

Torah Observant “SHOMER MITZVOT”

שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוֹת

A Series on Practical Messianic Living and Apologetics (halakhah)
By Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy

An Examination of Matthew 9:14-17: Are Judaism and Christianity Incompatible With One Another?

*Updated: June 17, 2015

Table of Contents (click link to access topic of choice)

Introduction and Replacement Theology	2
Example From Pastor John Piper	4
Example From Got Questions?org	6
Example from Pastor John MacArthur	7
Example From Pastor David Guzik.....	10
The Old Man, the New Man, and Messianic Judaism.....	11
A Better Way to Understand This Passage	13
Summary	15
Concluding Thoughts.....	17

Introduction and Replacement Theology

Have you ever heard of the teaching known as 'Replacement Theology'? Have you ever been taught to understand that the Church has replaced Isra'el as God's chosen people? As Tevye the milkman of Fiddler on the Roof would say, "*Sounds ridiculous, no?*" However, unfortunately, this type of teaching does exist and actually thrives in some Christian circles. Where would a Christian get such a peculiar viewpoint? And if God is done with Isra'el as a people, does this mean that once a [Jewish] person abandons his old, incomplete ways of understanding God and comes to faith in Jesus, that his association with things Torah must likewise be abandoned? For example, must Judaism and a Jewish person's cultural identification with being Jewish give way to Christianity and leading a noticeably "Christian" lifestyle instead? In essence, this would mean the death of living as a religious Jew, right?

Matt Slick of CARM.org, a fine Christian apologetics website, defines Replacement Theology thusly:

Replacement theology is the teaching that the Christian church has replaced national Israel regarding the plan, purpose, and promises of God.

Therefore, many of the promises that God made to Israel must be spiritualized. For example, when it speaks of Israel being restored to the land, this really means that the Christian church will be blessed. Also, covenants made with Israel are fulfilled in the Christian church so, for example,

1. The Jewish people are no longer God's chosen people. Instead, the Christian church now makes up God's chosen people.
2. In the New Testament after Pentecost, the term "Israel" refers to the church.
3. The Mosaic covenant (Exodus 20) is replaced by the new covenant (Luke 22:20).
4. Actual circumcision is replaced by a circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:29).

So, in replacement theology the church has replaced Israel as the primary means by which the world is blessed by God's work.¹

Fortunately, CARM.org does not espouse to Replacement Theology, and so the same article goes on to explain the errors of Replacement Theology:

Though it is true that the church does replace Israel in some areas such as properly representing God on earth, acknowledging the promise of the Messiah, etc., it is not biblical to say that God is completely done with Israel and that the Christian church is its complete replacement.

"For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until

¹ <https://carm.org/questions-replacement-theology>

the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will remove ungodliness from Jacob,'" (Rom. 11:25-26).

Some replacement theologians would teach that any mention of "Israel" after Acts chapter 2 (Pentecost) would be referring to the Christian church, but the above Scripture cannot be used to support that idea. In fact, it plainly contradicts it. Obviously, God is not done with Israel. The text tells us that God has hardened Israel but it also tells that disheartening is temporary.

Replacement theology is also known as supersessionism which means that the Christian church has superceded Israel in God's plan.²

In my personal experience of interacting with honest folks, many Christians are understandably uncomfortable with the implications described by the basic tenets of Replacement Theology, wishing instead to uphold the idea that, while the Church may not have actually replaced Isra'el, Christianity is, nevertheless, simply incompatible with any other religion—including Judaism. Judaism, they might suggest, is fine for unbelieving Jews, but once a person comes to faith in Jesus, perhaps Judaism and its old rituals needs to be left behind. Besides leaning heavily upon the Apostle Paul's teachings, such Christians might also naturally opine this position from a popular understanding of one of Yeshua's teachings found in the Gospels, particularly in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This is where I want to park my commentary for the most part today.

Here is one version of Yeshua's parable as rendered from the Matthew 9:14-17 reading:

14Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" **15**And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. **16**"But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. **17**"Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved." (NASB)

Interestingly, we could discuss the meaning of Yeshua's comments about fasting within Messianic and Christian circles, and I think we would find much to agree about together. However, when Yeshua continues his explanation, supplying the additional parable details about the un-shrunk patch, the old garment, the old wine, and the new wineskins, I have found that many Christian commentaries delve into what I feel is a form of Replacement Theology, even if they don't know they are doing so. Putting the meaning of Yeshua's teaching about fasting aside for a moment, the question on the table for discussion today is, to what exactly are his comments about the patch and the

² Ibid.

wine referring? Does this passage mean what most Christian commentators teach, that Judaism and Christianity are mutually exclusive religions? Are Judaism and Christianity incompatible with one another? Let us examine this topic and see if prevailing Christian teaching in this area is biblically accurate. To be sure, if Christianity replaces Judaism, then there can be no such thing as a “Messianic Jew,” right? In this view, wouldn't all cultural and religious, yet unbelieving Jews cease to be cultural and religious Jews when they become Christians?

The primary passage in question will be Matthew 9:14-17 even though a parallel of this parable exists in Mark 2:18-22 and Luke 5:33-39. I want to answer my own question right up front and say that I don't believe the Master was teaching the death of Judaism and the birth of Christianity in these verses per se. In other words, I firmly believe that Replacement Theology is rotten to the core and that Yeshua would repudiate such teachings. However, I don't want my readers to get the impression that I have completely rejected prevailing Christian interpretations surrounding this passage either; there is value in some parts of what most Christians are teaching on this passage. I simply want to challenge the average Bible student or pastor to consider what I believe is a more historically and biblically accurate way to understand Yeshua's parables in this section in order to uncover the heart of the Master's teaching here. Let me briefly explain how I “stumbled” upon this particular study and then move right into a few examples from well-respected Christian sources before examining a few Messianic sources for comparison.

