**John 18:15-18**

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/john/john-18/john-1815-18/>

Peter’s First Denial of Jesus

Peter manages to enter into the court of Annas where Jesus’s preliminary trial was taking place. While Peter is there, he denies being a follower of Jesus to a slave girl.

 The parallel gospel accounts of this event are found in Matthew 26:69-71; Mark 14:66-68; and Luke 22:54b-57.

The main event in this passage is the first of Peter’s three denials of Jesus.

Peter’s first denial most likely took place on the night of Nisan 15 (the dark hours of Friday morning by Roman reckoning) in the courtyard of Annas, the former high priest, as Jesus’s preliminary religious trial was underway inside his home.

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.

Following His submission to arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:1-11), Jesus was taken to the home of Annas for His preliminary religious trial (John 18:12-14). Before John narrates the events of Jesus’s preliminary trial, he explains what happened to Simon Peter while the preliminary trial took place.

This commentary will be subdivided into two sections:

* **THE BACKSTORY OF PETER’S THREE DENIALS**
* **PETER’S FIRST DENIAL**

If the reader wishes to skip straight to the direct commentary for this scripture, scroll down to the subheading: “PETER’S FIRST DENIAL.”

**THE BACKSTORY OF PETER’S THREE DENIALS**

To understand the significance of this moment it may be beneficial to recall three moments from earlier that evening.

1. **Jesus’s Predictions and Peter’s Promise**

The first moment to recall was when Jesus informed Peter that he would deny Him three times before a rooster crows twice, and Peter’s promise that he would die for Jesus and never deny him (Mark 14:30).

It seems that Jesus may have even warned Peter of this twice that night, and both times Peter vehemently rejected His Lord’s shameful prophecy of his imminent denial.

Jesus’s initial warning occurred during the Upper Room Discourse that followed Jesus’s Seder meal with His disciples celebrating the Passover. During that conversation, the disciples argued about which among them was the greatest (Luke 22:24). Jesus reminded them about true greatness being rooted in service (Luke 22:25-29) and commanded them to love one another (John 13:31-35).

At which point Peter interjected: “Lord, where are You going?” (John 13:36).

Jesus responded: “Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later” (John 13:36b).

Peter then said: “Lord, why can I not follow You right now? (John 13:37a)

Jesus then likely responded to Peter’s promise: “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).

Peter rejected his Lord’s suggestion that he would falter: “Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!” (Luke 22:33); and “I will lay down my life for You” (John 13:37b).

Then Jesus plainly predicted: “I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me” (Luke 22:34). John’s Gospel prefaces Jesus’s prediction with Him asking His wounded disciple: “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).

Peter was silent.

And it seems this conversation repeated itself as Jesus and His disciples walked from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane.

As they travelled across Jerusalem and through the gates that evening, Jesus predicted that all of His disciples would fall away that night as foretold by the prophets (Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27).

Peter then disputed Jesus: “Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away” (Matthew 26:33; see also Mark 14:29).

Jesus then repeated His specific prediction: “Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times” (Mark 14:30: see also Matthew 26:34).

But Peter “kept saying insistently, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!’” (Mark 14:31; see also Matthew 26:35).

From these predictions and denials, it is clear Jesus knows that Peter will deny Him three times before the rooster crows twice. It is also clear Peter firmly believes that he is ready to die for Jesus and that he will not deny his Lord.

1. **Praying and Sleeping in the Gethsemane**

The second moment that could be helpful to recall was when Jesus and His disciples arrived at the Garden of Gethsemane. Upon their arrival, Jesus was deeply troubled by what He was about to undergo (Matthew 26:37). Jesus took with Him Peter, James, and John and asked them to “remain here and keep watch with Me” (Matthew 26:38; see also Mark 14:34). More specifically, what Jesus asked Peter and the other disciples to do was to “pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Luke 22:40).

Jesus knew He would soon be arrested, unjustly condemned, tortured, crucified to bear the sins of the world, and be buried for three days. He dreaded this for Himself and needed to ask God for strength to faithfully endure the trial. Jesus also knew this experience would be incredibly difficult for His disciples to endure. It would shake their faith and they would fall unless they relied on God, as He relied on God. Therefore, He asked Peter and the other disciples to pray that they may not succumb to the temptation to rely on their own will and resolve or to fall into despair when the saw what happened to Jesus.

