

## REVIEW–DISCUSSION

### DOES PETER’S FAITH PETER OUT?

Robert H. Gundry, *Peter: False Disciple and Apostate According to Saint Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. Pp. xx + 119. Paperback, \$20.00. ISBN 978-0-8028-7293-7.

*Note:* The Table of Contents of this book appears at the end of the review.

#### **1. Introduction**

In this concise yet controversial work, Robert H. Gundry proposes that:

Matthew portrays Peter as a *false* disciple of Jesus, a disciple who went so far as to apostatize; that Matthew does so to warn Christians against the loss of salvation through falsity-exposing apostasy; that this warning fits the Matthean theme of apostasy-inducing persecution; and that the danger of apostasy fits the further Matthean theme of the ongoing presence of false disciples in the church, a present form of Jesus the Son of Man’s kingdom, till the end. (3)

Gundry organizes the first six chapters of his work according to the order in which Simon/Peter occurs (or does not occur (re: 28:7) in the case of chapter 6) in the narrative. This arrangement is unfortunate, however, as the idiosyncrasies of his earlier readings are often difficult to explain until the reader reaches chapter 5, which presents the core argument for Gundry’s thesis. Rather than summarize all the ways in which Gundry perceives the First Gospel’s presentation of Peter as negative up through Matthew 26 I jump to the nucleus of Gundry’s argument and then work my way outward.

#### **2. The Heart of Gundry’s Thesis**

##### **2.a Gundry’s Exegesis of Peter’s Denials (26:69–75)**

According to Gundry, ‘Matthew 26:57–27:10, especially 26:69–75 [Peter’ denials], constitutes the heart of Matthew’s portrayal of Peter as a false disciple who apostatized’ (43). The following provides a detailed but not exhaustive overview of the contours of his exegesis. Matthew 26:69–75 is set against the backdrop of 26:31–5 where Jesus predicts that all of the disciples will fall away

that very night, and that even Peter—despite his dogged attempts to convince Jesus otherwise—will deny him three times before a cock crows.

Gundry argues that the narrative movement of Peter from *entry* into the high priest's courtyard (26:58), through progressive stages of *outward* withdrawal (26:69–75) is theologically significant, symbolizing Peter's spiritual demise.<sup>1</sup> Peter's plunge into perdition begins in 26:58 where his fickle commitment to Jesus is demonstrated: the one who declared he was willing to die with Jesus (26:35) now holds back at a distance to watch the Lord be condemned. With ἔξω in 26:69 (replacing Mark's κάτω (14:66)), Matthew 'starts an emphasis on Peter's becoming increasingly outside' (44). This theme, according to Gundry, works together with other telltale elements in the passage to narrate Peter's digression into hardened apostasy. His following observations are notable:

- μία παιδίσκη (vs. 69)—the fact that Peter's first denial is before a *lone maid* (note the feminine diminutive form) lays stress on Peter's weakness.
- ἐμπροσθεν πάντων (vs. 70)—Although Peter is approached by only one maid, his denial (ἀρνέομαι) is made *before all* (of the high priest's servants). This Matthean insertion conjures up 10:33, where Jesus declares that, at the Final Judgement, he will deny before his father whosoever denied (ἀρνέομαι) him before men (ἐμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων).
- ἐξελθόντα (fronted for emphasis) δὲ εἰς τὸν πυλῶνα (vs. 71)—Having made his first denial, Peter progressively moves outwards, now to the gateway.
- εἶδεν αὐτὸν ἄλλη καὶ λέγει τοῖς ἐκεῖ (vs. 71)—Matthew (uniquely) inserts a second maid in accordance with his emphasis on the minimum of two witnesses necessary to produce guilt (Gundry notes 18:16, 26:60, plus Num 35:30; Deut 17:16; 19:15).
- μετὰ ὄρκου (vs. 72)—A Matthean insertion, conjuring up Jesus's prohibition of oaths (5:33–37) as a necessary requirement to enter the kingdom of heaven (cf. 5:20). Gundry states: 'So by denying Jesus with an oath in flagrant disobedience of Jesus's prohibition, Matthew has Peter rule himself out of the kingdom of heaven. *Flagrant* disobedience because this oath did not accompany an ordinary statement. It accompanied a public denial of the very Jesus who had prohibited oaths' (48).
- οὐκ οἶδα τὸν ἄνθρωπον (vs. 72)—a contemptuous usage of ἄνθρωπος, equivalent to: 'I don't know the guy'.