Example From Pastor John Piper

Recently I was nearing the ending of a personal fast, the purpose, like many personal fasts, was to press in closer to God—closer to Yeshua—closer to the Ruach HaKodesh. A fast is a great way to keep the fire stoked and to continue to subdue the flesh in our pursuit of becoming more and more Christ-like. As was the case during many of my personal fasts, I decided to immerse myself in scripture and in studies about fasting. I like to hear the wonderful testimonies about how other believers have fasted and prayed, and pressed in for God's presence to move in their lives, and how his faithfulness has proven true over and over again as breakthroughs come. To be sure, the Torah teaches, “*Come close to God, and he will come close to you...*” (James/Jacob 4:8), and also, “*Therefore, let us confidently approach the throne from which God gives grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace in our time of need*” (Hebrews 4:16). As it turns out, I was reviewing a sermon by a well-known, well-respected Bible teacher named Pastor John Piper. He was preaching on Matthew 9:14-17, a passage familiar to most Christians I'm sure. Near the end of his short sermon, Pastor Piper made the following applications for his Church, based on his understanding of these verses. My brackets indicate which topic is being addressed by his explanation:

[Fasting] This is so stunning and so glorious and so unexpected in this form that Jesus said, you just can't fast now in this situation. It is too happy and too spectacularly exhilarating. Fasting is for times of yearning and aching and longing. But the bridegroom of Israel is here. After a thousand years of dreaming and longing and hoping and waiting, he is here! The absence of fasting in the band of disciples was a witness to the

presence of God in their midst.... [Patching] The patch of unshrunk cloth and the new wine represent the new reality that has come with Jesus—the kingdom of God is here. The Bridegroom has come. The Messiah is in our midst. And that is not merely temporary. He is not merely here and then gone. The kingdom of God did not come in Jesus and then just vanish out of the world.... [Wine and wineskins] And Jesus says, The old wineskins can't contain it. What is the old wineskin? In the context it seems to be fasting. Fasting was inherited from the Old Testament and had been used as part of the Jewish system of relating to God. Now Jesus says, the old wineskins of Judaism can't contain the new wine.... "The new fasting is based on the mystery that the Bridegroom has come, not just will come. The new wine of his presence calls for new fasting."³

Please don't misunderstand what I am about to say in this commentary. I sincerely appreciate Pastor Piper's passion for holiness and I am currently engaged in a study of more of his sermons in an effort to strengthen my own walk with Yeshua. On that note, I highly recommend his 'Desiring God' series of teachings. However, if this single sermon is an accurate representation of his general theology in this area, then I cannot help but disagree with his application of these verses, as if Yeshua were saying that his own "new" teachings have come to "replace" the old "Jewish system of relating to God." Again, I must stress that I do not disagree with Piper's concept of hungering and thirsting after the holiness of God. Indeed, we MUST pant after our LORD as if our very life depends on it, for in point of fact—it does! "...for in him we live and move and exist..." (Acts 17:28).

In all fairness, Pastor Piper correctly identifies one of the chief functions of the Torah, in that it was given by HaShem to identify and condemn sinful behavior. Pastor Piper himself singles out this function in a sermon called 'How to Use the Law Lawfully To Bear Fruit for God,' where he makes the insightful remarks, "*The main point here is that the law has a convicting, condemning, restraining work to do for unrighteous people. But for the righteous – for people who have come to Christ for justification and come to Christ for the inner spiritual power to love, this role of the law is past. From now on, the place where we seek the power to love is not the law of commandments but the gospel of Christ.*"⁴ Indeed the whole thrust of that particular sermon is to show, in his own words, that "...the path to love is not works of law. In other words the way to pursue love is by focusing on the transformation of the heart and the conscience and the awakening and strengthening of faith. Love is not pursued first or decisively by focusing on a list of behavioral commandments and striving to conform to them. That is what we must die to."⁵ To these particular comments I whole heartedly agree.

Other than these few sermon examples, as far as I could find on his website, Pastor Piper does not have a lot to say, either in criticism of or support of the Torah, making him, perhaps, not the best example to present on this particular topic. Truthfully, at first

³ <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/when-the-bridegroom-is-taken-away-they-will-fast-with-new-wineskins>

⁴ <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/how-to-use-the-law-lawfully-to-bear-fruit-for-god>

⁵ Ibid.

I was going to simply dismiss Pastor Piper's comments on the Matthew passage as perhaps an exception to the normal way of understanding that passage. After all, before this current fast of mine, I had not really thought of the passage as teaching a replacement of the old Jewish system of relating to God and so I decided to check a few more Bible commentaries, both Christian and Messianic, and what I found both surprised as well as saddened me.

Example From Got Questions?org

Surely Pastor Piper could not be the only mature believer out there where a few of his sermons—whether knowingly or unknowingly—may have contained an application in the form of Replacement Theology borrowed from the Matthew passages. In an effort to gain a well-balanced sample from prevailing Christian views, I decided to jump online and query a popular Christian question and answer website. Here is their question and answer reproduced in its entirety since it is quite short:

Question: "What is the meaning of the parables of fasting at the wedding feast, the old cloth, and the wineskins?"

Answer: These parables, found in Mark 2:18-22, begin with a statement that the Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist were fasting. The twice-weekly fast was a tradition adopted by the legalistic Pharisees at the time, even though the Mosaic Law prescribed only one fast on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29, 31). Some people came to Jesus and asked Him why His disciples did not fast like the Pharisees and those of John's disciples who had remained loyal to the Pharisaic traditions. Jesus' response is given in three short parables.

