

# Matthew 26:69-75

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## *Peter's Three Denials of Jesus*

*Peter is recognized by various people as a follower of Jesus while the Lord's religious trials carry on inside the homes of high priests. Despite his earlier promises, Peter denies knowing Jesus three times, each with increasing vigor. When the rooster crows, Peter remembers his now-broken promise and Jesus's now-fulfilled prophecy and he runs away weeping bitterly.*

The parallel gospel accounts of this event are found in Mark 14:66-72, Luke 22:54b-62, and John 18:15-18; John 18:25-27.

This passage is Matthew's account of *Peter's* three denials of *Jesus*.

*Peter's* first denial of his Lord most likely occurred *in the courtyard* of Annas, the former high priest, during *Jesus's* preliminary trial (John 18:15-18).

*Peter's* second denial most likely took place *in the courtyard* of Caiaphas, the high priest, as *Jesus's* second, night-time trial was beginning inside his home. The second denial happened "a little later" after the first denial (Luke 22:58).

*Peter's* third and final denial also most likely took place *in the courtyard* of Caiaphas, the high priest, during *Jesus's* second night-time trial, but it occurred "after about an hour had passed" as *Jesus* was likely being led away after being convicted, condemned, and beaten (Luke 22:59).

All three of *Peter's* denials most likely happened on the night of Nisan 15 (the dark and dim hours of Friday morning by Roman reckoning).

See "[The Bible Says Timeline of Jesus's Final 24 Hours](#)" to learn more about the timing and sequencing of this event.

Matthew's account thematically groups all *three* of *Peter's* denials together and he narrates them consecutively, rather than placing and discussing each separately as it occurred. Mark and Luke do the same. John, who was likely with *Peter* when *he denied Jesus*, is the only Gospel writer who tells us *Peter's* first denial was at Annas's home during *Jesus's* first trial (John 18:12-13, 15-17). John also tells us that *Peter's* last two denials were in Caiaphas's home during *Jesus's* second trial (John 18:24-27).

While we are discussing the four Gospels' treatment of this event it is worth mentioning that all four Gospels provide rich detail about how this happened. It is difficult to find another incident where all four Gospel writers provide such clear and detailed accounts of so brief a moment.

Some have asserted contradictions between one Gospel writer and another. For instance: on the surface it appears that the second accusation in Matthew and Mark were spoken by *a servant-girl* (Matthew 26:71; Mark 14:69), while in Luke's Gospel, *Peter* makes his second denial to a man (Luke 22:58). But when these details are considered more closely and in their context, there is no contradiction between any of these accounts whatsoever.

What is presented instead is an extremely rich and vivid story about a deeply personal and impactful moment in an important disciple's life. That each gospel writer confirms the abject failure of the head Apostle is an amazing aberration; the writers of history do not record unflattering accounts of themselves. Yet, in this and many other instances, the disciples record the vast extent of their cluelessness, ego, and failure in their painful yet immensely rewarding journey as disciples of *Jesus*.

We will attempt to faithfully illuminate this very humanizing story of *Peter* as we comment on Matthew's summary of *Peter's three denials of Jesus*.

This commentary will be subdivided into five sections:

- **THE BACKSTORY OF PETER'S THREE DENIALS**
- **PETER'S FIRST DENIAL**  
(Matthew 26:69-70)
- **PETER'S SECOND DENIAL**  
(Matthew 26:71-72)
- **PETER'S THIRD DENIAL**  
(Matthew 26:73-75)
- **REFLECTIONS FOR THE BELIEVER**

If the reader wishes to go straight to the direct commentary for this scripture, he may skip the backstory leading up to its events and go to whichever of the three denials is of interest.

## **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 14:30-31).

It seems that *Jesus* may have even warned *Peter* of this twice that night, and *Peter* vehemently rejected both of His Lord's prophecies.

*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 coming through 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 seems to respond 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 went on their way 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 corrected *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.

## 2. 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 for the sins of the world, and 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 fall into despair when they 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* to His kingdom while beside the shore at Galilee, 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.

## 3. 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*. *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, 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* would give Himself up without a fight, all His disciples fled (Matthew 26:56b; Mark 14:50), just as He had predicted they would do.

