



THE LAST WILL BE FIRST AND THE FIRST LAST

By George Lujack

Yeshua (Jesus) made numerous statements indicating that the last will be first and the first will be last. This article will examine those statements, and the context in which they were said, showing the different applications of who the first and the last are.

MATTHEW 19:30:

“But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

The context of the first being last, and the last being first in Matthew 19:30 concerns earthly possessions, wealth, and sacrifice for Yeshua’s (Jesus’) name’s sake.

MATTHEW 19:23-29:

Then Yeshua (Jesus) said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?”

But Yeshua (Jesus) looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Then Peter answered and said to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?”

So Yeshua (Jesus) said to them, “... And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.”

The first of this world, the rich, and those who haven’t sacrificed anything, or who have sacrificed minimally for Yeshua’s (Jesus’) name, will be last in the kingdom of heaven. Those who have given up family, worldly pursuits, wealth, and possessions will be rewarded as the first in His kingdom.

MATTHEW 20:16:

“So the last will be first, and the first last.”

The context of the last being first, and the first being last in Matthew 20:16 concerns entrance into and rewards within the kingdom of heaven.

MATTHEW 20:1-15:

“FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE A LANDOWNER WHO WENT OUT EARLY IN THE MORNING TO HIRE LABORERS FOR HIS VINEYARD. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.’ So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.’ And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.’ But he answered one of them and said, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?’

The Jews were God’s first chosen people, the first branches ‘appointed’ by God to tend to the things of the vineyard (the kingdom of heaven) and bring forth His word to the world. The Gentile world didn’t receive the Scriptures until after Yeshua (Jesus) came as the Messiah (Christ) into the world.

MATTHEW 8:11-12:

“And I say to you that many [GENTILES] will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom [EVIL JEWS] will be cast out into outer darkness.”

Righteous Gentiles, who were last to receive the Scriptures, didn’t labor for the kingdom of heaven as long as righteous Jews did, but many of them will be first into the kingdom of heaven. Evil Jews will be cast out.

LUKE 13:30:

“And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last.”

The context of the last being first, and the first being last in Luke 13:30 concerns the entrance of the Jews and Gentiles into the kingdom of heaven. The dead in Messiah (Christ) will be resurrected first (1 Corinthians 15:51-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17), and the righteous Jews who do not know Messiah (Christ) will be resurrected last, upon His return to Earth, and then they will know He is the Lord (Ezekiel 37).

LUKE 13:20-29:

And again Yeshua (Jesus) said, “To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.” And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then one said to Him, “Lord, are there few who are saved?”

And He said to them, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open for us,’ and He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know you, where you are from,’ then you will begin to say, ‘We [JEWS] ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’ But He will say, ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’ There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves [EVIL JEWS] thrust out. They [GENTILES] will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.”

There will be Jews who were first to see Yeshua (Jesus), who ate and drank in His presence, and listened to Him as He taught in the streets of Jerusalem and the surrounding cities and villages of Israel, who will be thrust out of His kingdom. Gentiles, who were last to hear His words, will be first into the kingdom of heaven. It is not the hearers of His words, but the doers of His words who are justified as righteous (Romans 2:13; James 1:22-25). The last being first and the first last also applies in a positive way towards righteous living Jews who have not yet accepted Yeshua (Jesus) as their Messiah, Lord, and Savior. Jews practicing righteousness through Judaism are the lost sheep of the house of Israel and Yeshua came for His lost sheep (Matthew 10:7, 15:24). The parable of the lost sheep and prodigal son (Luke 15) is a metaphor for a sinner who turns back and repents, but is also reflective of the sometimes-jealous relations that Jews and Gentiles have towards each other over God.

LUKE 15:4-6:

Yeshua (Jesus) spoke this parable to them, saying:

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep [THE DIFFERENT ETHNICITIES OF THE WORLD], if he loses one of them [THE JEWS], does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’”

LUKE 15:11-13:

Then He said: “A certain man had two sons [A JEW AND GENTILE]. And the younger of them [THE JEW] said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger [JEWISH] son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.”

In this interpretation, the Jewish prodigal son is driven from his homeland to foreign lands, then returns to his homeland, comes to His senses and accepts Yeshua (Jesus) as his Messiah, Lord, and Savior. Afterward, there will be celebrations and rejoicing in God’s kingdom.

LUKE 15:20-24:

“And he [THE JEWISH SON] arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the [JEWISH] son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”

“But the father [GOD] said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my [JEWISH] son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.”

Now the Gentile son, who had believed in Yeshua (Jesus) all along, got angry and jealous, and would not celebrate the return of his Jewish brother.

LUKE 15:25-32:

“Now his older [GENTILE] son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, ‘Your [JEWISH] brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’ But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father [GOD] came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this [JEWISH] son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’

And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your [JEWISH] brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’”

The following interpretation will most certainly play out among some Gentile believers when they see the celebrations in God’s kingdom over the return of the Jews. When the Jews of the house of Israel as a nation return to the fold, accept Yeshua (Jesus) as their Messiah, Lord, and Savior, and are regrafted into the kingdom of heaven, there will be rejoicing. Many Gentiles who were first to accept Yeshua (Jesus) will be resentful over the rejoicing over the Jews, who will be the last people to accept Yeshua (Jesus).

MARK 9:35:

“If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”

The context of the desire to be first, and the call to be last in Mark 9:35 concerns servitude in this age, to achieve greatness in the age to come.

MATTHEW 20:25-28; MARK 10:42-45:

Yeshua (Jesus) called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

To be first in the kingdom of heaven, one must first be a servant for His kingdom, and be last to be served of the things of this age, just as Yeshua (Jesus) came to serve and not be served.