

**An Unrecognizable Messiah:
A Critical Review of Y. Shapira's
*The Return of the Kosher Pig***

by Rob Vanhoff

Where to begin?

I became increasingly saddened as I read through *The Return of the Kosher Pig* (hereafter, *RKP*), by Yitzhak Shapira. The title was clever enough, sure to get the attention of anyone who would recognize the oxymoron. In the book there seems a sincere desire to convince readers that a divine Messiah is not a foreign idea to Judaism after all, and that those who have rejected Yeshua on those grounds should therefore reconsider. Peppered throughout *RKP* are citations of rabbinic sources from a number of times and places which Shapira musters to support his claim. Unless the Gospel is explained using the proper Jewish tools, Yeshua will continue to be unrecognized by Jews time and again.

Sounds simple enough. So what about *RKP* was so problematic for a “Gentile believer” in Yeshua? Why the sadness in my heart? Why did it matter to me what a Jewish believer, so enthusiastic about his findings, was telling other Jews about Messiah Yeshua? Is this any of my business?

It's my business because I care about what people (Jew or Gentile alike) are being told about Yeshua. Also, I care about the ways in which people are taught or encouraged to think about the Bible and the history of its interpretations more generally. In my opinion, *RKP* teaches people wrong things about Messiah Yeshua and wrong ways to think about God's Word. This review is an attempt to explain why.

I want to get straight to the point. To bring some order to my many concerns about *RKP* I will focus first upon Paul's instructions to Titus. Then I will share criticisms of the book through the following lenses: interpretive methods promoted by *RKP*, anachronisms, ecclesiology, misdirected praise, miscellaneous problems, and audience. After these I will offer some concluding thoughts.

Paul's instructions to Titus

Scripture is the main lens through which I evaluate Shapira's teachings. In contrasting many citations from the book with facts from the Bible and history, I hope to show that the onus is on the author and his many supporters to demonstrate that the following text does *not* apply to *RKP*.

Titus 1:10-14 For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of “the Circumcision” [boasting a privilege of “Jewish” identity], who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not *teach* for the sake of sordid gain . . . for this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths [extra-biblical legends and “mysteries”] and commandments of men [man-made religion]

who turn away from the truth.

It is my conviction that the contents of Shapira's *RKP* fall into the categories of error described by Paul. To stay silent on this issue would be to ignore the clear imperative in this and other passages of Scripture.

At the very least, Shapira and his supporters are obligated to explain to us how and why Paul's inspired words to Titus do not apply to numerous unbiblical teachings promoted in *RKP* such as gematria, PaRDeS, Metatron, tree of life, letter mysticism, straw-man boast in "Jewish" over against "Christian" identity/education, praise for heretical teachers, and the like. The big difference I see between the errors described by Paul and the errors found throughout *RKP* is that Shapira draws from newer, medieval Jewish myth rather than from the Second Temple variety. But the results are the same. Those faithful to Scripture will see that there can be no good gain from Shapira's approach. He teaches things he ought not to teach and has abandoned truth for fables. *RKP* is a one lane, dead end street for anyone genuinely seeking to learn about and grow in relationship with the Yeshua of Nazareth of the Gospels.

Interpretive Methods

Shapira is convinced that only "proper" Jewish tools will reveal the identity of the true Messiah. For him, the truth of the Gospel comes not as a revelation by the Holy Spirit, but by clever presentation and argumentation. People are "won over" for Messiah only when the right combination of authentically Jewish "tools" are used. He writes,

I believe that any discussion on the issue of Messiah that happens outside a Jewish context, framework, and authority misrepresents the Messianic expectations among the Jews.... In order to explain the Messiah in a proper context, our entire mechanism of looking at scriptures must be reevaluated with the proper tools. The tools that will help with the discovery of the Messiah of Israel are found only within Judaism as the rightful owners of the Hebrew Bible. (*RKP*, p. 6)

As we continue in the book, we will learn how the appropriate Jewish context and "tools... found only within Judaism" will facilitate the "discovery" of the Messiah. According to Shapira, Gospel readers and Yeshua-believers need to check with a Jewish authority (whatever that means) to see whether they have accepted a misrepresentation of Yeshua or not.