Prior to *Jesus's* arrest, it is apparent that the disciples, especially *Peter*, were all willing to die for *Jesus*, just as they had promised. But their commitment to die for Him was based on their expectation that *Jesus* would eventually seize political control from Rome. Therefore, their willingness to die would have to be on their own 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 and limited understanding of *Jesus* and His mission. His mission was to die for the sins of the world and to be raised back to life by God. The disciples trusted their own understanding instead of trusting God by faith. In other words, they had fallen into the temptation to rely on their flesh, rather than on the Spirit. *Jesus* repeatedly asked them to pray and prepare to have their spirit's strengthened when they first entered Gethsemane. Instead, they slept.

### **PETER'S FIRST DENIAL**

(Matthew 26:69-70)

*Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about" (v 69-70).*

Following *Jesus's* submission to arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, He was brought to trial. Meanwhile, "Peter was following at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the officers to see the outcome" (Matthew 26:58).

John's Gospel tells us that this was *the courtyard* of Annas, the former high priest (John 18:12-13). John's Gospel also tells us how *Peter* managed to enter into it. *Peter* was able to enter because "another disciple" (probably John) was acquaintances with the doorkeeper of the high priest—when this disciple saw *Peter* outside, he spoke to the doorkeeper and *Peter* was allowed to enter *the courtyard* (John 18:15-16).

Matthew picks up the narrative from there.

*Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard (v 69a).*

*Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, warming himself by the fire on a chilly spring night (John 18:18) as Jesus was being interrogated inside by Annas (John 18:19-23).*

*And as Peter sat there, a servant-girl came to him and said, “You too were with Jesus the Galilean” (v 69b).*

This *servant girl* was likely an attendant of Annas’s household. She was probably tending to the needs of the priests and officers filling her master’s house and courtyard at this late hour. As a young, female *servant*, she held a low and humble station in ancient Jewish culture. Her voice and opinions would be little regarded by the important figures she served.

While tending the priests and officers in the courtyard, this *girl came to Peter* who was sitting among the officials. She noticed that *he* seemed out of place. As she looked more intently by the firelight (Luke 22:56) she recognized that *Peter was with* the accused prisoner inside the house. She said to him: “*You too were with Jesus the Galilean.*”

Mark records her accusation slightly differently: “You also were with Jesus the Nazarene” (Mark 14:67).

The reason the *servant-girl* referred to *Jesus* as *the Galilean* was because the district of Galilee was where *Jesus’s* ministry had been headquartered for the past year or more (Matthew 4:13). The town of Nazareth was located in the district of Galilee and was where *Jesus* was raised (Matthew 2:23).

*Jesus’s* trials were in the capital city of Jerusalem (approximately ninety miles south of Galilee), where He and many other Jews had traveled to celebrate the Passover. As a city dweller, this *servant girl* would have naturally identified outsiders, like *Jesus* or *Peter*, according to the localities and districts they were from. The *servant-girl’s* expression: *Jesus the Galilean* as recorded by Matthew is the more general term. Her expression “*Jesus the Nazarene*” as recorded by Mark is the more specific term (Mark 14:67). Both expressions are correct.

*Peter’s* response to the *servant girl’s* accusation is emphatic,

*But he denied it before them all, saying, ‘I do not know what you are talking about’ (v 70).*

Matthew points out that *Peter denied* being *with Jesus*, before quoting what *Peter said*. This is Matthew’s way of keeping count and helping his readers recognize this as the first part of *Jesus’s* prophecy stated earlier in the evening that His disciple would *deny* Him three times that very night (Matthew 26:34).

As *Peter denied Jesus*, he pretended to not understand why the *servant-girl* would think that *he was with Jesus*. Mark captures *Peter’s* pretense this way: “I neither know nor understand what you are talking about” (Mark 14:68).

*Peter’s* response as described by Matthew is not directed to this *servant-girl*, whose opinion meant little and whose accusation would not be legally valid in a Jewish courtroom. His reply

was directed *before them all*—i.e. everyone else, including the officers and priests whom *Peter was sitting among in Annas's courtyard*. If they suspected that *Peter was with Jesus*, then *he* could be in danger.

This was the account of *Peter's* first denial of *Jesus* as described in Matthew.

