

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Least in the Kingdom

by J.K. McKee updated 08 November, 2006 www.messianicapologetics.net

What does it mean to be “least in the Kingdom”?

There is a variance of interpretations in the Messianic movement regarding what being “least of the Kingdom” means. In Matthew 5:19, Yeshua the Messiah says, “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” What we may assume from these words is that one’s status in the Kingdom of God can be determined by how one handles or approaches the Torah or Law of Moses. If one teaches the Torah, and encourages others to keep its commandments, that person will be considered great in the Kingdom. If one teaches against the Torah and its commandments, that person will be considered the least.

One of the most sobering words from our Lord comes in Matthew 13:41-42, speaking of His return. Yeshua says that when He returns, “The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” He also says, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS’” (Matthew 7:21-23; cf. Psalm 6:8).

These references to lawlessness, or *anomia* (ἀνομία), are references to those who deny the place of the Torah in their lives. Some have interpreted being “least” in the Kingdom as not being in the Kingdom at all. Unfortunately, there are some in the Messianic community who make it their job to judge the salvation of many who are not pursuing a Torah observant lifestyle as *they* are. **It is not our job as limited human beings to judge the eternal salvation of anyone.** But, it is our job to take the words of the Messiah very seriously. If we are not pursuing compliance with what He has told us concerning the Torah, then what is going to happen? The Torah is God’s standard of what He considers acceptable and unacceptable. If we are not pursuing an acceptable lifestyle, then are we in rebellion to God? Are we making ourselves out to be God?

The Messiah attaches rewards to those who keep the commandments of the Torah and teach them to others, and penalties to those who do not keep the commandments and teach others to break them. The word “least” or *elachistos* (ἐλάχιστος) is of importance here, as it “**pert. to being considered of very little importance, insignificant, trivial**” (BDAG).¹ What does this mean? Does it mean that many who have taught that the Torah is no longer to be followed are going to be given few rewards in the Kingdom? Again, it is *not our place* to judge the status of anyone, but we must heed the Lord’s words and endeavor to follow His admonitions.

Being “least in the Kingdom” can definitely be taken as a word concerning one’s status in the Kingdom, in terms of being given few rewards and accolades. We need to all remember, though, how one’s status in the Kingdom of God is ultimately determined by only God Himself. He is the final Judge of all human beings.

¹ BDAG, 314.

J.K. McKee (B.A., University of Oklahoma; M.A., Asbury Theological Seminary) is the editor of Messianic Apologetics (www.messianicapologetics.net), a division of Outreach Israel Ministries (www.outreachisrael.net). He is a 2009 recipient of the Zondervan Biblical Languages Award for Greek. He is author of numerous books, dealing with a wide range of topics that are important for today's Messianic Believers. He has also written many articles on theological issues, and is presently focusing his attention on Messianic commentaries of various books of the Bible.

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