The first one is a parable of a bridegroom with his groomsmen at a wedding feast. Jesus' point is that fasting during the wedding feast is pointless. In this story Jesus is the Bridegroom, and while He is present in this world, it is a time of celebration because He is the fulfillment of their Messianic prophecies. Jesus Himself said that He came to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17). To continue fasting with Jesus present is akin to fasting and being mournful during a wedding celebration in which the groom is present.

The other two parables, which are similar, make the same point. The first one says you don't put a new patch on an old garment, and the second says you don't put new wine into an old wineskin. In the first parable, if you put a new patch on an old garment, when the new patch shrinks due to washing, it will tear away from the older garment, making the tear worse. Similarly, new wine needs a new wineskin because as the new wine expands during the fermentation process, it stretches the wineskin. An old wineskin will burst under the pressure of new wine.

These two parables illustrate the fact that you can't mix old religious rituals with new faith in Jesus. Jesus' disciples were not fasting along with the Pharisees and John's disciples because they were now under the new covenant of grace and faith in Christ. As mentioned earlier, Jesus fulfilled the law; therefore, there is no longer any need to

continue with the old rituals. Jesus cannot be added to a works-based religion. In the case of the Pharisees, they were consumed with their own self-righteousness, and faith in Jesus cannot be combined with self-righteous rituals.⁶

Once again, as was seen with Pastor Piper, this view seems to be supporting the notion that Christian culture and religious worship triumphs over Jewish culture and religious worship. Now, I know this particular answer from GotQuestions.org is specifically comparing legalism with genuine faith, and in that regard, legalism is something a faithful follower of Yeshua should avoid at all costs. However, the answer above appears to take a step further by stating “*Jesus fulfilled the law; therefore, there is no longer any need to continue with the old rituals.*” Aren’t they implying that Gentile Christians are free to dispense with “Jewish-looking commandments” and indeed recommend that saved Jews leave Judaism—viz, Jewish culture—for Christianity as well? By the way, the reason I keep referring to Judaism as “Jewish culture” and not merely as a religion, is because my understanding of Judaism as a way of life does not neatly compartmentalize the cultural aspect of Torah-keeping into religious activities while defining the “secular” activities as non-Jewish. Are you following me? In other words, religious Jews believe and live as if every waking moment is an act of Torah submissiveness. Thus, to tell a religious Jew to stop keeping Torah is tantamount to telling him to stop breathing.

Example from Pastor John MacArthur

In my continuation of my examination of this passage from Matthew, I decided to check with one of my favorite Bible teachers, John MacArthur. I can truthfully state, without any reservation, that Pastor MacArthur is one of the finest expositors of God’s word that you will encounter anywhere! Period. He is thorough. He is honest with the text. He is not ashamed to exalt Jesus in his preaching. And he takes a serious stance against sin. Pastor MacArthur is a model Bible teacher, and I can only pray that HaShem will allow me to mature to the stature of this great man of faith. Having said all of that, however, I am at a loss to understand how he could come up with the interpretation of this passage that I am about to show you here. Perhaps it just goes to show that none of us is perfect in our insights into God’s Word. No one has arrived. We all have glasses of bias through which we view the Scriptures, and as a result, our interpretations are necessarily going to be a little off base at times. Thankfully, for most of the time, Pastor MacArthur hits the nail on the head in terms of explaining what the Bible means and demands of us. When it comes to his views on Torah submissiveness for believers, and the ongoing value of Judaism as a religion, I have learned to simply dismiss this side of Pastor John while continuing to uphold him in earnest prayer and high esteem. I highly recommend his preaching and commentaries to any and all alike.

Now, let us examine his thoughts on this matter. Pastor MacArthur likes to develop his main points by employing what I like to call a “well-developed running start,” therefore, I

⁶ <http://www.gotquestions.org/parable-feast-cloth-wineskin.html>

have included quite a bit more material than usual from this transcript of his sermon so as to fairly represent the context. (I have added a few **italicized and bracketed** comments of my own here and there to break up the lengthy quote):

In the text before us, we have a very clear defense of the singularity and purity of the unique gospel of Jesus Christ and it is given by our Lord Himself. The passage provides a clear and unambiguous statement of the exclusivity of the gospel and its incompatibility with Judaism in particular and if it is incompatible with Judaism, which does have at least Old Testament connections, it is certainly incompatible with every religion that has no such Old Testament connections. There are a lot of people today who would like to believe that Christians and Jews today have a lot in common, but those Jews who only adhere to Judaism in its current forms, even the form of Judaism that existed in the time of our Lord, have no common religious ground and no common spiritual ground with true Christians. **Any form of Judaism without Jesus Christ is a false religion. It is empty, bankrupt, damning, it might as well be Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism or Atheism...** *[I can agree in part with this bolded summary sentence]*

[Speaking of Yeshua's selection of Matthew the tax-collector as one of his disciples] The Pharisees then have concluded, this just adds to their firmness in that conclusion, that Jesus is espousing a religious view very different than theirs. It's really important that we understand that. Eventually they killed Him for it. They were convinced that not only was His religion different than theirs, their came from God and His came from Satan. They would be the first ones to say there is no compatibility between Judaism and the message of Jesus Christ. *[Yes, this is true, but such sentiments would originate from a darkened heart so it is understandable. There is no reason for true believers to echo such sentiments once the eyes of our heart have been enlightened]* It is a message foreign to us. It is alien to us. It is contrary to us. It is destructive to our religion. It is such a threat to our religion that its purveyor, this man Jesus, needs to be killed. And, of course, they were right, they're absolutely right. There is no compatibility between Judaism, the apostate form of Judaism that existed then and has continued to exist without Christ through the centuries and exist today... *[Yes, but what if both Judaism and the Jewish practitioner both underwent a radical transformation once Yeshua entered the picture...?]*

