark 14:27-31)

Matthew and Mark’s account both took place after Jesus and the disciples had left the house where they had eaten Passover (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26). Aside from a few particulars here and there, Matthew and Mark’s accounts of Jesus and Peter’s conversation on these matters are similar in structure and basic details.

Perhaps we can best understand Matthew and Mark’s accounts if we divide them into sections.

1. **JESUS’S PREDICTION ABOUT ALL THE DISCIPLES FALLING AWAY**

(Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27)

1. **JESUS’S INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE DISCIPLES**

(Matthew 26:32; Mark 14:28)

1. **PETER’S OBJECTION**

(Matthew 26:33; Mark 14:29)

1. **JESUS’S PREDICTION THAT PETER WILL DENY HIM THREE TIMES**

(Matthew 26:34; Mark 14:30)

1. **PETER AND THE DISCIPLES’ INSISTENCE THAT THEY WOULD NEVER DO THIS**

(Matthew 26:35; Mark 14:31)

1. **JESUS’S PREDICTION ABOUT THE DISCIPLES FALLING AWAY**

And Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away, because it is written, ‘I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.’”

After Jesus and His disciples finished their Passover meal together somewhere in the city of Jerusalem (Matthew 26:17-29) they left for the Mount of Olives located just beyond the city gates (Matthew 26:30). Somewhere along the way, Jesus said something upsetting to them.

The upsetting thing that Jesus said to them was: You will all fall away because of Me this night.

He was predicting that all His disciples would abandon and desert Him that very night. The Greek word for fall away is a form of the word σκανδαλίζω (pronounced “skan-dal-izō”). The English words “scandal” and “scandalize” are derived from this Greek word. This particular form of “skandalizō” means to “take offense” or “be offended.” When a scandal occurs, everyone associated with the person or institution upon which the scandal is centered seeks to distance themselves and get as far away from its epicenter as possible, lest they too become disgraced.

Interestingly, “skandalizō” is used in multiple contexts that describe believers as “stumbling” or “falling away.” In Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount, He said “If your right eye makes you stumble (“skandalizō”), tear it out… for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for the whole body to be thrown into hell (Gehenna)” (Matthew 5:29). And in Jesus’s explanation of “The Parable of the Sower” (Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23; Mark 4:3-9, 14-20), He uses “skandalizō” to describe what happens to the seed of His teaching after it falls upon the soil of a rocky heart where it is unable to take root when affliction or persecution arises, Jesus says these hearts cause the teaching to fall away (“skandalizō”) (Matthew 13:21, Mark 4:17).

In the current passage, Jesus predicts that all the disciples will fall away. He clearly did not mean they would be eternally separated from God in the Lake of Fire because they fell away. This shows that while it is never good for a believer to fall away, this does not indicate that the believer is no longer included in God’s eternal family. In fact, Jesus indicates quite the opposite, telling the disciples that they will be restored to Him.

Nothing, including our falling away, can separate believers from God’s love (Romans 8:38-39). There are adverse consequences to falling away; the consequence of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Peter will have immense remorse as a result of his betrayal of Jesus. But God will use his failure and turn it for his good (Romans 8:28-29).

When Jesus said to the eleven disciples: You will all fall away because of Me this night, He was preparing them for the fact that He was about to become the epicenter of a great scandal. And He knew that the disciples were going to fall away from following Him, take offense at Him, and distance themselves from Him because He had become a scandal. They would all “scandalize” because of Him. You will all fall away because of Me. And right after that He told them that they will also return to Him, telling them I will go ahead of you to Galilee.

Jesus then explained how their falling away was in accordance with scripture: for it is written, “I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.”

The scripture Jesus quoted was from a Messianic prophecy from Zechariah.

“‘Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd,  
And against the man, My Associate,’  
Declares the Lord of hosts.  
‘Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered;  
And I will turn My hand against the little ones.’”  
(Zechariah 13:7)

This verse from Zechariah is a part of a wider Messianic prophecy discussed throughout chapter 13. It begins by predicting how a fountain will be opened up for the house of David for sin and impurity (Zechariah 13:1) but discusses how the people will no longer believe the genuineness of the LORD’s prophets (Zechariah 13:2-3). And it concludes with a prediction that a remnant of Israel will be saved and proclaim the LORD to be their God (Isaiah 13:8-9).

Within Zechariah 13:7, Zechariah describes the Messiah as “My Associate” and “My Shepherd.” Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is God’s “Associate” (John 1:18; 5:37; 6:46). Jesus is “the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11, 14).

When Zechariah prophesied, “Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered,” he was predicting that when the Messiah was arrested and/or executed, His followers (“the sheep”) would fall away in fear.