<sup>1</sup> Noting ἔσω (26:58) in the former, and ἔξω (26:59), ἐξελθόντα (fronted to highlight), and ἐξελθὼν ἔξω (having a twofold emphasis) in the latter verses.

- ἀληθῶς καὶ σὺ (vs. 73)—the term ‘truly’ highlights Peter’s falsehood, while the ‘you too’ ‘brightens the spotlight on Peter as he is about to deny Jesus the third time’ (49).
- τότε ἤρξατο καταθεματίζειν (vs. 74)—The first term (‘started’) indicates that his cursing *continued* afterwards, and the second may *intensify* the cursing (compared to Mark’s *ἀναθεματίζω*).
- καὶ ὁμνύειν (vs. 74)—Again, Peter *volunteers* yet *another* damnable oath.
- ὅτι οὐκ οἶδα τὸν ἄνθρωπον (vs. 74)—As previously, this usage suggests contempt. Gundry summarizes: ‘Instead of denying *himself* so as to follow Jesus and gain eternal life, as Jesus commanded in 16:24–5, Peter has now denied *Jesus* three times’ (50, emphasis original).
- τρὶς (vs. 75)—Gundry connects Peter’s three denials with his three failures to pray in Gethsemane. In this way, Πέτρος (meaning ‘rock’) becomes the ‘example par excellence’ (50) of the seed sown on *rocky* ground (cf. 13:20–1), quickly falling away under the threat of persecution on account of the word.
- καὶ ἐξελθὼν ἔξω ἔκλαυσεν πικρῶς (vs. 75)—The emphatic combination of ἐξ- and ἔξω is unique to Matthew and culminates the theme of outward movement. Likewise, the description of Peter’s weeping as ‘bitter’ is a Matthean insertion.

The interpretation of the final statement in 26:75 (‘And he went out and wept bitterly’) is fundamental to Gundry’s entire thesis. He states:

These last changes have almost universally been interpreted as Matthew’s intensifying of Peter’s repentance, already evident to a certain extent in Mark. But earlier in Matthew the combination of going outside which Matthew has maximized in the present passage, and weeping has repeatedly gained a connotation radically different from repentance that gains forgiveness—rather, the connotation of bitter despair over salvation lost, over eternal perdition in the outermost darkness. The passages are numerous. [Here he quotes 8:12, 13:41–2, 13:49–50, 22:13, 24:51, and 25:30.] The statements in 22:13; 24:51; 25:30 appear by way of Matthew’s insertion into otherwise paralleled material. The statements in 13:41–42, 49–50 appear in Matthew’s unparalleled material (cf. 5:13; 13:48). Only 8:12 has a parallel (in Luke 13:28). All the other, distinctively Matthean statements have to do with the fate of false disciples who help populate ‘the kingdom of heaven’ till the final separation of the false out from among the true. And throughout his account of Peter’s denials, Matthew has Peter going farther and farther outside—from the courtyard ‘outside’ the room where Jesus was standing before the Sanhedrin ‘out’ into the gateway and then completely and doubly

‘out, outside,’ or as we might say, ‘altogether outside’—and finally has him weeping at that outermost point (vv. 69, 71, 75). The bitterness of his weeping corresponds to the gnashing of teeth by the damned.

After repeating time after time after time that false disciples would be thrown outside, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, Matthew must have intended his audience, with that statement ringing in their ears, to have understood Peter’s denials of Jesus farther and farther away from him as evidence of false discipleship, and his bitter weeping outside as an omen of eternal damnation in the outermost darkness. (51–2)

Gundry closes this section with a summary of the ‘nearly universal attempt’ (52) to read into Matthew a rehabilitation of Peter, listing nineteen different examples. He resolves the first eighteen of these by more or less resorting back to his previous exegesis of 26:69–75.

The final one, however, requires further argumentation from Gundry. He quotes this last objection as follows: “‘The careful specification that it was *eleven* disciples who met Jesus in Galilee (28:16 [cf. *Acts Pet.* 12 *Apos.* 9:17]) ensures that Peter is included in the ‘disciples’ of 28:7 and the ‘brothers’ of 28:10.” He resolves the objection by listing six passages in support of the notion that false disciples will continue on in the church until the end of the age (with weeping and gnashing of teeth included in all but 25:1–13):

1. The tares and the wheat (13:36–43)
2. The foul fish and the good fish (13:47–50)
3. The ‘called’ (but not ‘chosen’) man without a wedding garment (22:11–14)
4. The wicked slave (24:48–51)
5. The foolish virgins (25:1–13)
6. The useless slave (25:14–30)

As he brings his exegesis and defense of 26:69–75 to a close, Gundry remarks: ‘Notably, none of the forgoing defenders of a Petrine rehabilitation in Matthew take note of the emphatically Matthean combination of weeping outside by the damned as an interpretive background for Peter’s weeping outside’ (56).

