

ON PETER'S DENIAL

Jesus' prediction of Peter's three-fold denial in Mark 14:30 is paralleled in the other three gospels (Matthew 26:34; Luke 22:34; and John 13:38). The poignancy of this prediction's subsequent fulfillment raises questions as to how this most faithful of disciples could, on that terrible night, seemingly deny his Lord.

At times the discussion has focused upon the Savior's words, "thou shalt deny," which are a translation of the Greek words *aparnēsē* and *arnēsē*. The form of each is ambiguous, being the second person singular of either a future deponent indicative or an aorist deponent subjunctive. In both Luke and John, *aparnēsē* and *arnēsē* appear in an indefinite temporal clause that requires a subjunctive and can only be translated "the cock will not crow *until* you deny me thrice." Matthew and Mark use another construction, "*before* the cock crows thrice, you *will* deny me thrice," that requires *arnēsē* to be a future form. Most grammars identify this as usage as a "predicative future."

Some commentators, in an attempt to explain Peter's motivations, have wondered whether Jesus' prediction included some veiled direction or command intended to preserve the impetuous but loyal disciple from a premature death brought about by his desire to defend his Lord. This might be suggested by a Classical usage, the "jussive future," although the equivalent of this in Koine Greek—known either as "imperative future" or "future indicative for volitive expressions"—generally reflects Old Testament usage and is generally used in prohibitions such as "thou shalt not" rather than in positive commands. Positive uses in injunctions are attested, however.

While it is possible that the accounts of Matthew and Mark might suggest that Peter felt directed to deny Jesus, other considerations besides grammatical intricacies may be more significant. Before Jesus' prediction, he had announced "ye shall all be offended because of me this night." (Matthew 26:31; par. Mark 14:27). More importantly, Jesus' questioning of Peter in John 21:15–19 allowed Peter to affirm his love for the Savior three times, perhaps balancing the earlier, three-fold denial. Signaled in Peter's momentary failure and his later complete redemption is the full power of Jesus' grace.

In the end, a perceived failure on the part of any one person should be offset by his later faithfulness. Of Peter's Denial, Spencer W. Kimball has written, "I do not pretend to know what Peter's mental reactions were nor what compelled him to say what he did that terrible night. But in light of his proven bravery, courage, great devotion, and limitless love for the Master, could we not give him the benefit of the doubt and at least forgive him as his Savior seems to have done so fully. Almost immediately Christ elevated him to the highest position in his church and endowed him with the complete keys of that kingdom." ("Peter, My Brother," *BYU Speeches of the Year*, 1971).

For Those With a Little Greek

(Matt. 26:31–25; Mark 14:27–31; Luke 22:34; John 16:38)

^{John 13:36} Λέγει αὐτῷ Σίμων Πέτρος· κύριε, ποῦ ὑπάγεις; ἀπεκρίθη [αὐτῷ] Ἰησοῦς· ὅπου ὑπάγω οὐ δύνασαι μοι νῦν ἀκολουθῆσαι, ἀκολουθήσεις δὲ ὕστερον.

³⁷ λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Πέτρος· κύριε, διὰ τί οὐ δύναμαι σοι ἀκολουθῆσαι ἄρτι; τὴν ψυχὴν μου ὑπὲρ

σοῦ θήσω.

³⁸ ἀποκρίνεται Ἰησοῦς· τὴν ψυχὴν σου ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ θήσεις; ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, οὐ μὴ ἀλέκτωρ φωνήσῃ ἕως οὗ ἀρνήσῃ με τρίς.

ἀλέκτωρ masc sing nom subj of φωνήσῃ < **ἀλέκτωρ**, ορος m *rooster, cock*

ἀρνήσῃ 2nd sing fut dep ind —or— 2nd sing aor dep subj in indef temp ἕως clause (Wallace, 479) < ἀρνέομαι (impf. ἠρνούμην; fut. ἀρνήσομαι; 1aor. ἠρνησάμην; pf. ἤρνημαι) *deny; disown, renounce; refuse* (He 11.24)

Matt 26:34 ἔφη αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἀμὴν λέγω σοι ὅτι ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ νυκτὶ πρὶν ἀλέκτορα φωνῆσαι τρίς ἀπαρνήσῃ με.

Mark 14:30 καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἀμὴν λέγω σοι ὅτι σὺ σήμερον ταύτῃ τῇ νυκτὶ πρὶν ἢ δις ἀλέκτορα φωνῆσαι τρίς με ἀπαρνήσῃ.

Luke 22:34 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν, Λέγω σοι, Πέτρε, οὐ φωνήσῃ σήμερον ἀλέκτωρ ἕως τρίς με ἀπαρνήσῃ εἰδέναι.

Hall *NTWC*, 65–66, “In Greek, a future tense verb in the second person can also be construed to express a command, just as if it were an imperative form of the verb. This usage is given the grammatical term of the ‘jussive future.’ It occurs *not infrequently* in both Classical and *koine* Greek.”

Jussive Future: the future may express a command, like the imperative; and, in the second person, may denote a concession or permission” (Smyth §1917; the examples cited are *P. Pr.* 338a, *P. Phil.* 12a, *Th.* 7.77, and *Xen. Hell.* 2.3.34)

Imperative Future: “The future indicative is sometimes used for a command, almost always in OT quotations (due to a literal translation of the Hebrew). However, it was used in this manner even classical Greek, though sparingly. Outside Matthew, the usage is not common” (Wallace, 569). *Negative imperative futures (prohibitions) are the most general use, although positive uses (injunctions) are attested, particularly in Mark.*

Future Indicative for Volitive Expressions in Main Clauses (instead of the imperative or subjunctive): “The future indicative is employed to render the categorical injunctions and prohibitions (negative οὐ) in the legal language of the OT” (BDF §362).