"In my opinion, the method of presenting Yeshua as the Jewish Messiah needs to be reevaluated." (8)

What one finds repeatedly throughout the book is that for Shapira, the "proper tools" are found in medieval Jewish fables. They are: PaRDeS, gematria, sefirot, letter mysticism, and the rewriting of history. If readers are unfamiliar with any of these, descriptions are readily available on the internet. The key problem is that these "tools" were not the means by which Yeshua or His talmidim preached the Gospel, nor did many of them exist at the time. Yet for Shapira, any attempt to understand Messiah without such "tools" will lead to misrepresentation. The basic message of *RKP* is that unless presented in terms of a medieval kabbalistic worldview, Jews will not be able to recognize Yeshua as Messiah!

On the contrary, I argue. If you insist upon seeing Yeshua as a chassidic-style kabbalist rabbi, then the Messiah revealed in the Gospel, Yeshua of Nazareth, will not be recognizable to you.

Here are some examples of gematria (numerology) which Shapira believes to have special significance: 'or "light" = 'ein sof = 'adon 'olam; "The Messiah" = "Moses is alive"; shofar = sar kisseh = 'elohim sar ; truth = and this is Messiah Ben David. Many times in the book he mentions Pardes, various mysteries involving Hebrew letters, and promotes the kabbalistic cosmology of the Jewish ascetic-mystic Isaac Luria. Your "Titus 1" alarm should be loud and piercing.

Anachronisms in RKP

There are numerous anachronisms which if Shapira were to correct the book would lose much of its sensational "sizzle." And some of these anachronisms serve as pillars to his argument. But his house is built upon sand. Here are a few examples, more-or-less in order of appearance.

1. "Yeshua used the root word *kibbutz* or *gather* . . . to identify a concept similar to *Melachet Kibbutz Hanitzotzot*—the task of collecting sparks in order to bring the kingdom of God."
(5)

Here, Shapira not only tells his readers the specific Hebrew word Yeshua used (for which we have no data), but connects it with a much later lurianic-hasidic teaching about "gathering the sparks" of Jewish souls in order to establish the kingdom of God. This is not the only time Shapira uses 16th century kabbalah as a backdrop for reading the Apostolic Writings. This is not the kind of thinking that we should be encouraging in the Body of Messiah!

2. "Yeshua himself referred to *Hazal* in Matthew 23:1-3..."

This claim is a bit of a reach, as Shapira expects his reader to swallow the idea that Yeshua had the rabbis of the Mishnah and Talmud (*Hazal* is an acronym for *our sages, their memory for a blessing*) in mind. But no proof or argumentation is to be found in *RKP*, no support of the claim. We're just expected to accept it without question.

Where do we ever see the tannaim identifying with "scribes and Pharisees"? The rabbis of the Mishnah most certainly did not advertise themselves as heirs to the Pharisees. Rather, they distanced themselves from that name. When medieval commentators or even later chassidic teachers cite "Hazal," they are citing Mishnah, midrash, gemara, etc... halakhic authorities who lived centuries *after* the destruction of the temple. If Yeshua is referring to *Hazal* in Matthew 23, then it's only secondarily so. That is, it's because Shapira judges those later rabbis as guilty of the charges laid out in that chapter.

Perhaps the link that Shapira sees here between the "scribes and Pharisees" and the later "Hazal" is Yeshua's comments and commandment concerning the title "rabbi." But since the author refers to himself as "rabbi" (contrary to Yeshua's very commandment in the same chapter) are we left to assume that Shapira sees himself in the line of "Hazal"?

3. “I knew that if the Messiah was not recognizable to the Jews as the great *Admor*, he could not possibly be the Messiah of anyone.” (8)

In a footnote, he explains “[*Admor* is] title used for many rabbis considered ‘holy.’”