### **2.b Judas and Peter: A Parallel of Similarity (27:3–10)**

With key arguments from 26:69–75 in place, Gundry goes on to argue that the subsequent account of Judas’s sorrow/suicide (27:3–10) parallels Peter’s: both are presented as unrepentant apostates whose despair arises from their unforgiven/damned state. Gundry’s argument is based on the disjointed location

of 27:3–10 in relation to 27:1–2, and the pericope’s emphasis on Judas’s unrepentant sorrow. First, although connected chronologically to verses 1–2 by *τότε* (vs. 3), Judas’s confrontation with the chief priests and elders is out-of-place. For as Gundry explains: ‘At the time, the chief priests and elders were not at the temple, where they and Judas are said to confront each other and into which he hurls the reward money. According to 27:1–2, 11–14, they were busy elsewhere, taking Jesus to Pilate and accusing him before Pilate. So Matthew has misplaced the story of Judas’s suicide both chronologically and topographically in order to bring the suicide into relation with Peter’s bitter weeping outside’ (58).

Second, compared to the Judas account of Acts 1:15–20, Matthew emphasizes Judas’s (unrepentant) remorse: he is a cursed man (cf. Deut 27:25) who accepts responsibility for his sin by throwing the money into the sanctuary and hanging himself. That Judas does not seek forgiveness, according to Gundry, is further suggested by a proposed Jesus–Judas//David–Ahithophel connection: ‘Matthew conforms the way this traitor died to the way Ahithophel, the traitor of King David, died, i.e., by hanging himself (2 Sa 17:23)’ (61). Thus Judas, like Ahithophel, correctly despaired of reconciliation with the Davidide—as did Peter.<sup>2</sup> Gundry goes on to summarize: ‘Why does Matthew introduce after Peter’s going outside and weeping bitterly a chronologically and topographically disjointed account of Judas Iscariot’s suicide if not to draw a parallel of similarity between Peter’s final state and that of the man who would have been better off if he had not been born?’ (62)

In Gundry’s reading, therefore, Matthew presents Peter as a false disciple, like Judas, who remains active in the church even as he awaits his final damnation at the end of the age. Such a portrayal fits into and contributes toward ‘a theme—false discipleship—that pervades Matthew’s Gospel also outside that portrayal’ (67); while, at the same time, is itself supported by this broader theme.

### **2.c The Broader Context of False Discipleship and Persecution in Matthew**

In chapter 7, Gundry surveys various texts in Matthew that contribute to this theme of false discipleship.<sup>3</sup> Particularly significant for his argument vis-à-vis Peter are the positive aspects of Judas Iscariot’s ministry, who:

<sup>2</sup> According to Gundry, the word describing Judas’s change of mind (*μεταμέλομαι*; 27:3) does not signify genuine repentance in Matthew (he argues this notion is communicated by *μετανοέω*).

<sup>3</sup> Matt 5:13, 20–2, 27–30; 7:15–23, 26–7; 8:18–22; 10:4, 22, 33; 13:20–1, 24–30, 36–43, 47–50; 18:1–3, 8–9, 15–18, 23–35; 22:1–14; 24:10–12, 45–51; 25:1–13, 14–30; 26:14–16 (w/ 10:2–4), 20–5; 26:47–50. As his primary aim is rather modest—that is, to establish the widely

- a) Obtained the full commission and authority of chapter 10 (e.g. casting out demons, healing, preaching, representing Jesus/the Father).
- b) Received the privileges and blessings of the secrets of the kingdom (13:16–17).
- c) Worshipped Jesus and declared him ‘God’s Son’ (14:33).
- d) Was granted authority to bind and loose (18:18).
- e) Was promised one of the twelve thrones of judgment over Israel at the end of the age (19:28).<sup>4</sup>

Gundry concludes: ‘So if after all these positive notes Judas Iscariot would have been better off if he had not been born, what is to keep us, given the textual evidence surveyed above, from accepting that Matthew has portrayed Peter too as a false disciple, one who went so far as to apostatize in speech just as Judas apostatized in deed?’ (89)

In similar manner, chapter 8 goes on to supplement the preceding discussion by providing an overview of the theme of persecution in Matthew.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, false discipleship and persecution go hand-in-hand. So Gundry concludes: ‘All in all, as the case of Peter merges with the Matthean theme of false discipleship and apostasy, so that theme merges with the further Matthean theme of persecution, which exposes false disciples for who they really are, especially when they apostatize by denying Jesus publicly, as Peter did’ (97).

acknowledged presence of this theme across Matthew—the idiosyncrasies of his readings need not be conveyed here.