But three times, Jesus came and found Peter, James, and John sleeping instead of praying (Matthew 26:40-45; Mark 14:37-41; Luke 22:45-46). At one point Jesus woke Peter up and said: “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mark 14:37b-38).

There seems to be a connection, thematic if nothing else, between the **three times** Peter fell asleep while praying in Gethsemane and the **three times** Peter denied Jesus. When the risen Jesus personally forgives Peter and restores him beside the shore at Galilee to his kingdom calling, the Lord asks Peter **three times** “Do you love me?” (John 21:15-17).

From this moment in Gethsemane, it seems apparent that Peter did not spend the night praying for God’s strength to help him overcome the trial coming swiftly upon him. Instead, he slept and relied on his own will.

1. **Jesus’s Arrest and Peter’s Attack**

The third moment of significance preceding Peter’s denials was when the Jewish authorities and Roman cohort arrived to arrest Jesus (Matthew 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-50; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-11). As they came to seize Jesus, Peter made good on his promise that he was willing to die with Jesus, in that he immediately began to fight. Peter drew his sword and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his ear (John 13:10; see also Matthew 26:51; Mark 14:46-47; Luke 22:49-50).

Jesus immediately intervened, commanding Peter to stop, and healed the servant’s ear; thus, saving Peter’s life (Matthew 26:52; Luke 22:51; John 18:11).

At this point, Jesus freely submitted to His captors (Luke 22:53).

Confused that Jesus had given Himself up without a fight, all His disciples fled (Matthew 26:56b; Mark 14:50), just as He had predicted they would do.

From this episode it is apparent that the disciples, especially Peter, were all willing to die for Jesus, just as they had promised within their chosen perspective. They all expected Jesus to eventually seize political power from Rome. Thus, their commitment to die for Him came with the caveat that their death would be on their terms. Peter and the disciples were all willing to die for Jesus as long as He fit into their expectations for Him. But they were not willing to die for Him (i.e. follow Him) on His terms.

Moreover, Peter and the disciples were acting in their own strength. They had limited understanding of Jesus and His mission, which required Him to die for the sins of the world and to be raised back to life by God. Even though Jesus had told them this plainly, they had been unable to hear. They continued to rely on their own understanding instead of trusting God by faith. In other words, they had fallen into the temptation that Jesus repeatedly asked them to pray and prepare for when they first entered Gethsemane.

**PETER’S FIRST DENIAL**

After Jesus submitted to arrest, His captors brought Him to the home of Annas, the former high priest for His preliminary religious trial (John 18:12-14).

Meanwhile, Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple (v 15a).

Matthew’s Gospel tells us that Peter followed the arresting party “at a distance” so as not to get noticed or caught; he wanted “to see the outcome” (Matthew 26:58).

Then—another disciple—that John mentions is presumably himself. John frequently refers to himself in his Gospel indirectly in the third person, and this is likely another instance of his signature pattern. If this unnamed disciple was in fact John, the author, it would account for how the writer knew these specific details so intimately.

All three of the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) state that Peter got as far as “the courtyard of the high priest” (Matthew 26:58; Mark 14:54; see also Luke 22:55), but only John’s Gospel explains how Peter got in.

Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in. (v 15b-16).

John explains that the unnamed disciple (himself) was known to the high priest. This expression likely means he personally knew someone in the high priest’s household or staff rather than Annas, the former high priest, or Caiaphas, the current high priest at that time.

The staff member that the unnamed disciple knew and was known to was apparently the door keeper. Because John, the unnamed disciple was known to the door keeper of the high priest he was allowed inside; and he entered with Jesus and His captors into the court of the high priest.

But Peter was not known by this high priest’s household and was left waiting outside, standing at the door. Peter seems to have lingered there, trying to glimpse inside until John noticed him, and went out and spoke to the door keeper, and then brought Peter in.

John’s personal familiarity with the door keeper not only allowed himself and Peter a front row seat to what happened at Jesus’s trials, it also helps explain how he knew the name of the high priest’s servant whose ear Peter cut off. The servant’s name was “Malchus” (John 18:10). John’s Gospel is the only Gospel that identifies this servant by name.