So let’s get this straight. Shapira believes that unless Yeshua is understood as having a title shared with many modern-era chassidic teachers, (made popular when used particularly for Shneur Zalman, founder of *Chabad*), then He can “not possibly be the Messiah of anyone”? This is nonsense. The confession of Who Yeshua is does not come from man, but from the Father in Heaven. To call Yeshua “Admor” is to put Him right in line with a host of chassidic and other pious rabbis of the last two-hundred years, some of whom are also called “divine” (אלקי). It’s lip service. So unless Shapira is calling to revoke this honorific address from every other Jewish teacher who has received it, then this too is nonsense.

4. “During the days of Messiah, the pig will be kosher again.” (12)

Shapira states that this was an important ‘fact’ that he discovered. But it’s actually a teaching that does not emerge until the middle ages. Also, his claim that the Midrash to Psalms *Shocheh Tov* dates to 2nd and 3rd centuries (p. 14) has no support in reality. There are no manuscripts whatsoever of the section of *Shocheh Tov* cited by Shapira. The earliest evidence we have is a printed text from the year 1515. How he arrives at a 2nd or 3rd century dating from a text printed in the early 16th century is anybody’s guess. [But on the other hand, millions of Mormons believe a book authored and printed in the 19th century was in fact a very ancient document. And there is no manuscript evidence for that book either.]

Following a clever talmudic midrash, Shapira takes the phrase *matir asurim* “releases the imprisoned” in **Psalm 146:7** to mean that God also “permits the forbidden” (pp. 14-16). I have heard this cited by other popular Messianic Jewish teachers as well, who tell people that by this rabbinic “re-reading” of Scripture we know that one day pigs (and presumably other forbidden things) will be “kosher.”

Yet if we take the time to investigate, we will see that the clear text of the Psalm has nothing to do with such a teaching.

The beautiful praise for Adonai in **Psalm 146** describes the Holy One gloriously...

- *Who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them*
- *Who vindicates the oppressed*
- *Who gives food to the hungry*
- *Who releases the imprisoned*
- *Who gives sight to the blind*
- *Who lifts up all who are bent over*
- *Who loves the righteous*
- *Who protects sojourners*
- *Who lifts up the fatherless and the widow*
- *Who opposes the wicked*
- *Who rules forever*

We might ask why anyone would feel the need to change the obvious meaning here. But that is what happens. Some creative midrashists wanted others to believe that one of these listed activities, “Who releases the imprisoned,” should actually be understood as “permits forbidden things.” And once this re-reading of Psalm 146 took hold within a strain of mystical Jewish thought, the next step was to assert that swine (forbidden) will one day be “kosher” (permitted). Sadly, Shapira and others have aided and abetted this obvious and dangerous distortion of the Word of God.

5. “...the main contributor to what later became known as the book of the *Zohar*, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai...” (31)

The texts that made up the *Zohar* were composed in 13th century Spain, and sold to the gullible as the words of an ancient mysterious figure. But Bar Yochai, who lived in the 2nd century, had nothing to do with it. Someone just hijacked the dead rabbi’s name. One thing is sure, sensational claims get popular attention and sell books!

6. Shapira seems to be mixed up about the history of the “Pardes” scheme.

Judaism has defined a systematic method of interpreting the scriptures over the course of centuries known as Pardes... (27)

Readers would be right to ask, “So ‘Judaism’ defined this system? How and when?” But they do not get an answer. Rather, Shapira goes on to write,

...Rabbi Yitzhak Luria, who was the founding rabbi of the Pardes method, explains that the Scriptures possess four layers that are represented by the word PARDES... In order to understand the Scriptures and come into the kingdom of God, one has to apply these four methods of interpretation. (29)

Now readers will ask Shapira, “So now Luria was the ‘founding rabbi of the Pardes method’? I thought you said it was ‘Judaism’? And without Pardes I cannot enter the kingdom of God?” This certainly does not sound like the Gospel to me. But Shapira goes further...