Judaism at its most devout level, Judaism at its most self-righteous level, Judaism as the extreme religion, Judaism with all its connection to the Old Testament, all its desire to revere the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that Judaism is completely out of touch with God...completely out of touch with God's salvation. Purposely completely out of touch with Son of God, completely out of touch with the gospel. They were into self-righteousness. He preached grace. They were into denying that they were sinful. He preached repentance from sin. They were proud of their religiosity, He preached humility. They were into external ceremony, He preached a transformed heart. They held tightly to the Old, He offered the New. They loved the approval of men. He offered the approval of God. They had ritual, He offered a relationship... *[Sad but true indictment of the 1st century Judaisms]*

And then to make clear to them how different these two were, we come to the clarifying analogies, verses 21 to 22 and we'll add a third one, and in His inimitable way He uses analogies that they would readily understand that need virtually no explanation. "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment otherwise the patch pulls away from

it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results. Anybody who washes anything at any time that is made out of a natural fabric whether it's linen, cotton, or whether it's wool, some other form of animal hair woven together understands that things shrink. No synthetic products in the ancient world, things shrink. So everybody would know that if you take a piece of unshrunk cloth, and by the way, Matthew describes this and Luke describes it as well, their words are a little bit different and that's the genius of the New Testament that if a committee had put it together, they would make it all match, but any teacher knows that when you're teaching something like this and you're drawing out an analogy, you repeat yourself and you nuance it and you say it two or three ways until they get the point and each of the writers picks up the unique elements of it, together you get the whole thing. But it's essentially exactly the same. You take a piece of unshrunk cloth, cut it into a patch. You don't do that to sew it into a new garment, otherwise the patch when it is washed, or becomes wet and dries out will pull away from it, the new from the old and a worse tear results. This is a foolish mix. You can't mix new patch, unshrunk with an old piece of cloth. Apostate Judaism's rituals and ceremonies are a worn-out old garment and you cannot patch the holes in it with a piece of the gospel. It's not compatible. Jesus didn't come with a message to patch up the old system. He came with a message to replace it all together... [*Jesus came to replace Judaism with Christianity?! Does that line up with the prophecies in the TaNaKH about the coming Messiah's mission to unbelieving Isra'el and to the Gentiles? If only Pastor MacArthur could understand how theologically improper this sounds, I'm sure he would not have made this statement to his congregation*]

There's a lot of talk these days about conferences between Jews and Christians and certainly we want to love them...and love them from the depths of our heart, we want to bring them to the knowledge of the truth, but whenever there is a conference between Christians and Jews, I think the Christians are obligated to tell the Jews that their religion cannot save them. That's what we ought to say at the conference. The Messiah has come and by His death and resurrection, offers forgiveness and salvation if they will abandon their hope in their own works and their own traditions and leave that religion behind. No mixture of the gospel or any other religion is possible, it is absolutely unique. It is grace and grace alone...⁷

Did you catch the main import of his thoughts? There is so much more from this sermon that I could have put in my commentary, but space does not permit it. If my abbreviated representation is a bit confusing, visit the link in the footnote and read the entire sermon for yourself and see if I improperly quoted Pastor MacArthur in any way. I am open to correction and will gladly retract or correct anything that knowingly or unknowingly slanders a fellow brother in Christ. However, I don't think I misunderstood Pastor MacArthur here, and I am certainly not trying to slander my brother in Christ. His advice to Christians to tell Jews to *"abandon their hope in their own works and their own traditions and leave that religion behind"* needs to be clarified. Christians should instead be telling Jews, *"Abandon your hope in your own works and you own traditions and fall on the mercy and grace of your Messiah Yeshua! In him, you can live the complete and fullest Jewish life you already seek to live! In Messiah, you become a Jew both inside and out! Judaism as a way of life, as grounded, not in the traditions of the rabbis, but in*

⁷ <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/41-10/the-matchless-distinctiveness-of-the-gospel>

the written word of God, is a wonderful gift from HaShem. Contrary to what the traditional Church might be teaching, you do not need to leave your ancestral religion behind to embrace Jesus as LORD. Jesus and Judaism are not incompatible with one another.” Yeshua always has and always will have a problem with dead faith and legalistic perversion of Torah. I don't see in the Gospels where Yeshua had a problem with Judaism as a religion, nor do I see any hint of this in Paul's writings. The overall thrust of Pastor MacArthur's sermon about the incompatibility of Judaism with Christianity simply cannot be the best way to understand Yeshua's parable here in Matthew if we are giving the weight of the rest of Scriptures their complete and deserved reading.

Example From Pastor David Guzik

I would like to include just one more traditional, well-known, well-respected Christian pastor before I turn to a popular Messianic Jewish author and then to Tim Hegg to provide some concluding thoughts. In this examination, I purposely tried to stick to Internet resources due to their ease of access by any and all Christians with a computer. After all, many clergyman and professional Bible teachers often utilize differing types of expensive Bible software to dig into the background and commentaries behind scriptural texts, and if you are like me, many times you simply cannot afford such software—as fine and valuable as they may prove to be in unlocking more of God's Word for those who use them. So this was an exercise for us “average Church-going folks” who have a Bible and a computer with Internet and yet are hungry to dig a bit deeper.

