

Bible Contradiction? – Peter’s Denial of Jesus

Question: On the night Jesus was betrayed are there differences between the Gospels in the account of Peter’s denial?

The goal of the Gospels is not to tell every detail of events. They summarize the important points to get the message of Christ across.

| | Matthew 26:69-75 | Mark 14:66-72 | Luke 22:54-62 | John 18:15-18,25-27 |
|------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| 1 st Denial | A servant girl while he was sitting outside in the courtyard. | One of the servant girls of the high priest as Peter was warming himself below in the courtyard. | A servant girl as Peter is sitting around a fire in the middle of the courtyard. | The servant girl (other translations say the woman who kept the door). |
| 2 nd Denial | Another Servant Girl after he went out to the entrance. | The servant girl (some say this may be the same as the first servant girl, but not necessarily true) after he went out into the gateway. | Someone else standing near. The first word of Peter’s response to the accusers is “Man...” which many believe it was a man accusing him. He responded “Woman” in the previous accusation. | The servants and officials who were with Peter warming themselves around the fire. This means that potentially it was more than one person accusing him. |
| 3 rd Denial | Those standing near him a little while after the second denial. | Those standing near, a little while after the second denial. | “Another” an hour after the second denial (notice Luke’s detail here which is in line with his character). Peter once again responds with “Man...” | One of the high priest’s servants, a relative of the soldier whose ear Peter cut off, said he saw Peter in the garden |

President of BiblicalTraining.org and member of the Committee for Bible Translation, Bill Mounce, notes that there were groups of people around Peter during each denial and there could have been multiple people shouting accusations at him, or one person does it and another affirms. Essentially, the biblical writers are noting what different people said, but with the same intent (accusing Peter of being associated with Jesus).

Scriptures

Matthew 26:69-75 - 69Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and (1) a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. 70But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. 71Then he went out to the gateway, (2) where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." 72He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!" 73After a little while, (3) those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away." 74Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. 75Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

(1) servant girl

παιδίσκη (paidiskē)

Noun - Nominative Feminine Singular

[Strong's 3814](#): A female slave, maidservant, maid, young girl. Feminine diminutive of pais; a girl, i.e., a female slave or servant.

(2) another [servant girl]

ἄλλη (allē)

Adjective - Nominative Feminine Singular

[Strong's 243](#): Other, another (of more than two), different. A primary word; 'else, ' i.e. Different.

(3) those

οἱ (hoi)

Article - Nominative Masculine Plural

[Strong's 3588](#): The, the definite article. Including the feminine he, and the neuter to in all their inflections; the definite article; the.

Mark 14:66-72 - 66While 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. 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, 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.

1) servant girls

παιδισκῶν (paidiskōn)

Noun - Genitive Feminine Plural

[Strong's 3814](#): A female slave, maidservant, maid, young girl. Feminine diminutive of pais; a girl, i.e., a female slave or servant.

Note: This is the plural form, but the translation says “one of” and is thus consistent with Matthew. However, this implies that there was a crowd.

2) servant girl

παιδίσκη (paidiskē)

Noun - Nominative Feminine Singular

[Strong's 3814](#): A female slave, maidservant, maid, young girl. Feminine diminutive of pais; a girl, i.e., a female slave or servant.

Note: She said to those standing around (another implication here that there is a crowd).

3) those

Οἱ (hoi)

Article - Nominative Masculine Plural

[Strong's 3588](#): The, the definite article. Including the feminine he, and the neuter to in all their inflections; the definite article; the.

Luke 22:54-62 – 54Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. 55And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. 56 (1)A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, “This man was with him.” 57But he denied it. “Woman, I don’t know him,” he said. 58 (2) A little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” “Man, I am not!” Peter replied. 59 (3)About an hour later another asserted, “Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.” 60Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. 61The 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.” 62And he went outside and wept bitterly.

(1)servant girl

παιδίσκη (paidiskē)

Noun - Nominative Feminine Singular

[Strong's 3814](#): A female slave, maidservant, maid, young girl. Feminine diminutive of pais; a girl, i.e., a female slave or servant.

2) someone else

ἕτερος (heteros)

Adjective - Nominative Masculine Singular

[Strong's 2087](#): (a) of two: another, a second, (b) other, different, (c) one's neighbor. Of uncertain affinity; other or different.

Note: Because Peter’s response is “Man, I am not” many scholars believe the second accusation is from a man.

3) another [man]

ἄλλος (allos)

Adjective - Nominative Masculine Singular

[Strong's 243](#): Other, another (of more than two), different. A primary word; 'else, ' i.e. Different.

Note: “Another” is also an indication of a crowd that you can’t pick out someone specifically.

John 18:15-18 - 15Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, 16but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to (1) the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in. 17“You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?” she asked Peter. He replied, “I am not.” 18It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

1) doorkeeper,

θυρωρῶν (thyrōrō)

Noun - Dative Feminine Singular

[Strong's 2377](#): A door-keeper, porter. From thura and ouros; a gate-warden.

Note: Peter is allowed into the courtyard by the doorkeeper, at this point, she is the only one besides the “other disciple” near Peter.

2) servants

δούλοι (doulōi)

Noun - Nominative Masculine Plural

[Strong's 1401](#): (a) (as adj.) enslaved, (b) (as noun) a (male) slave. From deo; a slave.

This is more masculine than feminine which isn't consistent with Matthew or Mark. However, if the second denial in Luke is translated as a man, then this could be consistent with Luke. As you can see there is a crowd, so there could have been multiple people shouting accusations among the “servants and officials.”

John 18:25-27 - 25Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, “You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?” He denied it, saying, “I am not.” 26One of the (3) high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, “Didn't I see you with him in the garden?” 27Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

3) servants,

δούλων (doulōn)

Noun - Genitive Masculine Plural

[Strong's 1401](#): (a) (as adj.) enslaved, (b) (as noun) a (male) slave. From deo; a slave

Also masculine, but and singular (one of).

Conclusion

Each writer of the Gospel is telling story of true events. The purpose of telling these stories is not to record every detail, it is to spread the message of Christ. Even though some details are different, you see the consistency in the overall story and in the character of the story tellers (i.e., Luke's attention to detail). Per an article on the subject from the Gospel Coalition website

(<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/you-asked-are-the-differing-narratives-of-peters-denials-reconcilable/>):

“More likely, as is the case throughout so much of the Gospel parallels, each writer is being faithful to what Darrell Bock calls the ‘gist’ of the various speakers’ words. Paraphrase was the norm in ancient history writing, in a world without quotation marks or any felt need for them.”

“Alternately, we may just have to assume that more than three people accused Peter, even if he denied it only three times. After all, ‘the bystanders’ already suggests more than one person making the final accusation. In any event, there is no threat to the inerrancy of Scripture.”

“Bystanders” referring to NLT translation of Matt 26:73 and Mark 14:70 (“those standing there” in the NIV).

What message is involved here? One is not to make a vow like Peter’s vow never to leave Jesus (Matthew 26:33, Luke 22:33, Mark 14:29, John 13:37). It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it (Eccl 5:4-5, Deuteronomy 23:21-23, Matthew 5:36-37). In fact, Matthew 5:36 says do not swear by your head, of which Peter swears in Mark 14:71 and Matthew 26:74. Even though he broke his vow and denied the Messiah, the other message here is redemption, see John 21:15-17:

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you 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 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.”

When we sin against God, we deny Him. Think about the emotions Peter felt once he realized what he had done. We can all talk about what we will do, but you never know until you are in the situation. This story is a reminder to praise God for restoration, a second chance. As we know, the Apostle Peter made the most of his second chance.