During the 13th century, it became quite popular to combine all four layers of interpretation known as Pardes into a systematic method of analyzing the scriptures. (31)

Let’s get this straight. Luria didn’t live until the 16th century, but he was the “founding rabbi” of this method... yet it was already popular back in the 13th century, and without it we will be unable to “come into the kingdom of God”? Our author sounds chronologically challenged and generally confused about the Gospel. But I must grant that, being such a fan of Luria, it is possible that Shapira accepts that mystic’s doctrine of reincarnation. Perhaps Luria developed the system in a past life, only to reinvigorate it in his 16th century incarnation... *I think not!*

Another anachronistic statement along these lines:

...in order to get a true portrait of Messiah and his identity from a Jewish understanding, we must consider the entire Pardes framework, especially if we are to understand Yeshua as the Messiah.” (32)

One must use Luria’s “Pardes” method in order to truly understand Yeshua? Why didn’t John the Baptist or any of the Apostles bother telling us this? Shapira would have his readers believe that without the “tools” of kabbalah, there can be no proper understanding of Yeshua as Messiah.

7. Shapira is a bit confused in his discussion of the *targumim* (Aramaic translations of the Scriptures) as well. Concerning the assumed translator behind Targum Yonatan, he writes...

...Yonatan Ben Uzziel, who lived in the Tannaim era in the first century. (42)

But then he writes...

The Targum of the Prophets was composed by Jonathan ben Uzziel under the guidance of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi..."

Are we to believe that Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi all lived in the first century? Which is it? Shapira hasn't thought this through, because he then cites the Talmud where it says ben Uzziel was a disciple of Hillel the Elder. This puts Yonatan back into the 1st century. But then, he cites Paul Hershon, who wrote "the Targum of the Prophets was executed by Yonatan ben Uzziel at the dictation of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi..." (43)

Did ben Uzziel live in *both* the time of Malachi and Hillel the Elder? He must have lived for four or five hundred years. Amazing!

8. Shapira claims that the 'Metatron' in Jewish mystical tradition is Yeshua.

I vehemently reject such an equation. Since I've written about this elsewhere, I won't get into it here. But two mistakes I will point out. Shapira writes of a medieval Jewish prayer that contains the name "Yeshua" and "Metatron," and asserts that this "Yeshua" is the Yeshua of the Gospels. He says that the "source of the [metatron/Yeshua] prayer dates back to 1st and 2nd centuries..." (228, 234). He has no evidence for this claim, because there is none. It is fantasy.

Second, Shapira leads his readers to believe that the book of *Jubilees* is an ancient Jewish source for Metatron (239-240; 243). *Jubilees* (2nd Century, BCE) never mentions 'Metatron.' Let me state this bluntly: Metatron is a Babylonian-Jewish invention drawing from earlier myths about Enoch coupled with a rejection of the Gospel. There is no such figure 'Metatron' until centuries after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, when Yeshua's teachings had already reached far out into the world, East and West, even translated into many languages.

9. Shapira repeatedly refers to the Apostle Paul as "Rabbi Saul" and "Rabbi Shaul."

This is problematic because neither Paul nor anyone else ever referred to him as 'rabbi' until quite recently. I think Paul (at least after the Damascus road incident) would not have been comfortable with people addressing him as such.

We can learn from Rabbi Shaul's communication that some of the traditions or kabalot were passed to the talmidim by word of mouth. We often refer to that in Judaism as תורה שבעל פה (the Oral Torah). (45)

We see here and elsewhere that Shapira has not grasped the distinction between "oral tradition" on one hand and the 3rd century CE rabbinic ideology of *torah shebeal pe* on the other. We have plenty of evidence for all manner of text-interpretive and "oral" tradition from the Second Temple Period (Most families, communities, and cultures have some sort of "oral tradition," so that is nothing unique in and of itself). Within the Jewish world from the time of the Hasmoneans on, groups competing for the authority of their own interpretations and life style (what Josephus referred to as "philosophies") had worked out their own "spin" on texts and symbols inherited from ancient Israel, and even wrote new texts. The disciples of Yeshua

also held to specific traditions, rejected others, and produced new texts. But the rabbinic concept of “Oral Torah” comes onto the scene at a much later time and is a different animal all together.