Pastor David Guzik has been producing verse-by-verse commentaries on the whole Bible for as long as I can remember studying the Bible! And all I can say to that is a hearty “amen!” He is no rookie. His sermons and commentaries come highly recommended by myself. Plus, like Pastor MacArthur, he makes his resources relatively free to access by anyone with a computer and Internet. His views are not extreme in any way, and in his expositions, he consistently upholds the foundational doctrines of the Faith—convictions I personally hold to myself. As with Pastor MacArthur, and Pastor Piper already mentioned, I can only pray that I myself will one day have the honor of developing into the measure and level of Bible teacher that these great men of faith already operate at. That being said let us see what Pastor Guzik has to say about Yeshua's parable in Matthew 9:15-17:

c. Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break: With this illustration of the wineskins, Jesus explained that He did not come to repair or reform the old institutions of Judaism, but to institute a new covenant altogether. The new covenant doesn't just improve the old; it replaces it and goes beyond it.

d. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved: Jesus' reference to the wineskins was His announcement that the present institutions of Judaism could not and would not contain His **new wine**. He would form a new institution - the church - that would bring Jew and Gentile together into a completely new body (Ephesians 2:16).

i. Jesus reminds us that what is old and stagnant often cannot be renewed or reformed. God will often look for new vessels to contain His new work, until those vessels eventually make themselves unusable. This reminds us that the religious establishment of any age is not necessarily pleasing to Jesus. Sometimes it is in direct opposition to, or at least resisting His work.

ii. Jesus came to introduce something new, not to patch up something old. This is what salvation is all about. In doing this, Jesus doesn't destroy the old (the law), but He fulfills it, just as an acorn is fulfilled when it grows into an oak tree. There is a sense in which the acorn is gone, but its purpose is fulfilled in greatness. (All emphases his)⁸

As was observed from the previous standard Christian sources already cited in this commentary, we notice Pastor Guzik interpreting Yeshua's parables as evidence of Christianity being incompatible with Judaism and therefore needing to supersede Judaism. But once again, we must ask ourselves why would this need to be the case with the coming Jewish Messiah? What was it about Palestinian Judaism that was ostensibly so "incompatible" with the message of Jesus that it supposedly necessitated, not a radical reformation of Judaism, but a supposed destruction of Judaism? Is there a better way to understand Yeshua's parables that upholds the overall thrust and integrity of Moshe without sacrificing the religion that had come to be known as Judaism, yet at the same time allows for a renewal of the heart of the person practicing Judaism? I think there is, and I will show it to you in my quotes from David Stern and Tim Hegg below. But first, let's demonstrate what I intend to be a fair approval of the main gist of what the prevailing Christian sources are trying to convey in their interpretations. In other words, surely these sources are not 100% flawed. What truth can we safely glean from them?

The Old Man, the New Man, and Messianic Judaism

Having been raised with a solid Christian background myself, I believe I can understand where these mainline Christian sources are launching from and just what it is they are attempting to convey in their commentaries: Jesus taught that the old man must die in order for the new man to be birthed. This is not peripheral to the gospel. This is central. It is foundational. These great men of God are unabashedly teaching this central truth. Yes, we can agree, this indeed is sound biblical exegesis. Equally true is the fact that by the 1st century, the religious Jewish leaders had so polluted HaShem's genuine form of Torah obedience that only a skeletal frame of what Moshe actually said barely remained visible for the casual observer to see. By the time Yeshua arrived on the scene, the Torah had become all but choked by the traditions of men, the teachings of the sages, and the poison of ethnocentric Jewish exclusivism—viz—works of the law. The average Jew probably didn't even know where to start in his honest endeavor to become "shomer mitzvot," that is "Torah observant." And what about Gentiles seeking

⁸ <http://www.enduringword.com/commentaries/4009.htm>

to become followers after the God of Isra'el? They had little choice but to rely on the interpretations of the extant Torah Teachers and proto-rabbis of that day if they wished to obtain a peek into the Scriptures that were micromanaged by Isra'el.

So, in our effort to properly explain Yeshua's teachings on the matter, we must start with the mainline doctrinal position that only a circumcised heart can receive the Words of God thus bringing that individual in line with the Son of God and the Spirit of God. This accords with the words of Torah, and all of the Apostolic Scriptures agree with and affirm it as well. Judaism does not need to die. However, it most certainly needs to be reformed. Given these foundational truths, allow David Stern, well known and well-respected Messianic Jewish author of the Complete Jewish Bible to provide us with some notes from his invaluable work entitled the Jewish New Testament Commentary:

This verse and the next speak to the issue of whether faith in Yeshua the Messiah can be combined with Judaism. Here the **old coat** is Judaism. The **unshrunk cloth** is Messianic faith which has not been adapted ("shrunk") to the framework of Judaism as currently practiced. ("Shrinking" here is simply an aspect of Yeshua's "patch" metaphor. It does not imply that Messianic faith must be diminished in order to fit into Judaism.) Combining unadapted Messianic faith with traditional Judaism doesn't work—the **patch tears away from the coat**; that is, faith in Yeshua apart from Judaism—and, later on in the case of Gentiles, faith in Yeshua apart from the foundational truths about God taught in the *Tanakh*—is useless and worthless. Not only that, but it **leaves a worse hole**—attempting to combine unadapted Messianic faith with traditional Judaism leaves Judaism worse off than before. The implication is that one must shrink the new cloth—adapt Messianic faith to Judaism—for Yeshua does not imply that there is anything wrong with patching an old coat! The early Messianic Jews did adapt Messianic faith to Judaism, but the later Gentile Church did not. Instead, some forms of Gentile Christianity became paganized precisely because the *Tanakh* was forgotten or underemphasized. Messianic Jews are once again trying to bring New Testament faith back to its Jewish roots.