When we analyze the accounts of John and Luke's Gospels alongside Matthew and Mark's, it seems as if this *servant-girl's* accusation and *Peter's* denial were a more extended conversation rather than a short exchange.

In John's Gospel, the *servant-girl's* accusation comes in the form of a question: "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" (John 18:17). It seems as though the *servant-girl* may have asked this question to *Peter* first, before making the more direct accusation recorded by Matthew. John records *Peter* as responding: "I am not" (John 18:17).

After the *servant-girl's* question and *Peter's* terse answer, she seems to have pressed *him*: *You too were with Jesus the Galilean* (v 69). Luke records *Peter's* agitated response to her firm accusation: "Woman, I do not know Him" (Luke 22:57). By referring to the *servant-girl* as "woman," *Peter* may be trying to belittle her or minimize her credibility.

Luke also records her response, which was to make it known to *all before them* that: "This man was with Him too" (Luke 22:56). Matthew and Mark then record *Peter's* response *before them all*: "*I do not know what you are talking about*" (v 70; also see Mark 14:68).

Some of the Gospels may have simply summarized this interaction or they may have described only a part of it to make the point and then move on with their narrative. Or perhaps the conversation unfolded something like the extended interaction described above. Either way, the Bible considers these interactions to constitute one denial, even though *Peter* may have reiterated it two or three times to the *servant girl* and those *before him*.

## **PETER'S SECOND DENIAL**

(Matthew 26:71-72)

*When he had gone out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." And again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man."* (v 71-72).

*Peter's* first denial had taken place *in the courtyard* of Annas (John 18:12-13, 15-18) during *Jesus's* preliminary trial when a *servant-girl* recognized *Peter* as being *with Jesus*. After *Jesus's* preliminary trial concluded, Annas sent *Jesus* to his son-in-law, Caiaphas, the sitting high priest (John 18:13, 24) where the Sanhedrin Council had been gathered in the middle of the night to illegally manufacture a charge to condemn *Jesus* to death (Matthew 26:57, 59).

*Peter* relocated to Caiaphas's house along with everyone else.

But when Peter had gone out to the gateway of Annas's courtyard (possibly on his way to Caiaphas's house) another servant-girl saw Peter and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." This other servant-girl may have drawn a similar conclusion as the first servant-girl who identified Peter; or she may have heard their conversation; or perhaps she was told about Peter by the first servant-girl. In any case this second-servant girl informed others who were there about Peter being with Jesus of Nazareth.

Mark's Gospel echoes this scenario of Peter leaving ("he went out onto the porch" – Mark 14:68) and a servant-girl "once more" saying "to the bystanders, 'This is one of them!'" (Mark 14:69).

Matthew tells us Peter's response was another denial:

*And again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man."*

But when we look at the accounts from the other Gospels, it seems that Matthew compresses these events into a short interaction, because John tells us that the second and third denials occurred at Caiaphas's house during Jesus's second trial (John 18:24-27). And Luke tells us that the second time Peter denied Jesus, he denied Him to a man—not a servant-girl (Luke 22:58).

Putting these facts together suggests that a servant-girl informed people as Peter and everyone else were relocating from Jesus's preliminary trial at Annas's house to His second trial at the home of Caiaphas that Peter was with Jesus of Nazareth (v 71). Then "a little later" after they arrived at Caiaphas's courtyard, one of the people the servant-girl informed saw Peter standing there "and said, 'You are one of them too!'" (Luke 22:58). To which Peter replied: "Man I am not" (Luke 22:58). Peter's expression, captured by Luke could also be sternly translated: "Sir, I am not!"

The seed for the second accusation was therefore planted by a servant-girl at Annas's house as Jesus's preliminary trial was moving on, but the direct accusation and Peter's second denial were made by a man at Caiaphas's house "a little later" (Luke 22:58) as Jesus's second trial was getting underway.

There are three important things to notice from Matthew's account of Peter's second denial of his Lord.

The first is that Matthew introduces Peter's response with the phrase: *And again he denied it*, before quoting Peter. This is Matthew's tracking Peter's three denials and helping his readers recognize this was the second part of Jesus's prophecy stated earlier in the evening that His disciple would deny Him three times that very night (Matthew 26:34).