<sup>4</sup> Gundry also mentions that Judas ‘received assurance that with faith he could remove a mountain and “receive all things” that he “might ask for” (21:21–22); and that he ‘was promised to drink “this produce of the vine” with Jesus in the “Father’s kingdom” (26:29)’ (89). But these are weaker examples. The first is weakened by its conditionality. The second occurs right after Jesus (indirectly) tells Judas that his judgment for his betrayal will be so severe that it would be better if he had never been born (26:24); thus it is easier to assume that, for Matthew, Judas is not included in Jesus’s promise of participation in the eschatological banquet.

<sup>5</sup> Again, Gundry’s aim is simply to establish the prevalence of the topic in Matthew and, therefore, the minutiae of his particular readings need not be rehearsed (the theme is self-evident, as he acknowledges).

### 3. Selective Overview of Secondary Arguments

Having examined the heart of Gundry's argument in detail, we are now oriented to survey the basic element(s) of several<sup>6</sup> of his decidedly negative readings of Peter elsewhere in the First Gospel, beginning with **Matthew 10:2–4** (8–9). The fact that Peter here is mentioned first amongst the Twelve anticipates 19:29–30, where those who are first are counted last and fail to obtain eternal life. Gundry looks ahead to the aforementioned exegesis of chapter 5 to undergird his point: 'Especially in view of his failure in 26:69–75 to heed Jesus's command in 10:26–31 not to fear antagonists, the possibility that 'first Peter' in 10:2 augurs for Peter the fate of the first who will be last, and therefore lost, should be kept open' (9).

Gundry's adverse reading of Peter continues into the uniquely Matthean account of Peter walking on the water (**Matthew 14:28–33**; 10–13). In light of its use elsewhere on the lips of false (e.g. 7:21–2, 25:11)/non-disciples (e.g. 8:2, 15:22, et al.), Peter's use of *κύριος* in this passage does not indicate an authentic confession of Jesus's deity/messiahship (14:28, 30). On the contrary, Peter's testing statement—'If it is you'—may even recall Satan's first two temptations of Jesus. If so, then Peter here, like Satan, would be 'testing Jesus's self-identification with a stunt of Peter's own' (10–11). Further, Gundry points out Peter's fear of the wind, which constitutes disobedience to Jesus's command not to be afraid (14:27). 'This addition of disobedient fear to doubt overwhelms whatever faith in Jesus's power to save him may be implied in Peter's screaming for rescue' (12). Peter's subsequent sinking (*καταποντίζω*), then, may reflect on a deeper level his spiritual trajectory toward damnation in light of the usage of the term in 18:6. Rather than Peter's saving faith being the defining emphasis of the passage, therefore, it is his damning doubt (cf. *διστάζω* (14:31)//28:17). Finally, at the close of the passage, Gundry reads 'those in the boat' who worship Jesus and declare him to be 'truly God's Son' to refer to those who never left the boat—i.e. not Peter.

One of the most important passages related to Gundry's sweeping thesis, of course, is Peter's declaration about Jesus in **Matthew 16:13–20** (15–26). As elsewhere, Gundry's determined exegesis attempts to undercut potentially positive portrayals of Peter. In regards to Peter's confession Gundry suggests that since he did not confess Jesus's sonship in 14:33 (as did the rest of the disciples), in 16:16: 'Matthew has Peter playing catch-up' (16). Indeed, the very fact that Peter needed to have Jesus's messianic identity *revealed* to him (as was the case

<sup>6</sup> Due to space considerations, I am forced to leave out his negative readings of Peter in Matt 4:18–20; 8:14–15; 15:12–20; 17:1–8, 24–7; 18:21–2; 26:31–5; and 26:36–46. The following summarizes his argumentation for the most critical and/or debatable (subsidiary) passages vis-à-vis his thesis.

with the hardened Saul (cf. Acts 9)), unlike the other disciples (14:33) underscores that ‘Peter was too obtuse’ (17). Thus, the subsequent beatitude pronounced upon Peter (16:17) lacks real significance as far as Peter’s status is concerned—Judas Iscariot, after all, received a similar blessing (cf. 13:16).