Whereas in v. 16 Messianic faith has to be adapted to Judaism, here it is Judaism which must be adjusted to Messianic faith. If one tries to put **new wine**, Messianic faith, into **old wineskins**, traditional Judaism, the faith is lost and Judaism ruined. But if Judaism is **freshly prepared**, reconditioned so that it can accommodate trust in Yeshua the Messiah, both the faith and the renewed Judaism, Messianic Judaism, **are preserved**.

This understanding is undergirded by the writer's careful choice of words: "new" (Greek *neos*) wine, "fresh" (*kainos*) wineskins. "*Neos*" means "new in respect to time, implying immaturity or lack of development. "*Kainos*" means "new" or "renewed" in respect to quality, contrasting with "old" or "not renewed" and implying superiority. Old wineskins have lost their strength and elasticity, so that they cannot withstand the pressure of new wine still fermenting, although an old wineskin can be restored to service if its useful qualities are renewed.

The meaning of the figure is that the new wine of Messianic living cannot be poured into old religious forms if they remain rigid. But if the old religious forms become "fresh," they can accommodate Yeshua. When "*kainos*" is rendered "new," as in many translations, the implication seems to be that Judaism cannot possibly be a suitable framework for honoring Yeshua the Jewish Messiah—only the "new wineskin" of Gentilized Christianity will work. This is a peculiar conclusion, especially if it recalled that Yeshua was speaking with his fellow Jews. As rendered here the point is that the only

vessel which can hold the new wine of Messianic life in a Jewish setting is a properly renewed, restored, reconditioned and refreshed Judaism, such as Messianic Judaism was in the first century and aims to be now.

Taken together, verse 16 and 17 imply that both Messianic faith and Judaism should adjust to each other. However, the accommodating must be true to God's Word; on that there is no room for compromise. See 13:52&N.⁹

Do you see now how much better Stern's view fits with the overall historic message of both TaNaKH and Apostolic Scriptures than do the views of the previously examined mainline Christian position on these verses? Yeshua's words were not said in a vacuum. They were presented to a group of 1st century Jewish people following a Torah that was given to the nation of Isra'el over a thousand years earlier. This means if one leaps past the context of the 1st century and immediately begins to inadvertently apply Yeshua's parable to 21st century false religions, one will necessarily miss the main point of the Master's words in favor of one's own pretext. Context is king. And context demands that the parable be applied to the immediate listeners and readers first, before making secondary and tertiary applications for others. Yes, false religions are incompatible with the true "religion" of Yeshua as LORD and King, but that is not even the central point of the parable (as we shall find out in Hegg's comments below). Therefore, any later Christian application that opts for an interpretation that teaches the destruction of Judaism in favor of the establishment of Christianity actually destroys the intended meaning of Yeshua's parable and even ends up presenting a form of Replacement Theology to unsuspecting Christians.

To be sure, when we examine the TaNaKH more closely, we do not find promises of a "death of Judaism" due to some supposed incompatibility of Jewish lifestyle with the promised Messiah to come. Instead, what we find is God's indictment against sinful man and his fallen nature and how only the Ruach HaKodesh can soften the heart to receive the Messiah as LORD—thus bringing about a genuine transformation of a man and a reformation of his ways (which in the context of the 1st century Judaisms would mean a reformation of their Jewish way of living).

A Better Way to Understand This Passage

We have already presented David's Stern's thoughts on this section of scripture, and historical context—as well as with theological context—shows that this is probably a much better treatment of the passage and parables in question. The prevailing Christian view of these verses (essentially calling for the death of Judaism so that Christianity can take its place) amounts to a basic form of Replacement Theology—a view that would most certainly be unwanted by any Jewish person in their right mind—whether 1st century or 21st century—seeking the Messiah of their Scriptures. Replacement Theology must be outright rejected, and thus, any interpretation of these

⁹ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary-Mattityahu (Matthew)* (Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), pp. 36-37.

passages that supports the dismantling of Judaism in favor of Christianity is wrong-headed and must equally be looked at with suspect. David Stern pointed us in the right direction. Now, allow Tim Hegg to knock the ball out the park with his homerun explanation of Yeshua's words. Speaking of the parable of the cloth, Hegg begins:

In the two parables incorporating the idea of "new" and "old," the emphasis is upon why Yeshua would choose uneducated men to be His talmidim. Most of the commentators have missed this, opting rather to follow the traditional view that Yeshua is teaching the abolition of Torah laws as incompatible with the dawning of a new era, which He is bringing.¹⁰

Sensing, as I also have, the theological incongruity created by the interpretation of standard Christian authors, Tim Hegg continues:

This perspective, that Yeshua is doing away with the "old" because it is incompatible with the "new" simply does not obtain if one reads the parables carefully. In our current text, the reason one does not put a new patch on an old garment is because it will fail to repair the old garment but will make the tear even worse. In other words, the purpose is to preserve the old garment. Even in Luke's somewhat different telling of the parable, both garments are deemed as worthy, for the point is made that the new patch will not match the old garment. Once again, the point is that the goal is to patch the old garment in the best possible way so that it can be worn. It surely is not the point of our Master that the "old" is worn out and needs to be discarded. Just the opposite is true: the old garment needs to be patched so that it can continue to be worn.¹¹

Having sufficiently explained a theologically more sound way to understand the parable of the patch, Hegg drives his point home with this summary of the wine parable and the overall context of Yeshua's teachings on the subject:

