

Cock-a-doodle-do...Twice?

by Eric Lyons, M.Min.

I have debunked other articles of this author, however this time he is right, at least where he does not stray of the the topic of Peter's denials. He has the cockcrowing time incorrect. It's not 3 a.m. in the morning.

Perhaps the most famous alleged Bible contradiction centers on Peter's triple denial of Jesus and the crowing of a rooster. For years, skeptics have charged that Mark's account of this event blatantly contradicts the other gospel accounts, thus supposedly "proving" the imperfection of the Scriptures. Even Bible believers have questioned the differences surrounding this event, yet relatively few have taken the time to understand them. Whenever people ask us about Peter's denials and the differences within the gospel accounts, we often fail to give an adequate answer to their questions (see 1 Peter 3:15). This lack of understanding and poor defense of God's Word has led skeptics to become more confident in their position (that the Bible is not God's Word), and has caused some Bible believers to abandon their position on the infallibility of the Scriptures.

The passages in question are found in Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and John 13. Matthew, Luke, and John all quoted Jesus as saying that Peter would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed.

- Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times" (Matthew 26:34).
- Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me" (Luke 22:34).
- Jesus answered him... "Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times" (John 13:38).

After the third denial actually took place, these three writers recorded that Jesus' prophecy was fulfilled exactly the way He said it would be.

- And immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times" (Matthew 26:74b-75).
- Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times" (Luke 22:60-61).
- Peter then denied again [for the third time—EL]; and immediately a rooster crowed (John 18:27).

Matthew, Luke, and John all indicated that Peter denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed. Mark however, says otherwise. He recorded Jesus' prophecy as follows: "Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows **twice**, you will deny Me three times" (Mark 14:30, emp. added). Following Peter's first denial of Jesus, we learn that he "went out on the porch, and a rooster crowed" (Mark 14:68). After Peter's third denial of Jesus, the rooster crowed "a second time.... Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times' " (Mark 14:72).

Mark differs from the other writers in that he specifies the rooster crowed once after Peter's first denial and again after his third denial. But, do these differences represent a legitimate contradiction? Do they indicate, as some critics charge, that the Bible is not from God? Absolutely not!

Consider the following illustration. A family of three went to a high school football game together for the first time. The father and son had been to several games prior to this one, but the mother never had been fortunate enough to attend a high school game until now. After entering the stadium, Ricky tells his 16-year-old son, Cary, that they will meet him right outside Gate 12 after **the** buzzer sounds. Having filed away the instructions, Cary races to the stands to ensure that he sees the opening kickoff. Ricky's wife, Vickie, who did not hear the instructions he gave Cary, then asks him when they were going to see Cary again. He responds, "We are going to meet him right outside the gate we just entered after the **fourth** buzzer." After the fourth buzzer? But he told Cary after **the** buzzer sounded they would meet him. Did Ricky contradict himself? No. At this particular stadium, the time keepers normally sound a buzzer after each quarter. But, when we say "at the buzzer," or when we speak of "a buzzer beater" (such as in basketball), usually we are referring to the **final** buzzer. Cary was familiar

Excellent
Illustration!

with sports lingo, and thus Ricky told him they would see him “after the buzzer sounds.” Vickie, on the other hand, having never attended a football game in her life, was given different instructions. In a more precise way, Ricky instructed her that Cary would meet them, not after the first, second, or third buzzer, but after the fourth and final buzzer that marks the end of regulation play. Ricky knew that if he told Vickie, “Cary will meet us after the buzzer sounds,” she would have expected to meet him after the first buzzer sounded. Thus, Ricky simply informed Vickie in a more detailed manner. Surely, no one would claim that Ricky had contradicted himself.

In a similar way, no one should assume that, because three of the gospel writers mentioned **one** crowing while Mark mentioned **two** crowings, a contradiction therefore exists. Realistically, there were two “rooster crowings.” However, it was the second one (the only one Matthew, Luke, and John mentioned) that was the “main” crowing (like the fourth buzzer is the “main” buzzer at a football game). In the first century, roosters were accustomed to crowing at least twice during the night. The first crowing (which only Mark mentioned—14:68) usually occurred between twelve and one o’clock. Relatively few people ever heard or acknowledged this crowing (*Fausset’s Bible Dictionary*). Likely, Peter never heard it; else surely his slumbering conscience would have awakened.

Nope: at earliest dawn

The second crowing took place not long before daybreak—likely around three o’clock (*Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary*). [Please remember, biblical hours cannot be translated exactly into our modern clock-hours.] It was this latter crowing that commonly was called “the cockcrowing.” Why? Because it was at this time of night (just before daybreak) that roosters crowed the loudest, and their “shrill clarion” was useful in summoning laborers to work (McClintock and Strong, 1968, 2:398). This crowing of the roosters served as an alarm clock to the ancient world. Mark recorded earlier in his gospel account that Jesus spoke of this “main” crowing when He stated: “Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, **at the crowing of the rooster**, or in the morning” (Mark 13:35, emp. added). Interestingly, even when workers were called to work via artificial devices (e.g., bugles), this time of the night still was designated by the proverbial phrase, “the cockcrowing” (McClintock and Strong, 2:398). If you lived in the first century and your boss said to be ready to work when “the rooster crows,” you would know he meant that work begins just before daybreak. If he said work begins at the second crowing of the rooster, likewise, you would know he meant the same thing—work begins just before daylight. These are not contradictory statements, but rather two ways of saying the same thing.

This is merely the difference between the earliest dawn and sunrise.

When Jesus said, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times” (Matthew 26:34), it seems obvious that He was using “the rooster crows” in the more conventional way. Mark, on the other hand, specifies that there were two crowings. In the same way that the husband gives his wife more detailed instructions concerning a football game, Mark used greater precision in recording this event. It may be that Mark quoted the exact words of Jesus, while the other writers (under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) saw fit to employ the less definite style to indicate the same time of night (McGarvey, 1875, p. 355). Or, perhaps Jesus made both statements. After Peter declared that he never would deny the Lord, Jesus could have repeated His first statement and added another detail, saying: “[E]ven this night, before the rooster crows **twice**, you will deny Me three times” (Mark 14:30, emp. added). We cannot be sure why Mark’s account is worded differently than the other writers, but by understanding that “the rooster crowing” commonly was used to indicate a time just before daybreak, we can be assured that no contradiction exists among the gospel writers.

The earliest dawn was still considered night. It is actually the time where you could say it is either day or night.

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