The second noteworthy item is that Peter denies knowing Jesus this time with an oath. By using an oath, Peter was attempting to bring greater weight or veracity to his claim that he did not know Jesus. There was no mention of Peter using any oath to deny Jesus the first time (Matthew 26:70). This suggests that Peter denied Jesus more emphatically or with intensity the second time than when he did the first time.



The third and final important item is the Greek word that Matthew translated as *know* within *Peter's* denial. This word is a form of οἶδα (G1492 – pronounced: “Oi'-dah). 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 *he did not know Jesus* with the word “oidah”, *Peter* is implying that *he* knows little or nothing about Him. Had *Peter* said that *he did not “Ginōskō-know” Jesus*, *he* would have meant that *he* might have talked with *Him* once or twice, or heard *Him* speak, or heard about His miracles, but that *Peter* was not a real follower of *Jesus*, more of a distant acquaintance. But *Peter* did not use the word “ginōskō” in his denial. *He* used the word “oidah.”

By using “oidah” in his denial, *Peter* was claiming that *he* knew nothing about *Jesus* whatsoever; that *he* had never interacted with Him or heard Him or seen Him. When *Peter said: I do not “oidah-know” the man* (notice how *Peter* does not even speak *Jesus's* name) *he* was claiming that he and *Jesus* were complete and total strangers.

Therefore *Peter's* “oidah” denial was much stronger, harsher, and more complete than if *he* had merely said *he did not “ghinōskō” Jesus*.

Matthew uses the word, “oidah” when he quotes *Peter* in all *three* of his denials. Mark and Luke's Gospels also use “oidah” when they quote *Peter* denying *Jesus*. And no Gospel writer quotes *Peter* as speaking *Jesus's* name when *he* denies his Lord. *Peter*, shamefully, avoids it altogether.

### **PETER'S THIRD DENIAL**

(Matthew 26:73-75)

*A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away.” Then he began to curse and swear, “I do not know the man!” And immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, “Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly (v 73-75).*

Matthew writes that *Peter's* third denial took place *a little later* after the second. Luke is more precise. He writes the third denial happened “after about an hour had passed” (Luke 22:59). And for reasons that will be made clear later, Luke also seems to imply that *Peter's* third denial occurred after *Jesus's* second trial concluded.

A quick aside: *Jesus's* second religious trial seems to have lasted “about an hour” (Luke 22:59). This is calculated from Luke's observations. *Peter's* second denial took place as *Jesus's* second trial was beginning (it happened “a little later” than *Peter's* first denial – Luke 22:58). *Peter's* third denial came, “after about an hour had passed” (Luke 22:59) when it seems *Jesus's* second trial had ended—“the Lord turned and looked at Peter” (Luke 22:61a).

Therefore, *Jesus*'s second religious trial lasted "about an hour" (Luke 22:58). It was at this second religious trial that the following took place:

- Many false witnesses were summoned (Matthew 26:59; Mark 14:55-58);
- Notwithstanding, no charge was substantiated (Matthew 26:60-61; Mark 14:59);
- Caiaphas made his desperate intervention (Matthew 26:62-65; Mark 14:60-63);
- The Sanhedrin condemned *Jesus* (Matthew 26:66; Mark 14:64); and
- *Jesus* was physically abused (Matthew 26:67-68; Mark 14:65)

Matthew says that *the bystanders came up and* addressed *Peter* with an accusation. *The bystanders* would be the people who were gathered in Caiaphas's courtyard for the purpose of participating in or assisting those who were prosecuting *Jesus* in His second religious trial. These *bystanders* were hostile to *Jesus* and to His followers. As such, *Peter* likely sensed his peril, particularly since *he* had hacked off the ear of one of the priest's servants (John 18:10).

John reveals that the particular person of these *bystanders* who addressed *Peter* was "one of the slaves of the high priest [and] a relative of [Malchus] the one whose ear Peter cut off" (John 18:26a). This servant of the high priest went with the armed throng to arrest *Jesus* and was there in the garden and saw *Peter* injure his relative as *he* defended *Jesus* with his sword (Matthew 26:51-54; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:49-51; John 18:10-11).

Recognizing *Peter* as his relative's attacker, this servant *came up and* asked *him*: "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" (John 18:26b). "Peter then denied" that *he* had been in the garden with *Jesus* (John 18:27a).