Bi-lateral Ecclesiology

Shapira’s commitment to talmudic thought means that he accepts the map-of-the-world defined therein. That is, 613 commandments for Jews, and 7 for the so-called “Sons of Noah.” But this is not the map used by the Apostles, who referred to believers in Yeshua as sons of Abraham rather than sons of Noah.

...the writers of the Brit HaChadasha during the 1st century Judaism saw a real distinction between the Jews and the Goyim in their halacha.

To support this statement, Shapira contrasts Yeshua’s words in Matthew 5:17ff with the Apostles’ letter in Acts 15. The former is presented as a message for Jews and the latter a message for Gentiles. One Messiah with two messages. “Goyim” are given a simple “halacha” to follow, which is separate from the covenantal requirements given to Jews alone.

The point here is quite clear; those from the nations are certainly encouraged as a voluntary action to grow in their understanding of Torah because of their faith in Yeshua of Natzeret, but at the same time their legal requirements under Torah were not the same as they were for Jews... (10-11)

For Jews, Torah is obligatory. For Gentiles, it is voluntary. This view is similar to the doctrinal position of the UMJC (Though I don’t know whether that organization would assert that Torah is *obligatory* for anyone. It is my understanding that UMJC sees Torah more like a cultural heritage unique to Jews). But instead of addressing this issue here, I will refer readers to two books by Tim Hegg: *FellowHeirs*, *I Will Build My Ekklesia*, or to his in-depth commentaries on *Romans* and *Galatians*.

Misdirected Praise

There are two kinds of praise printed in this book that felt strange to me. On one hand, there is praise for Shapira’s work, found in several endorsements. On the other hand, there is Shapira’s praise for others.

In the book’s Forward, the UMJC’s Executive Director Russell Resnik suggests that *RKP* has significant instructional value. Resnik asserts that the book “serves as an ideal introduction for readers unfamiliar with the rabbinic literature” (vii). By such a statement I question whether Resnik has obtained any sound training in rabbinics. *RKP* encourages the wrong kind of thinking. We need to sharpen peoples’ minds, not dumb them down.

The most shocking endorsement for *RKP* came from Dr. Michael Brown, who praises Shapira for his “much careful study and great spiritual passion” and encourages people to read the book. I wonder if Dr. Brown, whose own work has demonstrated very close and accurate readings of rabbinic sources, actually took time to read this book he so enthusiastically endorses. Why didn’t Titus 1 or parallel passages of Scripture come to his mind? Did he find no cause for alarm?

In terms of individuals praised by the author, Shapira is particularly fond of the controversial Yitzchak Ginzburg. For those who are not aware, Ginzburg is a popular Chabad leader in Israel whose doctrines include teaching that Jewish blood is more precious than Gentile blood; that Jews are made in God’s image but Gentiles are not. This logical extension of

medieval kabbalistic doctrine also finds expression in the radical political philosophy Ginzburg promotes and desires for the State of Israel. His worldview is most hostile to the Gospel.

Yet here are some of Shapira's praises for Ginzburg.

1. "one of the chief leaders of the Chabad movement in Israel" (33)

This first statement is basically true, and does not really qualify as a praise.

2. "one of the greatest Jewish minds of the 21st century" (114)

Now we're getting into the realm of subjective praise. As an aside, on this same page Shapira favorably cites a commentary by Ginzburg wherein the word סִלּוּ (*sollu*, "lift up, exhalt") in Psalm 68:5 is interpreted in light of the English word "solo"! This is ridiculous, as is Shapira's claim that the Hebrew word *min* (מִן) is a Hebrew acronym for "believers in Yeshua the Nazarene" (21).

3. "one of the greatest Jewish minds of the 20th century (141)

4. "... the brilliant Rabbi Ginzburg" (210)

5. "one of the most important rabbis of the 20th century..." (221)

6. "one of the greatest *poskim* of the 20th century" (222)

7. "one of the greatest *poskim* in the 21st century..." (261)

In case you thought this was a bit over-the-top, Shapira uses similar praise for others.

