

Good Fish, Bad Fish (Kosher)

I have been reading through your *Messianic Kosher Helper*, and was surprised that among all of the Bible passages addressed, I did not see Yeshua's parable about the good fish and bad fish mentioned. Do you not think that this is a description of kosher and non-kosher fish being separated out?

While the *Messianic Kosher Helper* addresses many Bible passages surrounding the issues of eating and kosher, from both the Tanach and Apostolic Scriptures, it is very true that Matthew 13:47-50 is not one of them. As the production for the *Messianic Kosher Helper* entered into some of its final stages, the criteria for addressing a Bible passage and the Torah's dietary code, had to narrow, as we classified verses on the basis of terms like "food" or "clean" or "unclean," or scenes where some kind of eating would be taking place. Yeshua's word of Matthew 13:47-50 did not meet these criteria, and we thought it much more important to address passages seldom, if ever, addressed by Messianics, such as: 1 Corinthians 10:14-33; Philippians 3:17-19; Hebrews 9:8-10; 13:9-10, et. al. Whether or not Yeshua's word of Matthew 13:47-50, actually has anything to do with clean and unclean fish, was disputable enough for us to save pages. We are certainly happy to answer the question, though, regarding if there is any relationship between Matthew 13:47-50 and the kosher dietary laws.

A straightforward reading of Matthew 13:47-50, especially in light of some of the preceding vignettes about tares sown among wheat (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43), demonstrates how Yeshua's intention was to give a description of how the righteous will be separated out from the unrighteous. The righteous, those who are redeemed and have a proper faith in God, will enter into His Kingdom, and the unrighteous will be separated from it. The Kingdom of Heaven is welcoming of many, but just as one who fishes with a dragnet in the sea has to separate out good fish from bad fish, so do the righteous have to be sorted out from the unrighteous:

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering *fish* of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good *fish* into containers, but the bad they threw away. So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:47-50, NASU).

The suggestion that the good fish are clean or kosher fish, and the bad fish are unclean or unkosher fish, is not without merit. In *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, Aaron M. Gale asserts precisely this: "Fishermen in the Sea of Galilee would have had to separate kosher and nonkosher fish from their nets."¹ A similar conclusion is witnessed in the 2012 book, *Biblically Kosher: A Messianic Jewish Perspective on Kashrut*:

"In the Master's parable of the great catch, he uses 'good' (that is, kosher) fish to represent 'the righteous' and 'bad' (non-kosher) fish to represent 'the evil.' This correlates to the view that the characteristics of non-kosher animals, which are often scavengers and predators, correlate to evil character traits and behaviors."²

It is possible that the "good fish" representing the righteous, are intended by Yeshua to be like kosher fish, and that the "bad fish" representing the unrighteous are intended to be unkosher fish. This is not entirely required, though, for a proper interpretation of Matthew 13:47-50. The bad fish could just as well have been kosher fish that, when inspected, were undersized, had some kind of deformity or disease, or perhaps even demonstrated some sort of hostility when caught. While it is interesting to posit the thought that the good fish were kosher and the bad

¹ Aaron M. Gale, "The Gospel According to Matthew," in Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, NRSV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 26.

² Aaron Eby, *Biblically Kosher: A Messianic Jewish Perspective on Kashrut* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2012), 152.

fish were nonkosher, there are many more passages of the Apostolic Scriptures, to be sure,³ which much more clearly involve the kosher dietary laws and their validity for the post-resurrection era, that have now been given some degree of analysis in the 2014 *Messianic Kosher Helper*.

³ The total list of Apostolic Scriptures passages, addressed in detail, in the *Messianic Kosher Helper*, include:
Matthew 5:17-19; Mark 7:1-23; Acts 10:1-48; 11:1-18; 15:19-21; Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; 8; 10:14-33; Galatians 2:11-14; Philippians 3:17-19; Colossians 2:16-23; 1 Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 1:14-16; Hebrews 9:8-10; 13:9-10; 1 Peter 1:14-16.