Then it seems that either this same servant of the high priest and relative of Malchus, or another one of *the bystanders* called *Peter* out for his lie and said to *him*: "Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away" (v 73b).

One of the things that betrayed *Peter*'s lie and gave *him* away to *the bystanders* was *the way he* spoke. Either his accent or jargon, or both, revealed that *Peter* was not from Jerusalem. Apparently, these city dwellers recognized *Peter*'s speech as *Galilean* (Mark 14:70; Luke 22:59).

*Jesus*'s ministry was headquartered in Galilee (Matthew 4:12-13). *Peter* was a fisherman from Galilee. It was on the shores of Galilee that *Jesus* called *Peter* to be His disciple, and where *Peter* left his nets to follow *Jesus* (Matthew 4:18-20). By associating *the way Peter* spoke with that of a *Galilean*, these *bystanders* were telling *Peter* that his lies were deceiving no one. *He* was seen with *Jesus* in the garden (John 18:26b) and *he* spoke like the *Galilean* that *he* and *Jesus* both were.

*Then Peter* became angry and adamant.

*He began to curse and swear, "I do not know the man!"* (v 74a).

Once again, the word that is translated as *know* is οἶδα (G1492 – "oidah") which was *Peter*'s way of claiming that *he* knew nothing about *Jesus* whatsoever; and that *he* had never interacted

with Him or heard Him or seen *Jesus* before (Matthew 26:70, 72). Once again, *Peter* even avoided using *Jesus*'s name when *he* protested: *I do not know the man!* (Matthew 26:70, 72).

And as *Peter* increased his adamancy and intensity from his first denial to the *servant-girl* at Annas's courtyard (Matthew 26:70; John 18:12-13, 17) to his second denial to the man who accused him about an hour earlier *with an oath in the courtyard* of Caiaphas (Matthew 26:72; Luke 22:58; John 18:24-25), so *Peter* increased his adamancy and intensity *again*, with his third denial. This time, *he began to curse and swear*. By this clause, Matthew indicates that *Peter*'s third denial of *Jesus* was the strongest of the *three*.

To *curse* means to call upon something or someone's ruin. The Bible does not reveal what or who *Peter* cursed, but it seems plausible, if not implied, that *Peter* cursed *Jesus* in an effort to demonstrate that *he* was not with Him or a follower of *Jesus*.

To *swear* could mean one of two things. It could mean to use language that is ugly or offensive. People sometimes swear as a way to emphasize their earnestness or commitment to what they are saying. If *Peter* used derogatory language when he began to swear that he did not "oidah-know" *Jesus*, he may have used it to describe his Rabbi and close friend.

Or it could mean to *swear* upon something when making a promise. The intent is that the truth of the promise or what is being *said* has the same degree of certainty as the thing upon which it is *sworn*.

*Jesus* taught His disciples not to do swear when making a promise (Matthew 5:33-36); and *Jesus* chastised the Pharisees for this kind of speech (Matthew 23:16-22). *Peter* may have sworn in order to speak like the Pharisees, *Jesus*'s enemies, so that these *bystanders* would stop accusing *him* and leave *him* alone. *Jesus* taught His disciples to "Let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil" (Matthew 5:37). Swearing like this is similar to an *oath*, but was culturally regarded as stronger, because it was supposedly based upon something more solid than a person's promised words.

It is unclear if *Peter* used offensive language or swore upon something when *he began to swear* in his denial of *Jesus*. It is also possible that *Peter* swore in both senses of that word.

Not only was his third denial the strongest, but perhaps with this denial, more than the previous two, *Peter* was now turning his back on all that *Jesus* had done for him from that moment in Galilee until now. *Jesus* had personally chosen *Peter* to be one of His twelve disciples (Luke 6:12-14). *Jesus* commissioned *Peter* to proclaim His kingdom through preaching and miracles (Matthew 10:5-8). *Jesus* had enabled *Peter* to walk on water, and saved him when he fell (Matthew 14:28-31).

*Peter* was the first disciple to confess that *Jesus* was "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:15-16). *Jesus* called *Peter* "blessed" ("Makarios"), and gave him the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:17-19). When other disciples were leaving *Jesus* because of the hard things He was teaching, *Peter* assured *Jesus*: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

*Jesus* invited *Peter*, along with James and John to see Him in His full glory on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8). And just that night, *Jesus* washed *Peter*'s feet (John 13:5-12) and called him a friend (John 15:15).