- Kadoori/Kaduri (both spellings) was "one of the greatest rabbis of the 20th century" (191)
- "[Yehuda] Liebes, one of the greatest investigators of Jewish mystical writings in the 20th century..." (229)

What is Shapira trying to accomplish with these kinds of statements? What I hear is a repeated effort to sound larger-than-life, to sound sensational. Personally, I find the beating of these drums either numbing or hypnotizing.

Miscellaneous Problems

In his argument for a "divine Messiah in Judaism," Shapira leans upon the fact that some within Chabad (like Ginzburg) believe that Schneerson is a divine Messiah. Many of the arguments he uses in the book could equally be used by Chabad. The only difference, Shapira would say, is that they got the wrong guy. When it all boils down, what I hear Shapira saying is, "Well, Chabad can believe in a divine messiah and still be Jewish, so I can believe in a divine messiah and still be Jewish." But Shapira should read up on the ways that the Jewish mystical tradition was influenced by medieval Spanish Catholicism and Islamic Sufism.

Another statement Shapira makes in passing is "we all have good and evil inclinations" (204). According to Scripture, we have evil inclinations. The doctrine of a "good inclination" is foreign to the world view of Yeshua and His talmidim.

Shapira praises the *AENT*'s rendering of **Philippians 2**. "The Aramaic English New

Testament beautifully translates the verse to read ‘...who as he was in the likeness of Elohim, did not regard it sinful to be the coequal of Elohim’” (136). The word ‘sinful’ is nowhere to be found in the text; not in the Syriac, not in the Greek. This is reading into the text something that is not there. Nevertheless, Shapira reads this as a beautiful translation.

Shapira cites simply “the Blue Letter Bible” for his understanding of Greek (184).

Shapira equates the Lurianic concept of *tzimtzum* with Paul’s teaching in Philippians. He writes,

The same pattern of reduction [*tzimtzum*] that Ha’ari [Isaac Luria] spoke about is mentioned in the letter to the Philippians. . . ‘But emptied himself, taking the form of a slave....’ The Greek word κενόω, equated with the word קַיֵּץ in Hebrew, refers to the “reduction” of his true nature in order to take human form. . . HaShem reduced himself to “the middle point” in order to create the world... It is God himself who changed the universe when he took the form of a man through the process of *tzimtzum*. (267-8)

Clearly, Shapira takes this mention of “emptying” in Philippians as the incarnation, and reads them both through the lens of Lurianic kabbalah. Yet the Son was in fact “sent” by the Father, as is clear in Scripture, He is not a “reduction.” He ascended to the Father as well. Scripture also tells us that the Son had glory with the Father before the world was made (John 17:5). Also, it is possible that in Philippians 2, Paul is referring to Yeshua’s pouring out of Himself at the cross, as He gave His life for the sins of His people. “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). If this is the case, then this idea of *tzimtzum* for incarnation is no parallel at all. [For the meaning of κενόω as “pouring out,” see the LXX description of Rebecca’s actions at Genesis 24:20. The jar remains the jar, only the water is no longer in it. Messiah had the power to defend Himself, even to the point of bringing angels to His side during the trial. “Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and He will at once send Me more than twelve legions of angels?” **Matthew 26:53**. Instead, He willingly laid aside the use of His divine power in order to accomplish the will of His Father. He poured Himself out as a drink offering.]

Philippians 2:3 is helpful here. “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” This is the mind that Yeshua teaches us to have, one for another. Another passage to consider is **2 Corinthians 8:9** “For you know the grace of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.” We do not need Lurianic kabbalah to help us understand this concept.

Towards the end of the book, Shapira writes, “The ‘kosher pig’ is the real *tzimtzum* of YHVH, king of Mount Zion, who is the most kosher king that Israel ever had and will ever have.” (277)

Kabbalistic *tzimtzum* and “kosher pigs” are concepts foreign to the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. They do not help us understand the Gospel, nor do they help us to understand the incarnation in any way other than what Chabad already believes and claims about their decades-dead-and-buried Schneerson. There is no profit to the Kingdom of Messiah Yeshua for insisting that these strange ideas have a place in sound biblical interpretation or teaching.