As Peter was warming himself, huddled near the fire with the high priest’s slaves and the temple officers, the fire’s glow shown upon his face (v 18) (Luke 22:56).

Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, “You are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not” (v 17).

From a cultural perspective, a slave-girl who kept the door would have been held in low esteem by the officers around her. According to Jewish law, even a free-woman’s testimony held no validity in the court of law. But when she saw and recognized Peter, she accused him of being one of Jesus, the hated prisoner’s, followers (Matthew 26:69; Mark 14:67; Luke 22:56). In John’s Gospel the accusation is framed not as a statement, but as a question:

You are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?

The implied or assumed answer to the slave-girl’s question was “Yes, I am one of this accused man’s disciples.”

But instead of answering truthfully, Peter flatly answered: I am not.

Peter answered untruthfully and in a manner that was cowardly. This was quite a statement coming from one of Jesus’s closest disciples, not to mention one who so boldly said he would never deny Jesus, but stated in the most emphatic terms that he would die for Him.

Luke captures Peter’s first denial this way: “Woman, I do not know Him” (Luke 22:57).

It seems apparent that Peter denied His Lord because he was afraid of what would happen to him if the officers knew him to be one of Jesus’s disciples. Most particularly because he cut off the servant’s ear Peter could be arrested, abused, and killed like Jesus. A few minutes before, Peter was ready to fight, kill, and die for Jesus (John 18:10), but after Jesus surrendered to His enemies, Peter was fearful because his confidence and faith had been shaken.

Perhaps Peter had misplaced his faith in his own abilities and understanding rather than God’s. He was so afraid that he denied being one of Jesus’s disciples to a lowly servant girl, whose testimony was culturally regarded as worthless.

In Matthew’s recounting of Peter’s first denial, he uses a form of the Greek word οἶδα (G1492 – pronounced: “oi'-dah) that is translated “know” for Peter’s remark to the slave-girl “I do not know what you are talking about” (Matthew 26:70). The word “oidah”, describes theoretical knowledge. “Oidah” is different from the other common Greek word for “I know” which is γινώσκω (G1097 – pronounced “ghin-ōs-kō”). “Ghinōskō” describes relational or experiential knowledge or familiarity.

By denying that he knows (“oidahs”) Jesus, Peter is implying that he knows little to nothing about Him. To say he did not “ginōskō” Jesus, would mean that Peter may have talked with Him once or twice, but that was not a real follower of Jesus. But to say that he did not “Oidah” Jesus implied that Peter knew nothing of Jesus at all and/or had never interacted with Him. Therefore Peter’s “oidah” denial was much stronger and more absolute denial than if he had merely said he did not “ghinōskō” Jesus.

This strength of this denial is felt in Mark’s version of Peter’s first denial: “I neither know nor understand what you are talking about” (Mark 14:68).

After stating the main action, John describes what Peter was doing when the slave-girl asked him the question.

Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself (v 18).

The other Gospels all say something similar, namely that Peter was near a fire in the middle of the courtyard among the captors and accusers of Jesus when a slave girl approached and accused him of being one of Jesus’s followers. Which Peter denied.

This was the first occasion that Peter broke his promises from earlier that night to never deny Jesus (Matthew 26:33, 35; Mark 14:29, 31). It was also the first fulfillment of what Jesus told Peter he would do, before the rooster crowed (Matthew 26:34; Mark 14:30; Luke 22:34; John 13:38).

A “little later” (Luke 22:58), Peter would deny Jesus two more times, this time in the courtyard of Caiaphas (John 18:24-27). But first John reveals what took place during Jesus’s preliminary trial in the home of Annas, the former high priest (John 18:19-24).

[To see Peter’s second and third denials from the perspective of John go to the Bible Says commentary page for John 18:25-27.](https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/john/john-18/john-1825-27/)

[To see all three of Peter’s denials from the perspective of Matthew go to the Bible Says commentary page for Matthew 26:69-75](https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-26/matthew-2669-75/).

**Biblical Text**

**15 Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, 16 but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in. 17 Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, “You are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.” 18 Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.**