

Problem: Peter Does the Unforgiveable—He Denies His Relationship with Jesus the Messiah

Simon Johnson (nicknamed Peter, “the rock” by Jesus) was a fisherman. Some are known to talk big, even about small fish. Peter, like most fishermen of the time was known for his net worth. And, he was indeed a rich source of information about the Lord God. Simon Peter was picked by Jesus to serve as a key follower/student of Jesus. As such, he was often known to step forward aggressively, declaring what thought true. In one case, he was the first to declare for the group that Yeshua was indeed the Messiah, yes, the Son of God. The world shook.

But, ironically, Simon Peter was also known to back off, shedding his forthrightness for social approval—kind of like Adam’s choosing Eve instead of the Lord God, or Abraham’s pleasing Sarah instead of Yahweh, or David’s toleration of idols in his home.

Jesus strongly warned them and us about the consequences of denying Him before others. Yet, that’s exactly what Simon Peter did. It’s fairly obvious why Peter denied even knowing the Christ, three times no less. But what is more important to know why the Christ violated His own declaration regarding denial (Luke 12:8-10; i.e., if you deny Me, I will deny you before the Father). Let’s learn more:

The situation. Jesus is preparing His followers for His death and resurrection. They’ve met for Passover and...

- Q How did the Christ warn His followers?
- Q Who declared they would never disown Jesus? Why did Jesus warn Peter about his denial?
- Q Why did Peter lie to the girl who served the high priest? Why did Peter curse as he affirmed to them that he did not know the Christ?
- Q Who else had cursed Peter earlier?⁹
- Q Why did Peter break down and weep?
- Q Just what was his failure?

MARK 14:26-31 & 66-72

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

²⁷”You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.” [Zech 13:7]

²⁸But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

²⁹Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.”

³⁰”I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.”

³¹But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the others said the same.

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While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. ⁶⁷When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him.

”You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,” she said.

⁶⁸But he denied it. ”I don't know or understand what you're talking about,” he said, and went out into the entryway and the rooster crowed.

⁶⁹When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, ”This fellow is one of them.”

⁷⁰Again he denied it.

After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, ”Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.”

⁷¹He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, ”I don't know this man you're talking about.”

⁷²Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: ”Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

⁹When needed, Jesus had a sharp tongue. For example, Peter had just declared Jesus the Son of God, and then when the Christ reminded them He would have to be killed accordingly, Peter had the temerity to reprimand Jesus. “This ain’t goin’ to happen to you boss!” The Christ, wearing thin on patience and probably not liking to be rebuked, had this response:

Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” –Matthew 16:23

Solution: Jesus Does His Thing—Jesus Restores Peter’s Relationship

Denial is slippery, subtle and perilous. It sneaks up on all of us. But to understand Christ’s forgiveness of Peter’s denial, we need to understand the hurt Jesus was forgiving.

When people hurt us, it’s hard to forget. We love to dwell on the scars of pain, not just when we’ve been hurt, but especially when we have been ignored, denied, disregarded as if we were not even there. It is hard to forgive such trespass—against our very being. Jesus was confronted with that very problem with Simon Johnson, “i.e., Peter the rock.” Here’s how He handled it. Here’s how the Christ overlooked His own declaration of the consequences for denying Him.

- Q About what level of love was Jesus asking? What are “these?”
- Q How many times did the Christ ask Peter if Peter loved Him?
- Q What happens to them, and us, when His sheep are not fed?
- Q What do starving sheep look like? What do they do?
- Q Earlier Peter had rebuked Jesus for declaring the nature of His death. How did Jesus explain the nature of Peter’s death?¹⁰



JOHN 21:15-19

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

¹⁶ Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

¹⁷ The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” ¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

¹⁰How does this square with the popular notion in “historical” legend that Peter was crucified in Rome upside down? Again, another lesson about studying Scripture—let Scripture be your evidence base, not vice versa.