

# Bible Studies about Peter

## Study 6: Peter's Denial of Christ

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### Background

In our studies of Peter so far we have walked on a journey through his life and faith in the Lord. We have seen how he was called by Jesus to be one of the first disciples, how his understanding of Christ grew, how he even had sufficient courage to walk on the water to Jesus, and how he bore witness to a foretaste of the coming glory of the Son of God.

We have also had an opportunity to learn something of the real Peter – his impulsive nature, and his great love for the Lord. In this study we will examine the account of Peter's denial of Christ – which perhaps was one of the most humbling experiences that Peter ever encountered, and an account I have read and reread on so many occasions.

Remember in our earlier study in this series (Peter at the transfiguration of Christ) when we looked at the account of when Jesus predicted His death:

*“From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.”<sup>1</sup>*

Here Peter demonstrates his impulsive devotion to Jesus – “*God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.*” This then sets the scene for the account of Peter's denial of Christ. This of course follows on from our previous study on Peter in the garden of Gethsemane.

### The Message

In Matthew's gospel we read:

*“Then Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’*

*But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.” Peter said to him, “Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.” Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” Peter said to him, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And so said all the disciples.”<sup>2</sup>*

Here Peter uses similarly strong language to the earlier account from Matthew's gospel – “*I will not deny you.*”

Peter expresses absolute **disbelief** that anything bad could happen to Jesus and absolute **belief** that whatever may happen, he would never disown or deny Jesus. It was so hard for Peter to come to terms with why Jesus had to make so great a sacrifice, and he declared “*Even though all become deserters, I will not.*”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 16:21-22

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 26:31-35

<sup>3</sup> Mark 14: 29

In reading this account it is perhaps easy to forget **all** the disciples said they would not fall away, and knowing of Peter's denial of Christ, we so often tend to focus on Peter alone. However, Scripture tells us that subsequently "*all the disciples deserted him and fled*"<sup>4</sup> even though earlier they had concurred with Peter. Jesus was at that time truly alone – bereft of the companionship of His disciples.

Later, the account continues:



*"Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it before all of them, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man." After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you." Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know the man!" At that moment the cock crowed. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly."*<sup>5</sup>

It is hard to really imagine how Peter must have felt when he remembered Jesus' earlier prediction. The account in Luke's gospel adds "*At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times."*"<sup>6</sup> We cannot even begin to comprehend what look must have been exchanged between them, but we read how Peter "*wept bitterly.*" The root Greek word used here is *'pikrós'*, meaning *'bitter'* – or more literally *'pointed, sharp, penetrating, painful'* – and the adverb expresses his complete and utter despair following the denial. Perhaps the closest we can get to understanding how Peter felt is when God reveals to us an area of sinfulness in our lives that we have to bring before Him and submit – to lay at the foot of the cross – when we are utterly convicted of our sinfulness.

In a later study in this series, we shall take a look at Christ's forgiveness of Peter. We recommend that you read this later study in series with this one.

## Questions

1. What circumstances could you imagine going to the extreme of rebuking Christ? Do you think that this could ever be justified?
2. Are there times when you have not followed through on a commitment – such as saying "*Even though all become deserters, I will not*", and then in adversity letting the person down after all? What did this teach you about commitment, honesty, faith and forgiveness?
3. Think about your walk with the Lord. Are there any occasions when you have 'denied Christ'?
4. Have there been occasions in your work or social life when you have had an opportunity to talk openly about your faith, but have not grasped the opportunity?
5. If there have been occasions, what made you hesitate - what were you afraid of?
6. What do you think Peter was afraid of when he denied Christ?
7. Have you ever wept bitterly and why? Bring this situation before the Lord in prayer and meditation, and consider where Jesus was in this situation.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 26:56b

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 26:69-75

<sup>6</sup> Luke 22:60b-61