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Roosters

by haRold Smith
a citizen of the Commonwealth (Ephesians
2:19)

*"I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." Yeshua answered, "I tell you, Peter, **before the rooster crows today**, you will deny three times that you know me" ...About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, **the rooster crowed**. Luke 22:32-34, 59-60*



Stone excavated from the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, bearing the inscription "To the place of trumpeting."

We think we know, we think we understand what the words presented to us on the pages of scripture mean. But, when we consider that every letter of every book in the Book were written by Hebrews from a Hebrew perspective formed out of a Hebrew mindset that was influenced by Hebrew culture and were addressed primarily to a Hebrew audience which understood the nuances of the Hebrew language, then we find these words take on a context different from those of our contemporary culture. Reading these words from the Hebraic perspective they were written from often gives us an entirely different meaning. For instance, in the passage from Luke 22 at the beginning of this article, it seems completely natural to us to believe that the "rooster" Yeshua was referring to was an actual bird crowing to announce the arrival of sunrise as we have all heard for ourselves in some point in our lives. However, we run into a problem with that assumption when opening up the *Mishnah* (the material embodying the oral tradition of rabbinic Judaism and forming the first part of the Talmud) and reading that fowl of any sort were not allowed in Jerusalem at this time over purity concerns (**m. Bava Kamma 7.7 - [click on highlighted words to view content](#)**). Chickens, as you may know, are pretty dirty birds, leaving evidence of where they've been behind them everywhere. They also have a habit of getting into places you don't want them to be. To be sure that no chickens made their presence known in the Temple which would have desecrated the Holy Place or, worse yet, the Holy of Holies, the Mishnah says that the priestly officials simply forbid anyone in Jerusalem from having chickens. While it is doubtful the Romans would have been observant of this decree, it certainly would have had its desired effect upon those Hebrews surrounding the Temple and the priests therein. So, if roosters were not allowed to be raised in Jerusalem - just what, or who, was crowing and, just as importantly, what were they crowing about?

The English term "rooster" is translated from the Greek word, *alektor*, which is more accurately translated as the English, "cock". But this same Greek word, *ἀλέκτωρ*, can also mean "a man" as it is a singular nominative masculine noun. So, "cockcrow" could just as easily be translated in this verse as, "*the man will not cry out today before you deny three times that you know me*" - indicating that the scriptures did not mistakenly place a rooster in Jerusalem when roosters were not allowed to be raised in the city. But, it still does not answer the question as to who this man was and what was he "crowing" about? For that answer, we have to dig a bit deeper into the Temple regulations surrounding the activities of the priests. The Mishnah references a specific time in the early morning: "*He that was minded to clean the altar of ashes rose up early and immersed himself before the officer came. At what time did he come? Not always at the same time. Sometimes he came at **cockcrow** and sometimes a little sooner or later*" (**m. Tamid 1.2**). "Cockcrow" refers to a time early in the morning when the priests began to prepare the Temple for the daily rigors: "*Every day they used to remove the ashes from off the altar at **cockcrow**, or near to it, either before it or after it*" (**m. Yoma 1.8**). And it does not mean a rooster crow, but rather the blast from a *shofar* (ram's horn trumpet) at the Temple that announced the time: "*At **cockcrow** they blew a sustained, a quavering, and another sustained blast*" (**m. Sukkah 5.4**). In other words, **cockcrow** refers to a time early in the morning when a *shofar* signaled the beginning of the day for work in the Temple.



Peter's Denial

The Hebrew expression for "cockcrow" is **kerot hagever** (lit. "the call of the cock"). The Hebrew word *gever*, translated as cock, also means "man" - just like the Greek term *alektor*. Here we see, then, in mentioning cockcrow in Jerusalem - the preservation of the Hebraic manner for speaking of the *shofar* blast sounded from the Temple announcing to the priests it was time to begin preparing the Temple for the day. Yeshua was not referring to a random rooster, but rather a specific time in the morning, which Peter would have understood as a call to service, sacrifice and worship - to all of which he **retreated from**. Why does this matter to us in this day and age? Because we have all been like Peter at some time in our lives. Whether it be outright accusation, formidable opposition or adverse

circumstance facing us - the bravado expressed to Yeshua by us to always be there for Him, no matter what, like Peter, has been tried and tested. And we have all failed at some point having outrightly denied Him through our actions or just avoided acknowledging that we know Him to avert rejection or repercussions. These writers assumed that their readers understood the cultural and spiritual world from which they wrote. Since their primary audience were other Hebrews who understood the nuances of the language and the day, they did not feel the need to explain much of the language and details. The task at hand, if one is to truly understand and comprehend what these words actually mean, is to read the scriptures within the language, culture, and spiritual world of ancient Hebrews. And, like Peter, we can be assured that our Elder Brother is praying for us to come back around as He did for Peter (**1John 1:9**).

As seen in the photo at the top of this article, excavations along the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem uncovered a stone bearing a Hebrew inscription "to the place (lit. house) of trumpeting" suggesting that this stone marked an area on the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount, facing towards the city, where priests would blow the *shofar* announcing the different times of the day and week (see **Josephus, War 4.12**) marking the location from which cockcrow sounded.

*"Shim'on, Shim'on, listen! The adversary has demanded to have you, to sift you like wheat! **But I prayed for you, that your trust might not fail.** And once you have turned back in repentance, strengthen your brothers!" Luke 22:31-32*

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