As far as Jesus’s pronouncement upon Peter (16:18) is concerned, Gundry argues that *πέτρα* refers here to Jesus’s teaching—i.e. *not* to Peter as the chief of the Apostles. His argument rests upon a proposed parallel between the imagery of building (*οἰκοδομέω*) upon a rock (*πέτρα*) in the Sermon on the Mount (7:24–7), with the latter term functioning as a metaphor for Jesus’s teaching. As further support of this reading, Gundry notes: the shift from second to third person (‘*you* are ... *this* rock’); the parallel with the demonstrative pronoun in 7:24, 26 (*τοὺς λόγους τούτους // ταύτη τῇ πέτρᾳ*); and the widespread emphasis on Jesus’s words/teaching throughout Matthew’s Gospel. Likewise, in 16:19 the authority of the keys, and the right to bind and loose granted to Peter are each associated with administering Jesus’s words/teaching. But just as such authority was also granted to Judas Iscariot (cf. 18:18) as well as the scribes and Pharisees (cf. 23:13), there is no association between their possession and eschatological salvation with regard to Peter.

Particularly lethal to a positive reading of Peter in Matthew is **16:21–3** (26–30). Here Matthew’s Peter *severely* rebukes his Master—an egregious offence. In his response, Jesus identifies his confessor with Satan, and calls Peter a *σκάνδαλον*. Gundry notes: ‘Unhappily for Peter, every other Matthean occurrence of *σκάνδαλον* refers to those who are condemned to a furnace-like hell of eternal fire (13:41–2 (uniquely Matthean); 18:7–9); and *σκάνδαλον* occurs here in the emphatic initial position.’

Lastly, Gundry tries to discredit the apparently salvific promise made to Peter in **Matthew 19:27–30** (37–8). Here he interprets Peter’s question about rewards as altogether negative and self-serving: ‘So Matthew’s Peter is angling for present compensation to make up for his and the other disciples’ having “left all” to follow Jesus, as though Jesus should have told the rich young man what he would be compensated now, not just eternally, were he to sell his possessions, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow Jesus’ (38). Jesus’s response, then, is both a form of rebuke, and a warning against ‘Peter’s assumption of discipular entitlement’ (38).

Finally, as in the promise of 16:18–19, Gundry argues that Jesus’s promise of future thrones and judgment for the Twelve (19:28) does not indicate that Peter is an authentic, heaven-bound disciple since the same promise includes Judas Iscariot.

#### 4. Critical Reflections on Gundry's Thesis and Method

I turn now to offer some critical reflections on Gundry's thesis and methodology. Reviews of *Peter* have, for the most part, respectfully disagreed with Gundry's reading of Peter in Matthew, although without significantly engaging the heart of his argument.<sup>7</sup> In my estimation, Gundry's work must be analyzed at two separate levels: his core exegesis of 26:69–75, followed by his (subsidiary) readings of Peter-related texts elsewhere.

##### 4.a The Incompleteness of Gundry's Exegesis of 26:69–75

###### 4.a.i Darkness/Night in 26:75

Gundry's exegesis of 26:69–75—the core of his thesis—is correct, although substantially incomplete, and therefore less convincing as it stands. To begin, Gundry underemphasizes the theme of night and darkness that stands over the entire account of Peter's denials (cf. 26:4, 27:1).<sup>8</sup> This point adds weight to his proposal since in 26:75 Peter departs from the darkened gateway *into the outermost darkness* where he *weeps bitterly*, firmly linking it to 8:12, 22:13, and 25:30.<sup>9</sup>

###### 4.a.ii The Apostasies at Gethsemane and Why Matthew's Portrayal of the Sons of Zebedee Undercuts Gundry's Reading of Peter

Most importantly, Gundry misses critical elements in his exegesis of Matthew's Gethsemane account (26:36–45) that simultaneously enhance his reading of 26:69–75, and yet weaken his broader thesis against Peter. Despite Gundry's sensitivity to the deeper intratextual links at work in Matthew's account of Peter's denials, his exegesis of 26:36–45 remains only at the surface-level: Peter is highlighted (26:36, 40) as failing to stay awake and pray, despite Jesus's exhortations. Gundry overlooks, however, that on a deeper level Matthew recasts Peter *and the two sons of Zebedee* in terms of the foolish bridesmaids who are shut out of the wedding feast—i.e. damned to eternal perdition—because they are ill-prepared to await the hour of the bridegroom's return (25:1–13).<sup>10</sup> This reading is forged by the following links:

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Carter (2016) 373–8; Foster (2016) 439–40; Gurtner (2016) 210–11; and Lamerson (2016) 171–3.