...the contrast is not between "old wine" (as that which is unwanted) and "new wine" (as that which is now desirable). In both cases, the wine is essentially the same: it begins with grape juice and becomes wine through fermentation. What is more, the old wine is preferable according to Luke. Rather, the contrast relates to the ability of the skin to contain the wine. When connected to the whole enterprise of making disciples, the contrast is between someone who has already become engulfed in the traditions of the elders as having absolute authority and someone who was essentially uneducated. Normally a Sage would look for someone who had already excelled in his Torah studies to become one of his disciples. Yeshua sought just the opposite. He wanted "new wineskins" unstretched by the traditions of the elders. Or to put it another way, the manner in which Yeshua intends to fulfill the Torah (5:17) is clearly not by abolishing it, but by unwrapping it from the stranglehold of traditions in which it had been encased, traditions that had effectively eclipsed mercy as the motivating factor in halachic decisions. Rather, He desired to teach His disciples the Torah as God intended it to be understood and obeyed, an obedience that would be governed by mercy toward one's fellowman as befitting those who had themselves experienced the mercy of God. To do

¹⁰ Tim Hegg, *Commentary on the Book of Matthew Vol. 2* (TorahResource.org, 2007) p. 330.

¹¹ Ibid.

this required having disciples that were unencumbered by rabbinic education and were therefore “new wineskins” able to receive this reclamation of Torah as Yeshua would teach it, both in word and deed.¹²

In my personal opinion, Hegg’s remarks are so completely self-explanatory that I need little or no supporting commentary of my own to elaborate his thoughts to you. Instead, I will simply jump to the summary and conclusions of my own commentary.

Summary

In our opening few paragraphs we started by defining Replacement Theology, the notion that the Church has replaced Isra'el as the viable and ongoing People of God, and concluded that it is seriously lacking in its biblical accuracy, based on the fact that ancient prophecy as well as later scriptures clearly portray the ongoing relationship that God has with historic Isra'el (see example from Rom. 11:25-26). The Bible does not support Replacement Theology. Owing to the reality that many Christians are heavily influenced, not by careful and personal exegesis (extracting from the text) of any given passage, but instead by eisegesis (reading into the text), and by prevailing historic views of those passages, we turned to Matthew 9:14-17 to demonstrate how Yeshua’s parable of the unshrunk patch along with the parable of the wineskins has become a well-known launching point to essentially purport that Judaism and Christianity are incompatible with one another, and that Judaism must give way to Christianity if a person wishes to become a genuine and lasting follower of Yeshua and of His Father. Essentially, we demonstrated that this view would leave no room for “Messianic Judaism,” since all followers of Yeshua would become, de facto, “New Testament Christians” with no cultural ties to historic Judaism and its ritual Laws and customs.

We presented a sample sermon from Pastor John Piper and saw how, in my personal estimation, his interpretation of Matthew 9:14-17 supported an application that does not allow Judaism as “old wine” to coexist with the “new wine” of Yeshua’s teachings. I don’t believe, however, that Replacement Theology was Pastor Piper’s main purpose for presenting the teaching. Nevertheless, we saw that even though Pastor Piper postulated such a pejorative view of Judaism, he indeed does deserve our respect and admiration as a strong, mature shepherd of God. His thoughts, we concluded, are merely the product—no doubt—of centuries of poor Christian interpretation and application on the role and function of Torah and Isra'el in relation to Gentiles and Christianity. In other words, Pastor Piper is probably just repeating what he was taught in seminary.

Next we examined a short online article from GotQuestions.org, a Christian website that presents a resource of various inquiries and answers from an historic Christian worldview. As with Pastor Piper, this site also apparently upholds an interpretation of Matthew 9:14-17 that leaves Yeshua essentially denouncing his ancestral religion of

¹² Ibid., p. 332.

Judaism in order to usher in the age of a new religion that will come to be known as Christianity. Their comments seemed to focus on the premise that one should not mix Old Testament rituals with New Testament realities that are found only in Christ. The assumption here was that by the use of their phrase “rituals” I took it that they meant “a works-based religion.” What we found in our critique of this view, however, is that it is not necessary to jettison the whole “religious package” known as Judaism—to include its Torah-based rituals—in order to acquire genuine faith in Jesus, and that to enforce this view would essentially be like asking a religious Jew to stop being “religiously Jewish” in order to become “religiously Christian.”

We then observed a lengthy transcript of a sermon by Pastor John MacArthur on the passage of Matthew 9:14-17, and found Pastor MacArthur to be quite bold in his indictment of Judaism as a religion in need of replacement. Arguably, we found that the gist of MacArthur’s comments was really aimed at any and all dead religions—to include many modern religions we know of today. And, given these facts, indeed only Yeshua’s words carry the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Like any religion sans Christ, Judaism without Yeshua is hopelessly bankrupt, a point Pastor MacArthur aptly drove home time and time again. However, the overall thrust of John MacArthur’s sermon proved to mirror the central tenets of Replacement Theology too closely and thus eventually we had to reject his interpretation of Matthew 9:14-17 altogether in search of a more historically accurate and scripturally sound position.

Finally, from the prevailing views of the Christian camp, we examined the comments of Pastor David Guzik. Again, we stressed the notion that Pastor Guzik is a fine Bible expositor with a solid foundation in the biblical Jesus and a firm grasp of the central truths of the genuine gospel. Nevertheless, Pastor Guzik presented an interpretation of Matthew 9:14-17 that essentially agreed with the previously examined Christian positions, in that, Jesus did not come to repair Judaism but to replace it with the New Covenant. Indeed, Pastor Guzik feels that Jesus came to introduce something new, not to patch up something old, and thus there would be no need for a Jew to hold on to the cultural vestiges of Judaism once he embraced the New Covenant. In the end, it appears that all four traditional Christian views presented (Piper, gotQuestions.org, MacArthur, and Guzik) more or less agree with one another in this way: Judaism and its rituals represent an undesirable “unshrunk patch” and “old wine,” and Jesus’ teachings and the gospel represent the desirable “new garment” and “new wine.” The caricature of Judaism presented by all four samples seems to me to be too pejorative for a Messianic Jew to accept. What is more, based on the weight of the testimony of the rest of the Bible, the sentiments expressed by my four Christian samples do not seem to portray Yeshua’s teachings from this passage in the best historical and theologically accurate manner.