Some Thoughts from LDS Authorities

John Taylor, March 2nd, 1879, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol.20, p.160 - p.161, “Whereupon Jesus said unto him, “Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.” Peter could not believe it; but he did just as the Savior said he would do. Was he weak? Yes, after the manner of men. If he had said, Lord, though all men be offended because of thee, I will not, according to my present feelings, nor will I at all if thou wilt give me power to carry them out. But he felt sure that he could stand side by side with the Savior under all circumstances, but he could not. He did not look so very valiant when the trial come; it is easy enough to talk about it in the distance, at least much easier than to meet it and overcome it. But were these two brothers, whose mother made such a request of Jesus, bad men? No; but she had a notion that she would like to see her sons occupying such a position, and probably they would not have objected to it themselves; this we are not informed of. Then was it right in Peter to say he would stand by his Lord? How often have we said it? I will not condemn anybody, but merely speak of that thing to bring forth for good, and exhibit men as they were and as they are. Was Peter a weak man? No; but he was not without the infirmities of human nature, and when the trial came he faltered a little. After all I do not think the mistake so grievous, all the circumstances considered, for he was surrounded by, and speaking to, a riotous, corrupt and bloodthirsty people, only he had said he would not do it, but he did it, that's all. Was Peter valiant for the truth? He was. Was he imprisoned for the truth? Yes. Did he proclaim against vice and advocate virtue? He did. And did he go forth and feed the lambs and flock of God? Yes; and he acted every way becoming to a man of God, and finally suffered a martyr's death. Shall we find fault with either of these men? No, we love them for their good deeds, and for their fidelity and integrity and the great work which they accomplished in their day, in bringing forth the truths of the everlasting Gospel.”

Teachings of Lorenzo Snow, p.34, "Peter and Abraham achieved gradual perfection. There was the Apostle Peter, for instance, a man valiant for the truth, and a man who walked before God in a manner that met with His divine approval; he told the Savior on a certain occasion that though all men forsook Him he would not. But the Savior, foreseeing what would happen, told him that on that same night, before the cock crowed, he would deny Him thrice and he did so. He proved himself unequal for the trial; but afterwards he gained power, and his mind was disciplined to that extent that such trials could not possibly affect him. And if we could read in detail the life of Abraham, or the lives of other great and holy men, we would doubtless find that their efforts to be righteous were not always crowned with success. Hence we should not be discouraged if we should be overcome in a weak moment; but, on the contrary, straightway repent of the error or the wrong we may have committed, and as far as possible repair it, and then seek to God for renewed strength to go on and do better."

David O. McKay, *Ancient Apostles*, p.61–62, "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired you that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, [that is, "brought back afresh as a penitent disciple"] strengthen thy brethren. This grieved Peter very deeply. To think that his Master would even suspect that he, Peter, would even weaken in his steadfastness to his Lord! (It is significant that the Lord called him by his old name, Simon). Peter protested, saying, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both unto prison, and unto death. "I tell you, Peter," continued the Savior, "that the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me. But, he spake the more vehemently, 'If I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee in any wise.' Likewise so said they all." Peter meant every word he said, and he felt deeply the truth of what he spake; but his real strength had not come to him yet, and his Master knew it. It would come but it would be "Born in the deep silence of a long-suffering heart."

Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol.1, p.787, "Earlier this same night Peter and all the apostles had affirmed loyalty to their Lord, and Peter had been told that before the cock crew he would thrice deny that he knew Jesus. (Matt. 26:31-36.) Now the fateful prophecy is fulfilled, and the record of Peter's failure is left as a warning to all men not to boast in their own strength, but rather to walk humbly with their God. Peter was no coward; he alone drew his sword when Jesus was arrested; of all the apostles only he and John dared to mingle with the frenzied mob which sought the blood of their Master. Neither was his vehement, "I do not know the man," a denial of the divine Sonship of his Lord; nor did his act leave a scar of sin on his soul; nor is it an excuse for others who fail to stand valiantly in defense of truth and righteousness. Peter failed on this occasion to testify as becometh one who is a special witness of the Lord, but so in effect had all the disciples, for they all forsook him and fled. But Peter was not yet the man he was to be, for about fifty days hence, at Pentecost, he and all the saints were to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Perhaps, then, the great lesson to be learned from this experience of the chief apostle is this: if men are to resist and overcome the world; if they are to stand valiantly in the Cause of Christ; if they are to be faithful and true in all things -- they must have the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Spencer W. Kimball, "Peter, My Brother," *BYU Speeches of the Year* (1971), 3ff. Except: "Spencer W. Kimball, "Peter, My Brother," *BYU Speeches of the Year* (1971), "What was he to do? Could he do more? What would have been the result had he admitted his connection? Would he have lived to preside over the church? Peter had seen the Savior escape from crowds many times and hide from assassins. Is it conceivable that Peter also saw advisable advantage to the cause in his denial? Had Peter come to fully realize the hidden meaning in the oft-repeated phrase "Mine hour is not yet come" (John 2:4), and did he now understand that "now is the Son of man glorified" (John 13:31)?

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