<sup>8</sup> Although cf. 47. Gundry definitely pushes in this direction but the point gets lost over the course of his discussion (cf. e.g. 66).

<sup>9</sup> Each with the identical combination of ἐκβάλλω + εἰς τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον· ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Davies and Allison (1997) III.502—though while they notice some of the following links, they do not explore their significance at length.

1. The need to keep watch (*γρηγορέω*—26:38, 40, 41//25:13; cf. 24:42, 43).
2. The desire to sleep (*καθεύδω*—26:40, 43, 45//25:5).
3. *λοιπός*—26:45//25:11.
4. The unexpected hour of arrival (*ὥρα*—26:45 (cf. 40)//25:13; cf. 24: 50, 44, 36).

Matthew also interweaves elements of the Lord's Prayer (6:9–13) into this pericope:

1. The prayer theme—*προσεύχομαι* (26:36, 39, 41, 42, 44)//6:5 (2X), 6 (2X), 7, 9.
2. The specific request to escape temptation—*ἵνα μὴ εἰσέλθῃτε εἰς πειρασμόν* (26:41)//*μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν* (6:13).
3. The request that the Father's will would be done—*γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου* (26:42)//*γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου* (6:10).

No doubt there are further connections at work here.<sup>11</sup> But those noted combine to create a contrast between Jesus, Peter and the two sons of Zebedee. Jesus is portrayed as the faithful disciple par excellence—he embodies the ideal of the wise bridesmaid who maintains readiness by praying the same prayer he taught his disciples; while Peter and the Zebedee brothers are portrayed in terms of what Gundry would call 'false disciples'—like the foolish bridesmaids, they are ill-prepared, neglecting to keep watch (by praying as the Lord taught them), and therefore are caught off-guard by the 'hour' of arrival.<sup>12</sup>

At the surface-level of the story, these three disciples are simply overtaken unexpectedly by Judas and his armed entourage—just like Peter simply leaves the gateway in order to shed tears privately (26:75). The subtexts of both pericopes, however, create a deeper significance to these elements of the story: in each the disciple(s) are portrayed as lacking what is necessary to be saved on the Day of Judgment. Moreover, in both passages *the disciples act as a foil to Jesus as the model disciple par excellence*. (In his exegesis of 26:57–27:10, Gundry largely skips over 26:59–68, which portrays Jesus over against Peter in precisely these terms—the commentary on Peter in 26:58 and 69ff creating an *inclusio*, bracketing Jesus's courageous obedience by Peter's cowardice.) That the earlier passage is meant to inform the later one is suggested by the mirroring of Peter's

<sup>11</sup> One could examine, for example, the significance of the three disciples' heavy *ὀφθαλμοὶ* against Matthew's rich thematic backdrop of eyes/sight in relation to discipleship (cf. 18:9 (2X), 20:15, et al.).

<sup>12</sup> This reading is enhanced by the eschatologically loaded terms 'Son of Man' (26:45) and *ἐγγίζω* (26:46). Thus, four out of the twelve disciples are presented as apostates in Matthew's final chapters.

threefold failure to pray in his following threefold denial (as Gundry himself notes).

These observations provide a more robust picture of what is really going on in 26:69–75, even as they confirm Gundry’s initial exegesis of the passage. And yet, at the same time, they expose an Achilles’ heel of his method. For if we follow the same approach with the sons of Zebedee as Gundry does with Peter on the basis of their portrayal as apostates in 26:36–45, we should expect to find no indication that they would, in fact, persevere in faithfulness and so be saved. But in 20:23 we find just that: Jesus predicts that the two brothers will successfully drink the cup Jesus drinks—that is, they will suffer Christ-like persecution for their faithful witness—and, by implication (cf. 5:10; 16:25, et al.), receive an eschatological reward (although to what degree is left unspecified).<sup>13</sup> The salvific implications of 20:23 are confirmed by Jesus’s previous statement that the disciples (including the sons of Zebedee) will inherit two of the twelve thrones in the eschaton (19:27). Nor can 20:23 (and therefore 19:27) be written off by appealing to Judas Iscariot—namely, the way Gundry dismisses the apparently positive promises given to Peter—as here the promise is exclusively given to the brothers.

