

Bite Size Bible Study

Cockcrow #209

By Pastor Lee

There are parts of scripture that have always irritated me. This one today is the fact that the gospels don't agree with the facts presented in each one. Did the cock (rooster) crow once or twice? Maybe this is a small point but why do three of the Gospels say once and the other say twice?

In his years before Jesus' death Simon Peter's temperament was often volatile and unpredictable. He was prone to rash and unwarranted responses. These verses record one of the later tests Peter had before realizing his impetuous behavior was a problem.

"Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." Matthew 26:34 NIV

Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly. Matthew 26:75 NIV

"Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times." Mark 14:30 NIV

Immediately 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. Mark 14:72 NIV

Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me." Luke 22:34 NIV

The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." Luke 22:61 NIV

Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!" John 13:38 NIV

Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow. John 18:27 NIV

If we look back one chapter in Mark's Gospel, we find a clue as to the timing of the lesson Jesus was predicting.

*"Therefore, keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether **in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn.**"* Mark 13:35 NIV

This tells us that there were at that time 4 segments of time to the night. At this time, they were under Roman rule and the Roman Army had 4 watches each night. Using our hourly time frame, the Roman Night watch at the Temple in the first century was:

First Watch – Sundown to 9PM

Second Watch – 9PM to Midnight

Third Watch – Midnight to 3AM

Fourth Watch – 3AM to sunrise

Each watch ended with a different trumpet call. The end of the third watch at 3AM ended with the trumpet call that was referred to as the cockcrow. It signaled the end of the third watch and the beginning of the fourth and final watch before sunrise.

Using this knowledge, we can place exactly when Peter made his final denial – 3AM.

However, this doesn't tell us why Mark says the rooster crowed twice and the other three say once. By reading the footnotes in some Bibles it seems that many of the earlier transcripts don't record it as two cock crows but only as one. Have the translators made a mistake or maybe attempted to clarify the text? We may never know. All we can be sure of is that early transcripts do not say that the cock crows twice. This, added to the fact that the other three Gospels say only once, leads us to a reasonably solid conclusion that it was only once.

However, there are some other interesting parallels to be squeezed out of these verses.

The rooster (cock) is a vibrant bird and for those familiar with them, they are not just recognized for heralding the dawn of the day.

Crowing serves the purpose of alerting the hens to seek cover from a predator and alerting the predator that a rooster is guarding his flock. Predators, or even a perceived predator, will cause a rooster to crow.

They also have an indomitable spirit and keen awareness of their surroundings. The rooster reminds us of the importance of audacity in the face of challenges, and the beauty of standing tall with confidence.

Peter certainly had audacity but was often unable to channel it into productive use. Jesus' challenge for Peter was to learn to use his audacity in a constructive manner, to stand up for the right things and have the confidence to do so. His lack of standing up for Jesus was his test and by failing to do so taught him the lessons he needed. He failed the test but learned from the failure, only to go on to be a great leader in the Christian community.