

Peter and the Rooster

Author: Larry W. Wilson

On August 14, 2006, Steve Centani, an American reporter working for Fox News, and his camera man, Olaf Wiig, a New Zealander, were captured in the Gaza Strip by a formerly unknown group called The Holy Jihad Brigades. A day or so later, a video tape surfaced showing the two men were alive. Certain demands were presented by the hostages on the tape as a condition for their release.

Neither Israel nor the United States would consider the demands. For 13 days, recovery efforts proceeded in two directions.

Many volunteers tried to locate the missing men by interviewing various militant factions in Gaza, while at the same time Palestinian authorities pursued diplomatic efforts. Ultimately, the two hostages were released unharmed on August 27 and as you can imagine, it was a day of rejoicing for the families and employers of the two captives.

There is an interesting twist to this otherwise happy ending. On the day before their release, the captors told the two hostages they had three choices. They could: (1) Make a video tape denouncing the policies of the United States in the Middle East, convert to Islam and be set free; (2) Pay a tax (a jizya, a significant ransom), which Moslems can impose on infidels, and be set free; or (3) Suffer a jihad against infidels and die.

The hostages chose option one. Steve Centani and Olaf Wiig denounced America's policies in the Middle East, they professed a conversion to Islam and took Muslim names – all done while guns and a video camera were pointed at their heads.

Note: To become a Muslim, a person has to say the following words with sincerity: "Ash-hadu an la ilaha ill Allah." (I bear witness that there is no deity but Allah.) "Wa ash-hadu ana Muhammad ar-rasullallah." (And I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.)

Understand that Muslims do recognize and accept forced conversions. The following statements are taken from the Hadith, a collection of sacred writings concerning the teachings of Mohammed:

"If a protected person [Dhimmi] is forced to convert to Islam, his conversion is valid. If a Harbi [non-Muslim alien] is fought against and converts to Islam – it is valid. . . . If the [same] Dhimmi returns [to his former religion], he is not killed [like an ordinary apostate], but imprisoned until he converts to Islam [again], because there is doubt regarding his belief [when he was forced to convert].

There is a possibility that it [i.e., his forced conversion] was sincere, so he is to be killed as an apostate. It is [also] possible that he did not believe [in Islam while having been forced to convert] and then he [should] be a Dhimmi and shall not be killed." — pp. 168 (Azharite)

"A female apostate is not to be killed [unlike the case of a male apostate]. She should be imprisoned and beaten every day until she becomes a Muslim [again].

It means that Islam should be offered to her and if she refuses it, she should be flogged. Then Islam should be offered to her [again] and if she refuses it, she should be imprisoned.

And there is a version according to which she should be taken out every day and beaten as we have described, because it is not permissible to kill her. She has committed a gruesome crime that has no fixed punishment [hadd] for it, so she is punished by a non-fixed punishment [ta'zir], that is - beating and imprisonment." — pp. 371 (Azharite)

Did the Hostages Do the Right Thing?

The decision the hostages made has stimulated considerable discussion on the internet. In short, the discussions I have studied boil down to three general views:

1. A forced conversion is no conversion. This school of thought believes that a religious conversion is only genuine if the conversion is an expression of *free will*, sincere intent and belief. Because Centani and Wiig were forced at gunpoint to say certain words (both political and religious) to save their lives, their words and deeds cannot be interpreted to be a conversion.

This school of thought concludes, "Satisfying a ragtag bunch of armed teenagers with forced words is better than having a bullet in your head."

2. A forced conversion to Islam denies the deity of Jesus Christ. This school of thought believes that if a Christian succumbs to force and goes through the motions of converting to Islam, he betrays the deity of Jesus Christ and rejects the Bible as the Word of God.

Therefore, advocates of this view believe that if Centani and Wiig were Christians prior to their kidnapping, they should be ashamed of their cowardice because they betrayed the Lord Jesus when they converted. Advocates of this view believe the hostages should have boldly refused to convert, choosing death instead.

3. When life threatening circumstances exist, a person is permitted to do anything and everything possible to save his life. This school of thought believes that God permits a person to use self defense. Self defense can be words, as well as actions.

This principle is revealed in Exodus 22. **"If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed; but if it happens after sunrise, he is guilty of bloodshed. . ."** (Exodus 22:2,3)

In other words, under the right circumstances, a person can kill an intruder in darkness without incurring guilt because deadly force can be used in self defense. However, after sunrise the owner of the house is not permitted to use deadly force – at least this was the case in Old

Testament times when guns did not exist.

Now that you know the details of this hostage situation, their three options, and the three schools of thought which I have summarized, to what school of thought do you belong? Of course, this is a highly personal matter and each person has to choose for himself or herself.

Personally, I believe the Bible teaches that God permits a certain amount of self defense. This is true of nations and for individuals. So, if God permits self defense, what about Peter and the rooster?

Peter's Declaration

How does the hostage situation in Gaza compare with Peter's denial of Jesus in Jerusalem? Please study the following passage: **"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' "**

But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.' " (Matthew 16:13-17) When Jesus queried the disciples about His identity, Peter spoke with assurance and bravado because he was very sure of two things.

He was sure of himself and he was sure that Jesus was the Son of God, the promised Messiah. Peter was a natural born leader and his self assurance was both an asset and a liability.

Prior to the cross, the disciples often discussed the coming kingdom of God, which they believed Jesus was going to establish. Being human, they argued among themselves about the highest positions. Who would get them? Peter made no apologies.