*Peter* was now denying all of this to these *bystanders*.

And still even with the full knowledge of His friend's bitter denials, within a few hours *Jesus* would lay down His life for *Peter* (John 15:13).

*Peter* had now *denied* his Lord *three times*, just as *Jesus* had predicted he would do (Matthew 26:34; Mark 14:30; Luke 22:34; John 13:38); just as *Peter* promised he would never do (Matthew 26:35; Mark 14:31).

*And immediately a rooster crowed* (v 74b).

A *rooster*'s crow was the sign *Jesus* had given to *Peter* in His previous warnings. From Luke's Gospel, we learn that the *rooster crowed*, "while [*Peter*] was still speaking" his *curse*-filled denial (Luke 22:60b).

Also in that same swearing instant "the Lord turned and looked at Peter" (Luke 22:61a). It could be that this making of eye contact took place as *Jesus* was led from His trial, and was being transferred from Caiaphas's home to await His third religious trial, which was scheduled for sunrise at the Sanhedrin's council chamber at the temple. (This third religious trial was a show trial, and an attempt to cover-up the illegal night-time trial). *Jesus* and *Peter* made eye-contact as *Peter* was sealing his third denial. They both knew what *Peter* had just *said*. Then *Jesus*'s prophecy came to *Peter*'s mind:

*And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, "Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times"* (v 75a)

*Peter*'s recollection of this *word* and sudden awareness of what *he* had *said* was gut-wrenching. But the words were out; they could not come back into *Peter*'s mouth. His denials could not be undone. *He* had failed miserably. *He* had broken his promise *three times*. *He* had shown cowardice and *denied* *he* had anything to do with *Jesus* in the strongest terms.

*And he went out and wept bitterly* (v 75b).

*Peter* was crushed. *He* left *Jesus* in the hands of His executioners at Caiaphas's *courtyard* and *went out* into what remained of the night. Matthew and Luke describe what *Peter* did next in identical terms: *he wept bitterly*. Their description reveals that *Peter* expressed bitter sorrow, deep-regret, and terrible shame for what *he* had *denied*.

*Peter*'s reaction is likely a good picture of what *Jesus* indicates it will be like for unfaithful believers when they give an account for their lives on earth (Romans 14:12; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). *Peter*'s reaction reflects the scene *Jesus* often described when He pictured the regret unfaithful believers/servants will feel when they are *denied* the reward of

faithfulness—“weeping (sorrow) and gnashing of teeth (self-directed anger)” (Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30).

In Mark, the Gospel which is believed to be based on *Peter*'s telling, *Peter*'s weeping is described with a participle phrase: ἐπιβαλὼν ἔκλαιεν (Mark 14:72). This indicates that *Peter*'s mourning was not temporal, but perpetual.

The second word in the participle phrase, ἔκλαιεν is a graphic form of the word κλαίω (G2799 – pronounced: “klah'-yō”). It is the main verb in this phrase. “Klahyō” means to “mourn,” “weep,” or “lament.” To “ekklahyō” as Mark describes *Peter* doing, means to cry out in mournful agony. *Peter* was literally screaming in emotional pain as *he wept bitterly*.

The first word of this phrase is ἐπιβαλὼν (G1911 – pronounced: “ep-ee-bal'-lō”). It functions here as an adverb. Literally, “epeeballō” means to “throw on.” It can be used to describe waves that are thrown on and on and on.

Taken together, Mark's phrase explaining *Peter* in this bitter state reveals how he was overcome with wave upon wave of bitter grief that caused him to repeatedly wail in sorrow. This graphic description portrays *the Galilean* fisherman in the middle of a terrible storm of grief, guilt, shame, and regret with the shore nowhere in sight. When *Peter* was in a physical storm, he cried out to *Jesus* (Mark 14:29-30). In this instance it would seem that *Peter* is fully functioning in his own strength, which fails.

## **REFLECTIONS FOR THE BELIEVER**

John's narrative of this moment is silent concerning *Peter*'s grief. But John elevates *Jesus*'s loving restoration of *Peter* at the conclusion of his Gospel (John 21:15-23). In contrast, Matthew, Mark, and Luke leave *Peter* in this state as they proceed to the next events leading up to *Jesus*'s crucifixion.