On the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told His disciples that Zechariah’s prophecy was about to be fulfilled this very night when they scattered like sheep to get away from the doom that was about to come upon Him.

Isaiah also prophesied of the Messiah’s abandonment when he wrote: “He was despised and forsaken of men, a man acquainted with grief and sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3).

Before we continue, it is worth remarking that even though it was prophesied that the disciples would all fall away because of Jesus, they were still responsible for their cowardice and sin. The fulfillment of this prophecy did not absolve them of their guilt or make them blameless. They all choose to scatter and fall away because of the offense Jesus had become to the authorities.

This prophecy is one piece of evidence among many that demonstrates God’s sovereignty and omniscience. But we are not to use God’s sovereignty as an excuse for our sin. God’s sovereignty and omniscience do not obliterate human freedom and responsibility. God is sovereign. We are free and responsible for our actions. The Bible paradoxically teaches that both are true at the same time. This seems paradoxical to us, but God’s sovereignty and our freedom to choose coexist (for more, read our Tough Topics Explained article: Founding Paradox).

Jesus’s prediction about the disciples was accurate. Within a few hours of telling them this, they all fell away and were scattered because of Him that night.

Once Jesus submitted to arrest:

“Then all the disciples left Him and fled”  
(Matthew 26:56).

“And they all left Him and fled”  
(Mark 14:50).

1. **JESUS’S INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE DISCIPLES**

But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.

Jesus was not pointing out this prophetic fulfillment to His disciples for the mere sake of prophecy. He said this to them so that they would have greater understanding about His instructions for what they were to do next.

His instructions to them after they all fell away was: But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.

Once again, Jesus remarkably predicted His resurrection from the dead. He was so confident that He would be raised back to life that Jesus nonchalantly said after I have been raised I will meet you in Galilee. Though as we will see later in this passage, the disciples overlooked this remarkable statement and focused instead on defending their own, rather weak, commitment to Him. The angels guarding His empty tomb will recall Jesus’s instructions to the women later (Matthew 28:7).

Even though they will all fall away and abandon Jesus this night, all is not lost. Despite their cowardice, Jesus still had great plans for them. And He told them where they could meet Him after they ran away, and after He was killed, and after He returned to life—in Galilee. Galilee is located approximately ninety miles north of Jerusalem. Its northern shore was where His ministry with them had been headquartered. The disciples would have likely known the exact place where to find Jesus in Galilee.

Jesus wished to meet His disciples in Galilee after these dreadful and wonderful things took place. And perhaps the reason He told them that they would all fall away and take offense at Me this night was to assure them that when the time came, He still wanted to meet with them. Even though they will shamefully reject and deny Him, Jesus would never reject or deny them (2 Timothy 2:13). He would forgive them. We see Jesus personally forgive Thomas (John 20:24-29) and Peter (John 21:1-22).

Jesus did not want them to give up after their moral failure. Perhaps He said these things to them because He wanted them to know that they would still have an opportunity to follow Him after their falling away. The disciples had believed in Jesus (Matthew 16:16). The disciples were part of God’s eternal family (John 1:12). Through their faith in Jesus, the disciples had eternal life (John 3:16). They had eternal security and the disciples and their eternal belonging were safe in His hands (John 10:28-29).

God never gives up on His family. Like the father of the prodigal son and the son’s self-righteous brother (Luke 15:11-32), God loves us even when we fail and is eager to forgive and bring us back into fellowship with Him when we repent. God’s love and mercy are unending. And because of Jesus, our moral failures are not final. What was true for the disciples in their moral collapse is true for us as believers when we blow it and mess up big time. We need not despair and give up. Jesus still loves us. He still has a plan for our lives (Jeremiah 29:11). And He desires to meet us in our “Galilee”—the place where we first encountered His goodness and grace. If we repent of our sins, we can be restored to fellowship with Jesus.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”  
(1 John 1:9)

1. **PETER’S OBJECTION**

Peter seemingly interrupted Jesus’s instructions about meeting in Galilee after He was raised from the dead. Ignoring the instructions and overlooking the fact that Jesus just informed him that He would die and be raised from the dead, Peter was apparently hung up on defending his honor. Recall how Peter had already insisted that he was ready to die for Jesus (Luke 22:33; John 13:37). Now Peter interjected and insisted these passionate sentiments again. It seems apparent that Jesus’s predictions that all the disciples would fall away this very night really bothered Peter and upset his perception of himself.

But Peter said to Him, “Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.”

Peter was adamant. He was so adamant that he told Jesus that his loyalty was better than any of the other disciples. He promised that even if they all fell away, that he would never fall away.