There is also a slightly naive picture of Hasidic messianism. The oldest primary source for the historical Baal Shem Tov is the letter he wrote to his brother in law (late 1700s), wherein he describes his ascent to heaven and conversation with ‘the Messiah.’ Those in Chabad (like Shapira’s hero Ginzburg) who proclaim the decades-dead Lubavitcher ‘Rebbe’ is ‘the Messiah’ necessarily see him also as the incarnation of the Besht’s heavenly conversation

partner. And they are not ignorant of the Gospel. Obviously, this means that the tradition informing their conception of ‘the Messiah’ has nothing whatsoever to do with Yeshua of Nazareth. Chabad teaches a different ‘gospel’ altogether.

Who is Shapira’s Audience?

What group of Jews is Shapira wanting to reach? For whom is he writing? If it is Chabad, many of them are already convinced, using the “same authentic Jewish tools,” of another ‘Messiah.’

Is he just trying to make Messianics feel better about believing in the “divinity” of Yeshua? [BTW, Shapira would do well to define the adjective אֱלֹקִי, because many famous rabbis are called “divine” as mentioned earlier. Shapira would have to clarify for his Jewish audience how one “divine” rabbi is different than another.]

Perhaps his target audience is non-committed Jews who like to play around with gematria, kabbalah, and to read “the rabbis.” But one could ask, who are these Jews that believe in kabbalah, gematria, Pardes, etc... but do not serve a rabbi according to halakhah? Serving a rabbi is crucial for pious Jews who want to genuinely embody the Jewish tradition of *Avodat Hashem*. Not only that, it is a commandment of Oral Torah!

Pious Jews, whether they are disciples of a rabbi or have left that world, will do best to read the Gospels directly, and not the rabbinic “control narratives” like *Toldot Yeshu* and not books like *RKP*. Let the word of God do the work, rather than a false confidence in slight of hand and parlor tricks.

Perhaps Shapira’s book appeals to ex-Christians (Jews and Gentiles alike) who have been lured away by “anti-missionary groups,” and who need to know that Yeshua really is “Jewish” after all. I am reminded of Paul’s sobering words to Timothy:

“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” **2 Timothy 4:3-4**

Concluding Thoughts

In my view, Shapira’s book is an interesting case of someone trying to serve two masters. He would like to have both Chabad kabbalah and the Yeshua revealed in the Apostolic Writings. But when all is said and done, this renegade “rabbi” abandons the Gospel and obtains a cut-and-paste kabbalah. The product is devoid of any substantive resemblance to the Yeshua of the Gospels, and is at odds with how mystical texts are read within Orthodox Judaism. *RKP* leaves us with an unrecognizable Messiah. The new “patch” has torn the old garment.

Inasmuch as Shapira’s approach is praised as a positive direction for Jewish believers in Yeshua, we’re in trouble. The list of endorsements by various “Messianic rabbis” inside the cover is not so surprising, but I do wonder how many of them actually read the book cover to cover. The real shocker for me was to see Dr. Michael Brown among them. How can believers in Yeshua believe that there can be a positive gain in abandoning truth?

I am reminded of how the earliest scholars assigned to study, organize, and assemble the newly discovered Dead Sea Scrolls lacked the foresight to recognize that smoking, scotch-tape, and oil were not conducive for the long-term preservation of the delicate manuscript fragments. Shapira’s “tools” actually hinder the cause. But I am confident that the larger

“messianic” world will recognize soon enough that the approach taken in *RKP* will ultimately prove fruitless for Yeshua’s kingdom. There is no profit in peddling the Jewish mysticism taught by Luria or Chabad as “background” for the Gospel.

If we’re going to grow in our discernment and wisdom concerning the *Torah of the Messiah*, then we need to be completely immersed in His Word. *RKP* is a big distraction from that aim. If you want to know Yeshua better, stay away from Shapira’s book and stick with the Bible, Bible languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic), and history. Be patient with yourself, and stick with it. Avoid the sensationalism and hype that is plaguing the messianic world today. And finally, prayerfully consider taking some classes at a school that holds the word of God and the person of Yeshua as the very center of genuine faith.