But before we move on, it would be good to consider a few additional things about *Peter*'s denial.

### **1. Peter failed because he relied on his flesh to be faithful.**

We can discern that *Peter* relied upon his own strength and morally failed—spectacularly. Fleshly resolve will never overcome our sin and lead to faithfulness. The flesh cannot be reformed, because there is nothing good within it (Romans 7:18; Ephesians 4:22).

The same degree of failure will happen to us when we rely upon our own strength instead of placing our trust in God. Paul sets this forth in his letter to the Galatians, noting that when we sow to the flesh it reaps corruption (Galatians 6:8). In the instance of *Peter*'s denial, we can observe how walking in the flesh results in corruption, including corruption or twisting of his appointment as an apostle, his fellowship with *Jesus*, and his own inner peace.

When our flesh is the part of us that is willing, our spirit is weak to overcome temptation (Matthew 26:41). If we commit to following our imagined (but untrue) version of *Jesus* (as *Peter* did) and do not listen to what *Jesus* says about Himself, we will not be prepared to pick up our cross and follow Him (as *Peter* was unable to do). *Jesus* asks us to surrender to God's will,

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.’”  
(Matthew 16:24)

Every believer *will* either *deny* himself, or he *will deny Jesus*—as *Peter* did. This is another way to think about Paul's admonition that we must choose whether to walk in the flesh or the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-17). We must choose whom we *will deny*. And if we rely on our flesh, as *Peter* relied on his flesh, we cannot *deny* ourselves. Our sinful flesh *will* never choose to *deny* itself. Our flesh *will* always choose to *deny Jesus* and His Spirit.

## 2. Peter's sin was awful.

We have seen how repetitive, personal, and adamant *Peter* was as *he denied Jesus three times*. *Peter* recognized the horror of his sin when *he went out and wept bitterly*. Given the trial and temptation *Peter* faced, *he* behaved in about the worst way *he* could have responded. He was guilty of a terrible sin.

## 3. Peter suffered terribly for his sin.

The wages or consequences of sin is always death (Romans 6:23a). *Peter* was overcome by wave upon wave of guilt and shame, once he saw the full measure of what he had said. This is typical of the flesh vs. Spirit battle. As Paul states:

“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.”  
(Galatians 5:17)

In this Galatians verse, what we “do” is usually different than what we “please” to do. The flesh is our first actor, but our Spirit is our deeper belief. This is why it takes work to learn to set aside the flesh, because it is our first actor. A part of the process of learning to set the flesh aside is to adopt a perspective that “Walking in the flesh leads to death, loss, and corruption.”

*Peter* suffered a terrible consequence when he sinned. The same is true for believers when we sin. We will face the terrible consequences of our sin—but thanks be to God those consequences do not include eternal separation from Him because of the unfailing grace we have in *Jesus*, our Savior (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9). If we believe in *Jesus*, our eternity is safe and secure in God's hands (John 3:14-15, 10:28-29). But this does not make us immune from other negative consequences for our sin. See our article, “[Eternal Life: Receiving the Gift vs. Inheriting the Prize.](#)”

We will all be held accountable for the things we do and say in this life (2 Corinthians 5:9-10).

If we walk by faith and please God by obeying His commands, we will receive great reward:

- Matthew 7:13-14, 21
- Matthew 10:32
- Matthew 19:27-29
- Matthew 25:21, 23
- Romans 8:16-18
- 1 Corinthians 3:12-14
- 1 Corinthians 9:24-27
- 2 Timothy 2:11-12a
- Hebrews 10:23-25
- James 1:12
- Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28, 3:5, 12, 21

If we operate in the flesh and do as we please or try to manufacture our own self-righteousness (as *Peter* operated in that night) we will suffer and experience great loss (as *Peter* experienced after the *rooster crows*):

- Matthew 7:13, 21-23
- Matthew 10:33
- Matthew 25:11-12
- Matthew 25:30
- 1 Corinthians 3:12-13, 15
- 1 Corinthians 9:24-27
- 2 Timothy 2:12b-13
- Hebrews 10:26-31

#### **4. Even though Peter was guilty of denying Jesus, he was not beyond restoration.**

*Jesus* told His disciples that they would all fall away because of Him that night (Matthew 26:31), He also told them that their falling away would not be final. He proceeded to tell them: “But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee” (Matthew 26:32) before *Peter* interjected with his sincere promise that he was ready to die for *Jesus* (so long as it was on *Peter’s* terms).