Thus we have what Gundry would call a ‘contradiction’ in Matthew’s presentation of the sons of Zebedee.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, they are predicted to persevere even *through* persecution (a sort of external and meritorious sign of *true* discipleship in Matthew (e.g. 5:10–12)), and so receive glorious reward at the Final Judgment (20:23; cf. 19:27); on the other, they are recast as foolish bridesmaids who are caught off guard by the hour of arrival and thereby damned (26:36–45). *But if Matthew can portray the sons of Zebedee as both false and true disciples to fit his purposes, why not Peter?*

#### **4.a.iii The Nature and Function of Intratextuality as a Superior Methodology for Negotiating ‘Contradictory’ Statements about Peter (and the Zebedee Brothers)**

This in turn raises another key question related to Gundry’s methodology. Gundry employs a combination of redaction and narrative criticism.<sup>15</sup> But the

<sup>13</sup> The point here stands, irrespective of the fact that the passage as a whole corrects the disciples’ misunderstanding of what constitutes true greatness in the kingdom. Jesus’s prediction is probably fulfilled in James’ martyrdom (Acts 12:2) and John’s imprisonment (cf. Rev 1:9); see: France (2007) 759.

<sup>14</sup> Gundry (incorrectly in my opinion) writes of historical and theological ‘contradictions’ between the portrayals of Peter and Judas in Matthew verses their portrayal elsewhere in the NT (103–6).

<sup>15</sup> He compares his approach to reader-response criticism and discourse analysis (4).

objections raised suggest that his thesis needs to incorporate a clear and consistent methodology of intratextuality.<sup>16</sup> For it is chiefly through this method, I suggest, that we can adequately address the question here raised: namely, should we interpret the clear and direct statements at the surface level of the text on the same plane as those rhetorically forceful, yet hidden meanings which occur at the intratextual level—particularly if they are at odds with one another? Against Gundry's approach in *Peter*, I suggest not. From a literary perspective, Matthew's portrayal of the sons of Zebedee as true disciples is clearly the more fundamental: Jesus directly states that the sons of Zebedee are true disciples who will faithfully drink the cup of Christ-like persecution and obtain eschatological reward. Conversely, Matthew connects these brothers to the foolish bridesmaids only indirectly via verbal and thematic intratextual linkages. In this case, I suggest, Matthew's allusive method creates a powerful rhetorical effect that operates on the *level of paraenesis rather than the story level proper*. (This is one of the striking capabilities of inter/intra-textual writing: it enables an author to engage the reader on multiple levels at once; to communicate different types of messages at the same time.)

Thus, Matthew is not saying flat out (against Mark): 'Look—the sons of Zebedee are actually false disciples, damned for eternity'. Rather, he is narrating the history of that night in Gethsemane—i.e. Peter, James, and John were too weak to stay awake and support Jesus—in a manner which simultaneously underscores the theme of faithful discipleship in anticipation of the Final Judgment that dominates the final chapters of Matthew (esp. 25–6). More specifically: Matthew uses the historical account *to exhort the reader to emulate Jesus*, for he is like the wise bridesmaid who maintains readiness for the hour of arrival through prayer. In this way, the negative portrayal of the sons of Zebedee (and Peter) *acts as a foil* to highlight Jesus's obedience, without undoing the previous promises made to them regarding their faithful suffering and inheriting eternal life.

<sup>16</sup> The best discussion of intratextuality of which I am aware is: Riffaterre (1987) 371–85 (380ff) (although he uses the term *intertextuality*, even to refer to such allusions between texts within the same work). By intratextuality I refer to the manner in which Matthew creates verbal, structural, and thematic linkages between texts across his Gospel to indicate that they are to be read in light of one another. Intratextuality is sometimes conflated with narrative criticism, although the two are markedly different. Indeed, narrative critical approaches tend to miss key interpretive points more readily accessed via an intratextual approach (e.g., Anderson (1994). For initial discussion/examples of intratextuality in Matthew, see: Allison (2005) 79–105 (84–8); Leim (2015); Moffitt (2011) 233–45; and especially Pennington (2012) 189–92. Significant work still needs to be done in order to define more fully the nature and function of this method as it relates to Matthew. For example, intratextuality is not even mentioned as a viable methodology for interpreting the First Gospel in Powell (2009).