The reason Peter was so adamant was because he was genuinely sincere. He really believed that he would never do what Jesus said he would do. Peter was zealous for the Lord. And he was ready to die for him (on Peter’s terms). But Peter’s identity was misplaced. His sense of self-worth was wrapped up in this willingness to die with and for Jesus as he violently raged against the Messiah’s enemies.

But Jesus did not ask his disciples to defend Him. And He does not condone His followers defending Him with violence (Matthew 26:52; Luke 22:38; 22:49-51). God does not need humans to defend Him. God is more than capable of defending Himself (Matthew 26:53; John 18:6). Self-directed human violence in defense of God or the name of Jesus goes against the principles of God’s kingdom. God is the avenger, and does not condone individual vengeance (Romans 12:19). God has delegated His authority to governmental authorities to execute His wrath upon evil (Romans 13:1-4)).

The principles of Jesus’s kingdom were spelled out in Jesus’s kingdom platform recorded in “The Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5-7). Among the core principles of Jesus’s kingdom is to love your enemy (Matthew 5:44). Jesus’s followers are to turn the other cheek when they are struck—they are not to strike back (Matthew 5:39). They are to go the extra mile in service to their antagonists (Matthew 5:41). They are to forgive and show mercy (Matthew 5:7; 6:12, 14-15).

And by doing these things they let their light shine before men that they glorify the King (Matthew 5:16). This is what it means to seek His kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

In his passion and zeal (which are good things), Peter forgot the core principles of Jesus’s kingdom. Peter (stone) did not listen (Simon) but rather followed his own way. His zeal was misdirected. Much of Jesus’s discipleship of Peter was oriented to get Peter to redirect his zeal away from his own (hard-headed) plans, and toward God’s plans.

Peter was ready to kill and be killed for Jesus. But Jesus was ready to lay down His life for His enemies (Romans 5:8). And Jesus invited His followers to imitate His example by taking up their cross and laying down their life for His sake (Matthew 16:24). In so doing they would find their life (Matthew 16:25).

Peter proved his sincerity when they came to arrest Jesus. Peter attacked those who came to arrest his Lord, just as he promised he would do (John 18:10). But Peter was not prepared for Jesus to submit to arrest. Peter’s conviction and strength was rooted in himself and the (incorrect) perspective he had chosen. It was not in Jesus and a perspective that was true.

1. **JESUS’S PREDICTION THAT PETER WILL DENY HIM THREE TIMES**

As Peter continued to protest his willingness to die for Jesus, Jesus reminded His disciple, Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.

By using the authoritative expression, Truly I say to you, Jesus personally guaranteed this would happen. The phrases this very night and before a rooster crows are clear indicators that Peter would do this before morning came. Roosters crow as night turns to dawn.

Mark specified: “before a rooster crows twice…” (Mark 14:30). This expression possibly means that Peter will have at least one more warning (the rooster’s first crow) before he makes these denials. It also could be an expression that indicates that it is clearly morning.

Jesus flatly tells Peter that what he will do this very night is deny Me three times. The fact that Jesus predicted Peter will deny Him three times indicates that these denials will not be accidental but intentional. They won’t be a passing mistake. They will be a pattern. And it will be apparent to everyone, including Peter, that he will have denied Jesus by the time a rooster crows twice.

Luke elaborates on what Peter’s denial of Jesus will look like. Jesus says: “you [will] have denied three times that you know me” (Luke 22:34). The Greek word translated as “know” is εἴδω (pronounced “i'-do”). It means a book knowledge, or theoretical knowledge. This term suggest that Peter will not just deny being His follower, He will deny everything concerning Jesus, including knowing anything about Him.

In the hours to come Peter will deny Jesus three times while he is observing Christ’s trial. And he will deny Him three times, on that very night, before the rooster crows.

The first denial will be as Peter was sitting in the courtyard outside the trial. He will deny being with Jesus to a servant girl (Matthew 26:69-70; Mark 14:66-68a; Luke 22:55-57; John 18:17).

The second denial will come when he had gone out the gateway. Peter will deny being with Jesus to another servant girl, and this time he will deny Him with an oath (Matthew 26:71-72; Mark 14:68b-70a; Luke 22:58; John 18:25).

The third denial will be to a bystander about an hour later. The bystander was a relative of Malchus, the priest’s servant whose ear Peter cut off as he defended Jesus (John 18:10). This time Peter will deny knowing Jesus with swears and curses (Matthew 26:73-74a; Mark 14:70b-71; Luke 22:59-60a; John 18:26-27a).

“Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, ‘Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.”  
(Luke 22:60b-62)

1. **PETER AND THE DISCIPLES’ INSISTENCE THAT THEY WOULD NEVER DO THIS**

Peter said to Him, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You.”

Peter was persistent (Mark 14:31a).  And he was determined to do what he said he would do and not do what he said he would not do.

Once again, Peter’s confidence and faith were misplaced in himself and the (incorrect) perspective he had chosen rather than trusting Jesus. Peter was prepared to die for Jesus if it meant a fight to the death. But he was not prepared for Jesus to surrender to His enemies and lay down His life for them. He was not prepared to follow Jesus down **that** path. In other words, Peter was eager and ready to follow Jesus as long as Jesus fit within Peter’s own understanding and vision for what he thought God should do. But if God had other plans outside Peter’s understanding or that ran contrary to his vision, he would be lost.

Jesus understood that the path He would soon follow did not fit within Peter’s paradigm/perspective that night. And Jesus knew how Peter would respond – by denying Him three times—when reality (i.e. God’s will) ruptured Peter’s impassioned plans.

And when Jesus surrendered Himself, this blew Peter’s paradigm and plan. Not knowing what to do next, Peter followed at a distance and observed Jesus’s trial as an onlooker (Luke 22:54). When he was outed by a servant girl and others as a follower of Jesus, Peter denied His Lord and subsequently denied him twice more (Matthew 26:69-74; Mark 14:66-71; Luke 22:55-60; John 18:25-27). Once the rooster crowed and he realized what he had done, Peter was devastated (Matthew 26:74-75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:61-62)

Like Paul and his struggle with his flesh, the outcome for Peter was crushing and bitter once he realized how he failed to do what he had pledged to do,

“For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.”  
(Romans 7:15)

The reason Peter failed was because his promise was centered in his own strength—in what he could do for Jesus. His assurance was not grounded in dependence upon Jesus—in what Christ could do through Him. In this instance, Peter did not take to heart what Jesus told the disciples: “apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5b). Peter did what we are all inclined to do, he leaned on his own understanding instead of trusting in the Lord (Proverbs 3:5). And it was his reliance upon himself (in his wrong opinion and weak abilities) and his refusal to trust that God was in control which led to his denials.

And lest we forget, it was not only Peter whose trust was misplaced. It was all the disciples too.

All the disciples said the same thing too.

In the same way Peter was ready to die for Jesus, so were all of the disciples ready to die for Jesus. They were all ready to die for Jesus on their own terms (John 11:16). Like Peter, none of the disciples were ready to follow Jesus on His terms and to trust Him in all circumstances, including His arrest and execution. Like Peter, they were not willing (at this point in their lives) to follow Him and take up their cross (Matthew 16:24).

It was after Jesus came back to life and they were indwelt with the Holy Spirit that they fully surrendered their lives to His plan. The Book of Acts shows us that the disciples eventually learned to surrender all control over to God.

Peter’s misplaced faith and faulty perspective was representative of all the disciples. He was the most vocal about it. Their misplaced faith in themselves and their abilities, and their wrong perspective are often ours as well. We too often lean into our understanding and place limits on God and are only willing to follow Him if He leads us in paths that we are comfortable with. We often are unwilling to follow God down paths we do not understand or are painful to us. In great humility, Peter (through Mark), and Matthew as one of the other disciples, have given us this testimony of failure for our instruction and encouragement.

But the cross is always painful. And if we are to follow Jesus, we must pick our crosses up and surrender our lives for His sake (Matthew 16:24). We must surrender all illusion of control in our lives—and recognize the reality that God is in control. Each of us has control of three things: who we trust, the perspective/paradigm we choose, and the actions we take. All else we should leave to God. And we can see through this example of Peter that when we have a faulty paradigm (through not listening) and trust in ourselves (rather than depending upon God) we make bad choices.

We must trust Him in all circumstances—pleasant and painful, and every circumstance in between. God is capable of working all things together for His glory and our good (Romans 8:28). Only Jesus is worthy to be King of Creation and have control over all things (Matthew 28:18; Jude 1:24-25; Revelation 5:12).

Since we only control three things (who we trust; our perspective; and what we will do) it is always best if we:

* trust God (John 14:1);
* seek His perspective (Proverbs 3:5-6; James 1:5);
* and do what He tells us to do (Deuteronomy 30:19-20; Matthew 7:24; John 14:23).

**Biblical Text**

**31 Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, ‘I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.’ 32 But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.” 33 But Peter said to Him, “Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.” 34 Jesus said to him, “Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” 35 Peter said to Him, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You.” All the disciples said the same thing too.**