

## Episode #938 Matthew 26 Part 11-Do Peter's Denials Contradict?

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. In studying through a book like Matthew, everything can seem to fit and fit well. Yet when we start to compare the four gospels with each other, suddenly things become murkier. Many who have studied Peter's three denials of the Lord Jesus have noted that, though all four gospels record them, they appear to be quite different in each. Is this a contradiction in Scripture?

III. Peter's Three Denials—Do They Contradict?

A. All four gospels give the record of Peter's denial. All four list three of them. But, the three they list are not the same!

1. Matthew

- a. Matthew 26:69-70.
- b. Matthew 26:71-72. (Note: a DIFFERENT girl than at the fire)
- c. Matthew 26:73-74.

2. Mark

- a. Mark 14:66-68.
- b. Mark 14:69-70a. (Note: the SAME girl as at the fire)
- c. Mark 14:70b-71.

3. Luke

- a. Luke 22:56-57.
- b. Luke 22:58. (Note: Peter calls this one a MAN, not a girl)
- c. Luke 22:59-60.

4. John

- a. John 18:17. (Note: at the GATE, not the FIRE at all)
- b. John 18:25. (Note: at the fire, but not a girl)
- c. John 18:26-27. (Note: still at the fire, NOT later outside the gate)

B. Some wild suggestions are made trying to harmonize these, but ultimately they cannot be harmonized. The details are too different. Clearly, the gospels do not tell the same story about Peter's denials.

C. In order to solve this discrepancy, we must consider not just Peter's denials, but the Lord's predictions of Peter's denials.

1. Matthew 26:30-35. After they left the supper, at the Mount of Olives. Peter argues he will not stumble, even if others do. The Lord predicts he will deny three times before the rooster crows.
2. Mark 14:26-31. After they left the supper, at the Mount of Olives. Peter argues the same. The Lord's answer is much the same, except He predicts Peter will deny Him three times before the rooster crows TWICE.
3. Luke 22:31-34. Still at the last supper. The Lord tells Simon Peter Satan asked for him, but the Lord prayed to not allow it. Peter argues he will go with Him to prison and death. The Lord predicts he will deny three times before the rooster crows.
4. John 13:33-38. The Lord tells them He is leaving them. Peter wants to go with Him, and insists he will lay down his life for His sake. The Lord predicts Peter will deny Him three times before the rooster crows.

- D. It is fairly clear this was an ongoing argument between the two that night. Probably John was first, then Luke, then Matthew, and finally Mark, accelerating to denying Him before two rooster crows as well.
- E. Let us focus for a moment on Mark. Here, the prediction is different. Peter will deny Him three times before the rooster crows twice! I do not believe the Lord meant the rooster would crow twice in fast succession. Instead, consider this equation. 3 times before the rooster crows once + 3 times before the rooster crows twice = 6 denials!
- F. If Peter denied the Lord three times TWICE, then he denied SIX times, and each gospel picks different ones of the six in presenting their three denials. If this is the case, we would put the denials together as follows.
1. Denial 1. John 18:17. By the servant girl at the gate as Peter and John were entering the high priest's palace.
  2. Denial 2. Matthew 26:69-70, Mark 14:66-68, Luke 22:56-57, John 18:25. The one that links all four together. A servant girl while he is warming himself at the enemy's fire. According to John, some of the men there then joined her in the accusation before Peter denied.
  3. Denial 3. Luke 22:58, John 18:26-27. Still at the fire, by a kinsman of the man whose ear Peter cut off. (John is the only gospel to list all three of the FIRST denials in order.)
  4. Crow 1. Mark 14:68, John 18:27. The rooster crows the first time, but Peter doesn't notice this very common sound. He leaves the fire and goes out to the porch by the gate.
  5. Denial 4. Matthew 26:71-72. By a different servant girl than the one at the fire, who sees him standing at the gate.
  6. Denial 5. Mark 14:69-70a. By the same servant girl at the fire who now sees him standing at the gate.
  7. Denial 6. Matthew 26:73-74, Mark 14:70b-71, Luke 22:59-60. After Peter had been standing in the gate for about an hour. By a group of men standing at the gate. This time, Peter begins to curse and to swear in his final denial.
  8. Crow 2. Matthew 26:74, Mark 14:72, Luke 22:60. The rooster crows the second time. The Lord turns and looks at Peter, the crowing registers in his mind, and he remembers what the Lord had said. He runs away from the palace out of the city and weeps bitterly.
- G. This harmony of the denials seems to me almost self-evident, once we realize there were six. The only sticking points is John mentioning many at the fire and not mentioning the girl (but I think my explanation there makes sense); and my assumption that the same girl at the fire was the second denial in both sets (really there is no way to tell if Matthew's different girl or Mark's same girl was first of the two). But this seems to me to fit all four gospels, and align with the truth.
- H. Could there be a greater evidence of the Holy Spirit's guiding hand than how He has ordered the parsing out of these six denials, both to mark the event with the number three (to fit the three-fold restoration of John 21), as well as to give us the whole story of six denials, but only if we pay attention to all four gospels?

IV. Conclusion: While three is stamped all over Peter's denials of the Lord, the fact that none of the gospels list the same three denials leads us to the conclusion that Peter denied the Lord three times twice, once before each of two rooster crows. This shows the record's harmony and truth.