Having laid the foundation for an inquiry about historic Christianity’s views on Replacement Theology by presenting four easily accessible Internet resources on a few parables found in Matthew 9:14-17, we then turned to David Stern, author of the Complete Jewish Bible and the Jewish New Testament Commentary to show how Yeshua could not have been challenging his 1st century Jewish parishioners with a

choice to leave Judaism and embrace the [coming] religion of Christianity. What Yeshua was likely teaching instead was that in many ways existing Judaism, corrupted as it had become by the 1st century, was nevertheless “established” by HaShem using the precepts of the Torah, and was therefore of worth to God. However, because of this corruption, it badly needed to adjust itself to allow corrections to its structure in order to accommodate Messianic faith. At the same time, the newly acquired Messianic faith of an individual was expected to be adapted to existing Judaism as outlined by the Torah—for indeed Yeshua was speaking to Jewish people and as the Jewish Messiah they did not imagine nor expect a Jewish Messiah to come and establish a “new” religion (unless one chooses to narrowly define Messianic Judaism as “new”). The prophecies of the TaNaKH simply do not foretell of the coming Messiah’s supposed desire to swap out Judaism with a brand new religion once he arrives.

In an effort to provide a well-rounded teaching on the passage in question, we lastly cited the notes from Tim Hegg, a Messianic Jewish teacher at congregation Beit Hallel in Tacoma, Washington. Using his notes on Matthew 9:14-17, we observed that, instead of introducing the poison of Replacement Theology, and instead of hinting at the supposed abrogation of Judaism to the establishment of the up and coming religion of Christianity, Yeshua’s words are best explained from the context of the verses preceding Matthew 9:14-17. We must back up and see that the context of choosing and grooming a disciple was what our LORD had in view when he presented the subsequent parables about the unshrunk patch and the wineskins. In this way, nothing in the Matthew 9:14-17 passage supports an interpretation that leads to Judaism being destroyed and Christianity victoriously being recognized in its place. Instead, Yeshua’s words support the continuity of cultural Judaism for those Jewish people wishing to follow him, provided, his followers surrender to a complete transformation of the heart so that God the Father can write his Laws on their inward parts, a transformation that will radically change the way they walk out the Torah, a transformation already prophesied in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos (to name a few locations). A true Messianic Jew indeed!

Concluding Thoughts

We in the Body of Messiah need one another now more than ever before. These days in which we live are rife with darkness and the whole of humanity outside of Yeshua is desperately wicked and hopelessly soaked in sin. Now is not the time to tear each other down as fellow believers (indeed, is there ever a good time to tear each other down?). Of course we MUST demonstrate genuine love one for another if we are to be recognized by the world as followers of the Master. As he stated in the book of John, *“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

It was not my desire to single out a few Christian pastors and Christian resources for the purpose of mocking them or exposing their supposed gross negligence in biblical exposition. My aim was simply to examine Matthew 9:14-17 and, based on popular interpretations of this passage that I have found, ask the question, “Are Judaism and Christianity incompatible with one another?” First and foremost, I am asking the

question as a religious Jewish man that has embraced Jesus as the promised Messiah of my TaNaKH. However, I believe the question and answer has far-reaching relevance for Gentile Christians as well, particularly those seeking to further enhance their walk with Yeshua by embracing the ways of Torah.

If Christianity as a representation of the Truth of the gospel is to be relevant for unbelieving Jews seeking a genuine relationship with their God, then such Christianity obviously must never water down the message of the true Messiah, Jesus, but also it must be careful not to present a religion that is incompatible with a genuine, Torah-respectful lifestyle. To be sure, all well-meaning Bible students—both Jewish and Gentile alike—would agree that Moshe’s lifestyle was not incompatible with Yeshua. King Dahvid’s lifestyle was not incompatible with Yeshua’s. Paul’s lifestyle was not incompatible with Yeshua’s. And, all of these men were Torah observant, Torah respectful. The premise that Judaism and Christianity are incompatible with one another is a weak premise at best, and poor biblical exegesis at worst.

The Jew who embraces Jesus does not become a “Jewish-less” Christian, nor does he need to seek to lose his ancestral ties to Judaism. To be sure, as we already demonstrated, Paul teaches in the latter part of Romans chapter two that a true Jew is one who is both Jewish inside and out, and that this type of Jew receives praise, not from men, but from God. David Stern makes a fascinating statement in his book *Messianic Jewish Manifesto* that I want to use as my final quote for this commentary. Remember, David Stern is a Messianic Jewish man (one who believes in Yeshua and yet practices a sect of Judaism):

Some churches try to assimilate us to Gentile ways, denying our right to express our Jewishness; this is often done under the banner of eliminating “the middle wall of partition” between Jews and Gentiles, which has been broken down by Yeshua the Messiah. Other churches regard us as extra-special—either as weird, not quite-Christians, or as super-Christians doubly blessed. In the latter case we are put on display—we are requested to give our “testimony” every other week, and any question about the Old Testament is immediately referred to “our Jewish Christian”—in short, we become the church’s token Jew. In either case our Jewishness becomes a *cause celebre*, and—more to the point here—it gets defined not by ourselves but by the Gentiles around us.¹³

Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy yeshua613@hotmail.com

¹³ David H. Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto* (Jewish New Testament Publications, 1988) p. 13.