Once again, if such a multileveled approach reconciles the seemingly contradictory portrayals of the sons of Zebedee in 26:36–45 with those elsewhere in the First Gospel, why not so with Peter in 26:36–45 and 69–75? Indeed, by bifurcating the surface level of the story proper from the deeper level of rhetorical paraenesis (using intratextuality), the interpreter is freed to let each render their appropriate import.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, we can accept the positive promises made to Peter, including those of eschatological salvation/rewards, without dismissing them on account of Judas Iscariot. For although Judas received the same privileges as the other disciples, he alone is explicitly denounced *at the level of the story proper* as an apostate, doomed to eternal perdition, for whom it would have been better ‘if he had not been born’ (26:24). Such is never said of Peter (or the sons of Zebedee). On the contrary, at the story level proper, Jesus responds to Peter’s question by stating directly that he will obtain one of the twelve thrones of judgment at the eschaton because he left everything to follow Jesus. *That this promise applies especially for Peter and the sons of Zebedee is underscored by the fact that only Peter (and Andrew), and Zebedee’s sons are explicitly narrated as ‘leaving’ all their possessions (and in the latter case, their father as well), to ‘follow’ Jesus (4:18–22).*<sup>18</sup>

#### **4.b Some Critical Reflections on Gundry’s Secondary Readings**

Having addressed in detail several shortcomings at the heart of his thesis and method, I will offer some brief reflections on his subsidiary readings of Peter elsewhere in the First Gospel. The aforementioned discussion has already addressed his erroneous appeal to Judas Iscariot in favor of a negative reading of Peter in 16:19 and 19:27–30. In an unpublished paper John R. Markley has pointed out three additional weaknesses amidst Gundry’s secondary arguments.<sup>19</sup> First, Gundry interprets Matthew’s parable of the wheat and the tares with reference to false disciples in the church: thus, for Matthew, Peter is a tare (i.e. a false disciple) in the field (the church), who is permitted to continue amidst the wheat (true disciples) until the end of the age. Markley (correctly) notes, however, that it is more likely that Matthew identifies the tares with the scribes and Pharisees (15:12–14; 12:34; 23:15) rather than Peter. Second, Gundry exhibits a strong ‘tendency to see an anti-Petrine bias in the subtlest

<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, Gundry appeals to ‘the plane of different paraenetic needs and purposes’ to explain his proposed contradictions between Matthew’s negative portrayal of Peter against the other more positive portrayals in the NT (105).

<sup>18</sup> ἀφίημι—4:20, 22//26:27, 29; ἀκολουθέω plus a reference to Jesus in the dative—4:20, 22//19:27, 28, 29. Conversely, the call of Judas Iscariot is not narrated, and when mentioned by name, he is always and only associated with his betrayal of Jesus.

<sup>19</sup> Markley (2016). I would like to thank Dr Markley for giving me an advance copy of this incisive paper.

features of Matthean redaction'. Numerous examples could be cited in support.<sup>20</sup> Third, Markley highlights the unequal weight Gundry ascribes to positive portrayals of Peter's significance and fate. Although I have already addressed this issue in detail, Markley makes an insightful observation regarding Gundry's suggestion that Peter is listed first amongst the disciples since, for Matthew, 'the first will be last, and the last shall be first'. (19:30). Against this point, Markley notes that Judas Iscariot is last in the list, and asks: 'Are we safe to conclude, therefore, that Judas then becomes first in the eschatological reversal while Peter becomes last?' The connection proposed by Gundry simply does not work.

To Markley's points I simply add that Gundry often relies on arguments from silence, either in justifying Matthean omissions of Peter (e.g. all of chapter 6), or in his attempt to explain why Peter is not explicitly condemned at the narrative level.<sup>21</sup> While arguments from silence are always risky, the critiques of his central argument proposed in this review render them all the more tenuous.<sup>22</sup>

To close, Gundry's monograph is well researched and, particularly from chapter 5 onward, provides strong argumentation. More importantly, it highlights the need for scholarly discussion on the nature and function of intratextuality as a viable methodology for the interpretation of Matthew.

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<sup>20</sup> See e.g. Gundry's exegesis of 19:27–30—esp. quote from p. 38—summarized above.

<sup>21</sup> Gundry argues that this silence can be explained inasmuch as Matthew is simply obeying Jesus's command not to judge: 'the avoidance of an explicit judgment [of Peter] while presenting evidence of falsity keeps Matthew from disobeying Jesus's prohibition of judgment (Matt 5:22; 7:1–2)' (3).

<sup>22</sup> It should also be noted that Gundry's reading of Peter pulls up his dating of the First Gospel to prior to the mid-60s, before Peter was martyred (101).

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