*Jesus* knew about *Peter’s* denials before they happened. He knew *Peter* would repent. He knew also that He would forgive *Peter* of His denials. *Jesus* knew the future that *Peter* could not see. A future that included even greater trials, great works, and great glory.

In spite of this immense failure, *Peter* will emerge to become one of the greatest leaders the church has seen. That *Peter’s* denial is included in the gospels is a great testimony to their veracity. The Apostles told their own story with the greatest of humility, fully recognizing their failures and weaknesses. The only reasonable explanation is that these men became transformed by the resurrection power of *Jesus*. They were willing to suffer shame in order to fulfill *Jesus’s* admonition to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). Their example shows us that no one is beyond being restored to fellowship with God.

## 5. In the depths of our guilt and shame, a believer is never beyond restoration.

*Jesus* sees our future also. He knows the trials we will encounter. Trials which have the opportunity to perform great works done in His name. We can gain the greatest of rewards when we walk by faith, living in His power. We can also gain the worst of experiences and the greatest of failures when we rely on our own strength. When we seek rewards in this life we may throw aside future reward.

But whatever circumstances we experience in life, there is hope for all believers, regardless of our failures. Though we may lose rewards and experience regret, we are all destined to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). *Jesus* will still be there to wipe away our tears (Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 21:4). We see a picture of *Jesus*'s compassion in the life of *Peter*, while living on this earth. We have the opportunity to learn from *Peter*, repent of our failures, and move on to live a life of great faithfulness, which will gain the greatest of rewards (Revelation 3:21).

At the beginning of his first epistle, *Peter*, who failed miserably, encouraged believers to view the various trials they encountered this way:

“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

(1 Peter 1:6-7)

In preparation for those trials, he encouraged believers to not act as he did when he fell asleep in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:40-41, 43, 45a) but to:

“Prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

(1 Peter 1:13)

We can learn from *Peter*'s example, and be prepared and ready to follow *Jesus* as our trials come. This is *Peter*'s admonition. But his life (failure and restoration) provides a powerful example that our defeats in this life do not have to be final. Even in the depths of our failure and guilt, we too can be restored if we repent and follow *Jesus* by faith.

The experience of *Peter* demonstrates that a believer may lose reward and suffer adverse consequences of poor decisions. However, even if we deny *Jesus*, He will never reject us. As Paul asserts:

“If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”

(2 Timothy 2:13)

As believers we can never lose the Gift of Eternal Life, no matter how great or continual our sin (Romans 5:20b). But again, this does not mean that we are immune from other negative



consequences of our sin; each of us can forfeit gaining the positive experience and reward of eternal life.

To learn more about the Gift of Eternal Life, see: [“What is Eternal Life? How to Gain the Gift of Eternal Life.”](#)

To learn more about the rewards a believer may win or lose, see: [“Eternal Life: Receiving the Gift vs. Inheriting the Prize.”](#)

If we are still breathing, there is still opportunity to repent and renew our life for *Jesus* (1 John 1:9). Even after we have sinned and in the depths of guilt and despair, God desires and can still use us for great things in His kingdom, if we choose to follow *Jesus*. Sometimes it takes our being broken and feeling wave upon wave of guilt, shame, and grief, as it did for *Peter*, to realize our need to depend on God. If we humbly recognize our need for Christ in our brokenness and sorrow, *Jesus* calls us “Blessed” (Matthew 5:3-5).

To understand more about how to resolve guilt, see our article on [“Guilt and Repentance: The Healthy Way to Deal with Remorse.”](#)

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>69</sup> Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him and said, “You too were with Jesus the Galilean.” <sup>70</sup> But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you are talking about.” <sup>71</sup> When he had gone out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and said to those who were there, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” <sup>72</sup> And again he denied it with an oath, “I do not know the man.” <sup>73</sup> A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away.” <sup>74</sup> Then he began to curse and swear, “I do not know the man!” And immediately a rooster crowed. <sup>75</sup> And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, “Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.**