
FAQ

MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
www.messianicapologetics.net

Cock/Rooster Crowing

J.K. McKee revised 12 August, 2019

I heard a Messianic teaching which advocated that it was not a “cock” or “rooster” crowing, which was supposed to make a noise after Peter denied Yeshua, but rather a Temple-crier functioning in his duties. This was used to support an original Hebrew New Testament. Can you help me with this?

The reference to a cock or rooster crowing, in association with Peter’s denial of Yeshua, appears in all four Gospels:

“And Yeshua said to him, ‘Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times’...Immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Yeshua had made the remark to him, ‘Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.’ And he began to weep” (Mark 14:30, 72, NASU).

“Yeshua said to him, ‘Truly I say to you that this *very* night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’...Then he began to curse and swear, ‘I do not know the man!’ And immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word which Yeshua had said, ‘Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly” (Matthew 26:34, 74-75, NASU).

“‘Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.’ But he said to Him, ‘Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!’ And He said, ‘I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me.’ And He said to them, ‘When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?’ They said, ‘No, nothing’” (Luke 22:31-35, NASU).

“But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about.’ Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, ‘Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times’” (Luke 22:60-61, NASU).

“Yeshua answered, ‘Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.’...Peter then denied *it* again, and immediately a rooster crowed” (John 13:38; 18:27, NASU).

The late Nineteenth Century Delitzsch Hebrew New Testament, rendered the Greek *alektōr* (ἀλέκτωρ) with the Hebrew *tar’negol* (תַּרְנֵגֹל), “cock, chicken” (Jastrow),¹ an indication that within the narrative, Peter’s denial of Yeshua took place before the normal crowing of a rooster adjacent to daybreak. Those who suggest that the *alektōr* is actually a Temple-crier, would have to do so on the basis of the term *gever* (גֵּבֶר), which can mean both “man, master,” as well as “(the cryer’s) crying, or the

¹ Jastrow, 1700.

cock's crowing" (*Jastrow*).² In *The Messianic Writings* by Daniel Gruber, Matthew 26:34 is rendered as, "I tell you faithfully that this very night, before the rooster calls out, you will completely deny me three times." In his annotations, Gruber points out how "The Hebrew word *gever* can mean either 'rooster' or 'man.' There was a man in the Temple who cried out in the morning to begin the service of the Temple."³ He then references several statements appearing in the Talmud:

"What is the definition of the cock crow? Rab said, 'It is the call of a man' [since the word for man and cock share the same consonants]. R. Shila said, 'It is the call of a cock.' Rab visited the locale of R. Shila. There was no public speaker to appoint to stand next to R. Shila to serve him in presenting his public address, so Rab took the position next to him to serve as his loud speaker. He explained, 'What is the definition of the cock crow? It is the call of a man.' Said to him R. Shila, 'But will the master please say, It is the call of a cock?' He said to him, 'A flute makes great music for nobles, but hand it to weavers, and they won't take it at all'...When I stood before R. Hiyya [as his public voice] and interpreted the matter so — What is the definition of the cock crow? It is the call of a man — he didn't say a word to me! And yet you say to me, But will the master please say, It is the call of a cock!" (b.Yoma 20b).⁴

There should be little problem, in an academic sense, suggesting the possibility that the cock or rooster crowing, might be the Temple-crier—positing that the Greek Gospel narratives translated Yeshua's apparent, oral usage of the Hebrew *gever* literally as *alektōr*. As is inferable from the Talmudic quote referenced, only an understanding of the terminology within the context of Second Temple Judaism, could or would have enabled a reader to think that before the Temple-crier (a/k/a a cock or rooster) called for daily prayers to begin, that Peter would have denied the Messiah. Yet, not all of those involved in translating the Greek Apostolic Scriptures into Hebrew, for either Jewish evangelism or the benefit of native Hebrew speakers, have chosen to render *alektōr* as *gever*, but instead as *tar'negol* (Delitzsch, Salkinson-Ginsburg, 1992 UBSHNT) In modern Hebrew, **tarnegol** (תרנגול) means "cock; rooster," although in some instances can also be "turkey."⁵

There are some who have gone beyond a hypothetical and academically-informed proposal that *gever* could have been used as an alternative to *tar'negol*. One advocate of an original Hebrew New Testament states, "The 'rooster' or 'cock' that Peter and *Yeshua* heard was not a bird at all, but a man. That man was a priest at the Temple. He was the one who had the responsibility of unlocking the Temple doors each and every morning before dawn....The priest in question was known as the Temple Crier, and he was called the *Gever* in Hebrew, which means 'cock' or 'rooster.'"⁶ The problem is not suggesting the possibility that this could be an Hebraism, and the Gospel writers are relying on their audience to know that a "rooster" or "cock" might be the Temple-crier; the problem is with the assumption that this is "is [a] mistranslation of the original text," being an example of "A common problem that exists in our English bibles,"⁷ thus this one expression requires the Gospels to have been written in Hebrew. Furthermore, consider the poor external evidence that is provided for this being an Hebraism:

"[C]hickens were not allowed in Jerusalem during Temple times. The reason for this prohibition was because chickens are very dirty birds and they have the obnoxious habit of finding their way into places where they do not belong. Therefore, to assure that chickens could not gain access to the Temple and desecrate the Holy Place or, worse yet, the Holy of Holies, the Priests simply forbid [sic] everyone in Jerusalem from having chickens."⁸

The real problem that exists with the logic demonstrated here, is failing to account how chickens right outside the city of Jerusalem could certainly be heard audibly when they crowed. If kept in an academic sense of *a rooster crowing possibly be the Temple-crier*, then we should have little problem with such an hypothesis. Yet this is not what the Hebrew New Testament advocate thinks; he thinks that there are mistranslations in the Gospels, and that Bible readers are being misled at best, deceived at worst.

If this be the case about one seemingly insignificant reference about a "rooster" or "chicken" in the Gospels, then what will some of these Hebrew New Testament advocates do to other, more important Scripture passages? Can we suddenly not trust the Gospels for the basic facts contained therein? Will we suddenly start hearing that when Yeshua is eating a meal in a person's house that it really means something else? What about Yeshua healing someone or delivering a person from demons? This may sound extreme, but this is how far it could go when we dismantle the validity of the Greek source text behind the Apostolic Scriptures. What other basic facts are on the chopping block? The Messianic movement cannot afford to be accused of "radically reinterpreting" the Bible in such a manner.

² Ibid., 208.

³ Daniel Gruber, trans., *The Messianic Writings* (Hanover, NH: Elijah Publishing, 2011), 62.

⁴ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

⁵ Hayim Baltzan, *Webster's NewWorld Hebrew Dictionary* (Cleveland: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 1992), 413.

⁶ Dean and Susan Wheelock, *The Quiet Revival* (Hebrew Roots Press: Lakewood, WI, 2001), 15.

⁷ Ibid., 14.

⁸ Ibid, pp 14-15.

Few should deny the presence of legitimate Hebraisms in the Gospels (i.e., Matthew 16:19 and its reference to “binding and loosing” which pertains to permitting and prohibiting, relating to *halachah*.)⁹ The presence of Hebraisms, though, does not require the Gospels, much less the entire Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament, to have actually been written in Hebrew.

For a further discussion on this, consult the editor’s article, “**The Hebrew New Testament Misunderstanding.**”

⁹ Cf. Raymond F. Collins, “Binding and Loosing,” in *ABD*, 1:743-745; Terrence Prendergast, S.J., “Binding and Loosing,” in *EDB*, 187.