He was sure that he would inherit the highest position because he was a leader of men and one of Jesus' closest friends. Peter had a high regard for himself and his opinions, because among men, he was physically powerful, talented and highly intelligent.

Peter knew that he was a notch or two above the other disciples and the other disciples usually deferred to Peter because *he was gifted* with a forceful personality and natural leadership. Jesus knew that Peter was egocentric. Jesus also knew that Peter was especially vulnerable to arrogance and the trappings of power.

So Jesus took the opportunity to highlight Peter's flaws in front of the other disciples during yet another argument on who would hold the highest office. **"Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles [are arrogant little men, they] lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors [and you know how empty but lavish this boasting is]."**

But you are not to be like that. Instead, [if you are have a place in my kingdom] **the greatest among you should be like the youngest** [who is not permitted to voice an opinion in the presence of elders], **and the one who rules** [must be humble] **like the one who serves. For who is greater** [in this world], **the one who is at the table or the one who serves?**

Is it not the one who is at the table? But [learn from me, your Lord and Master] **I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom** [of suffering], **just as my Father conferred** [this] **one on me, so that** [when the time comes for the kingdom of God to be established] **you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**

[Now,] **Simon, Simon,** [my dear, arrogant and egocentric friend, who has laid claim to the highest position in my coming kingdom, because your thinking and behavior is of this world] **Satan has asked to sift you as wheat** [the devil has accused you before my Father, saying that your aspirations were no different than the devil's, and argues that you should be not permitted to have a part in my kingdom because he has no part in God's kingdom].

But I have prayed [to the Father] **for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back** [repented of your sins and abandoned your carnal ways], **strengthen your brothers.'** **But he** [an embarrassed Peter] **replied, 'Lord,** [look at me, I am a capable fighter]

I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.' **Jesus answered, 'I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.'**" (Luke 22:24-34, insertions mine)

Early Friday Morning

"Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. 'You also were with Jesus of Galilee,' she said. But he denied it before them all. 'I don't know what you're talking about,' he said.

Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, 'This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.' He denied it again, with an oath: 'I don't know the man!' After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, 'Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away.'

Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, 'I don't know the man!' Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: 'Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly." (Matthew 26:69-75)

Why did Peter deny that he knew Jesus three times? Many people believe that Peter denied Jesus in order to save his life (self defense).

They say he was afraid of the consequences of being associated with a condemned man. This argument does not make sense to me because Peter was not afraid of men or conflict. Wasn't it Peter who bravely wielded a sword and cut off the ear of a man in order to save Jesus from arrest?

Wasn't Peter the *only* disciple prepared to die defending Jesus? I believe that Peter sincerely meant all that he said, "**Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death. -" Peter truly loved Jesus. Because of this love, Peter was willing to die for Jesus because Jesus was Peter's God, the Messiah, the Son of the living God!**

So, why did Peter deny Jesus? Peter denied Jesus that morning because Peter had a major paradigm shift. When Peter saw the object of his worship and loyalty, his God and Messiah humbly submitting to gross injustice, Peter's understanding of Messiah's predicted power and His coming kingdom fell apart.

Everything Peter lived for – power over the Jews and Romans, the prestige of a high office, exaltation as a hand picked disciple of Jesus, bravery, valor, courage and victory over the enemies of Jesus – evaporated right before his eyes. Peter saw a sickening sight – Jesus being led away to die as a common criminal. There would be no kingdom of God. There would be no high position.

Realizing this, where was the bravery, valor, courage and victory that men of renown are known for? Jesus showed none of this! (Remember, Peter did not understand there would be a resurrection at this moment.)

Peter felt completely betrayed by his Lord and Master, because everything that he had anticipated of Jesus and everything he had lived for was not going to happen.

Being a disciple of a dead man who had no kingdom was more than Peter, a natural born leader of men could swallow. *It was bitterness toward Jesus that caused Peter to deny that he even knew Him.*

When the rooster crowed for the third time, Jesus turned and sadly looked at Peter. Suddenly, Peter remembered the words of Jesus and a great epiphany occurred.

Peter realized that his bitterness toward Jesus was totally misdirected. He realized that his bitterness sprang from carnal ambitions and self seeking, and these character traits had no place in Christ's kingdom.

The Holy Spirit overwhelmed Peter with the realization that Peter, like Lucifer, wanted to be in God's position. Peter was not into submission.

Instead, Peter was all about "my will be done." However, after the rooster's third call and that look from Jesus, Peter realized that Jesus was doing the will of the Father. Jesus, the Lamb of God, had surrendered His will to the Father so that the Father's will might be done through Him. **"And he went outside and wept bitterly."** This event dramatically changed Peter for the

rest of his life.

Summary

When it comes to denying Jesus (whether forced or not forced), I conclude that each situation has to be evaluated on its merits. I think the Bible supports this conclusion. A certain amount of wisdom and discretion is needed.

For example, if I was snatched off the street and taken as a hostage and held for political purposes, I would have probably done the same thing as Centani and Wiig. On the other hand, if I had been arrested and held captive *because of my faith in Jesus Christ*, that would be an entirely different matter.

I have shared my thoughts on this topic in hopes they will make you think about this. When the Great Tribulation begins, I believe a lot of Christians will find themselves standing in Peter's shoes. Everything they once believed will fall apart and the temptation to be angry at God will be overpowering.