

## According to the Law

### Esther 1:1-15 (KJV)

**1** Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, (this is Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces:) **2** That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace, **3** In the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him: **4** When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and fourscore days. **5** And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace; **6** Where were white, green, and blue, hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble: the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black, marble. **7** And they gave them drink in vessels of gold, (the vessels being diverse one from another,) and royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king. **8** And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure. **9** Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus. **10** On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, **11** To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on. **12** But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him. **13** Then the king said to the wise men, which knew the times, (for so was the king's manner toward all that knew law and judgment: **14** And the next unto him was Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, which saw the king's face, and which sat the first in the kingdom;) **15** What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the king Ahasuerus by the chamberlains?

In this story, we hear about the King of the Persians, Ahasuerus. Sometimes when we read the stories of these times in the Bible we get confused between the Babylonians and the Persians. The Babylonians lived in what is modern-day Iraq. These are the people who invaded Judah and Israel and carried the people away into captivity.

The Babylonians also believed that the king was the law. Whatever the kings said was law. If the king said something that didn't make sense, it was still law. The rule went from the king and the law (same thing), to the nobles, to the people

The Persians, however, believed in the rule of law. The law was preeminent. The law was above the king. The king could not make law by himself; the king had to obey the law and any new laws had to conform to the old laws. The law was sacred and the king was the chief keeper of that law.

That is why we see in this story so many references to things being done "according to the law." The law of the Persians could not be broken even by the king himself. When the king served wine (verse 8), it was per the law. When he wanted to know what legal recourse he had when the queen did not do as she was told (verse 12), the king went to the law.

In modern example, we would use the US Constitution and the President; the President cannot go against the laws defined within the Constitution. The US Constitution exists above any individual person that occupies the Presidency. The President must obey the law.

On December 10, 2013, President Barack Obama attended the funeral service for Nelson Mandela. He can be seen in a photo sitting next to Denmark Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt. He can even be seen touching her on the shoulder. Notice the look on his face and the look on the First Lady.

A few minutes later, we can see that the President and First Lady have switched seats. Not only that, but the First Lady has her back to the Prime Minister of Denmark and is looking at her through the corner of her eye. The Prime Minister of Denmark suddenly has something very interesting to read on her phone. There are days when I respect the office of President, but I disagree with the man who currently holds that office, and there are other days when I totally agree with

him. I don't care if you are the President of the United States and the Commander in Chief of the most powerful military that has ever existed in the history of the planet; when your wife tells you to switch seats, you switch seats.

The same was true of the King of Persia: it didn't matter that he was the king of the most powerful kingdom on earth at the time; he still needed to obey the law.

So, the king brought in his experts in the law and he asked them, "What does the law say?" If the law is the Constitution and the King is the President, then these guys would be like the Supreme Court. The king brings them in and asks, "What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law?" These men were experts in the law. They were experts in religious law, civil law, criminal law, and natural law. These men knew that according to the law, the penalty for stealing was death. They knew that according to the law, the penalty for striking your father was to have your hand cut off.

The Bible also says that they "knew the times" (verse 13). They knew that according to the law, the constellations in the sky appeared in a given order. They knew about the phases of the moon and the seasons of the year. If you wanted to know when Mars and Venus were going to be in conjunction in the sky, you asked these guys.

No matter what rule or law you need to know, these men were the experts in all aspects of law and order. So, when the King wanted to know what legal recourse he had with the Queen, he called his legal advisors and asked them. These men were the ones who advised the king that he should divorce the Queen because if she got away with breaking the law, then it would be OK for every woman in the kingdom to break the law as well. This is because when you have the law as the preeminent power in your government, then that law applies to everyone equally. It is called "common law." Common law means that the law applies to everyone, and any judgment applied to one person must be applied equally to everyone who commits the same offence.

So, it is that the King's wise men (verse 13) advised him that he should apply the principle of common law: that all women should obey their husbands. Since the Queen is not above the law, then she would have to endure the punishment of that law.

**Esther 1:20 (KJV)** And when the king's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his empire, (for it is great,) all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small.

Everyone must obey the law, both small and great.

## **God's Law**

Now God's law is interesting, because it is a mixture of the Babylonian and the Persian models. In God's law, the law is whatever God says it is (like the Babylonians). The law comes from God and God is above the Law. God can change the law as he sees fit, even if we feel that He is being inconsistent.

**Exodus 20:13 (KJV)** Thou shalt not kill.

**1 Samuel 15:3 (KJV)** Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

Some people have a huge problem with these two passages, because they seem to be inconsistent. How can God say that killing is wrong and then say that killing is OK? They get all caught up in trying to understand how scriptures like this can come from the same God. How can it be a sin to kill in one case, and yet it's a sin to not kill in another?

The problem is that we want God to be more like us; we want to make God in our image rather than making ourselves in His image. We are under God's law and we want God to be under that law as well. We want God to behave according to the law that he created. We are OK with God creating the law, just so long as he is subject to that law as well. But God is over the law; a sin is whatever God says it is, even if it betrays our sense of consistency. God is what He is and it frustrates us that he continues to be what He is despite what we think He "should" be. God refuses to be made in our image of Him.

But then God throws a wrench into our thinking. God as God is above the law and the source of law. We as human beings are subject to that law even if we don't

understand it or agree with it. But what if God were to become a human being? What happens when God comes to earth as a human being?

As God, he is above the law; he makes the law, but he is not subject to the law. As God, if he needs to change the law, he changes it. If God needs the waters of the Jordan River to stand up like a wall (Joshua 3:16), then it does. If God needs the sun to stay in the sky so that Joshua can defeat the Amorites (Joshua 10:13), then it does. God makes the law, so whatever he says is the law.

But as a human, we are subject to the law; the law is above us. As a human, we need to obey the law.

Jesus is both God and man at the same time. So, if Jesus is God, he is above the law. But if Jesus is man, then he is below the law. How can this be? How can one person be both above the law and below the law at the same time? We need to ask some legal experts. What shall we do according to the law?

It is not insignificant that some of the first people who come to visit Jesus in Bethlehem are “wise men from the east.” Although Matthew does not tell us how many of these “wise men” there were, tradition holds that there were 3, because they brought 3 gifts: gold, myrrh, and frankincense. There could have been 7, just as there were with king Ahasuerus in the book of Esther. Matthew also doesn’t tell us from where in the east they came, but I do know that Persia is east of Jerusalem.

I am certainly not going to tell you that the same men who were advisers to the king in the book of Esther were the exact same men who appeared to Jesus in Bethlehem. I am also not prepared to state unequivocally that the wise men in Matthew came from the Persian Empire. But I am willing to say that the “wise men” who visited Jesus had the same job function as the “wise men” who counseled the king in Esther: their job was to make sure that everything was done according to the law.

#### **Galatians 4:4-5 (KJV)**

**4** But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, **5** To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

God (who is above the law) takes on human flesh (which is under the law), so the first thing we need are some experts in the law to come certify the birth and make sure that everything is done according to the law. These wise men come from the east and go to the palace of Herod where they immediately start making sure that everything is done according to the law. To do that the Messiah must be:

Be a descendent of David	2 Samuel 7:12-13 Isaiah 9:7: Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David Isaiah 11:1-5 Jeremiah 23:5:	Matthew 1:1: The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.
Be born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2: But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah...out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel	Matthew 2:4-5: And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea
Be born of a virgin	Isaiah 7:14: Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,	Matthew 2:11: And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother
Be visited by people from all over	Isaiah 60:6: The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come:	Matthew 2:1: ...behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

Receive gold, frankincense, and myrrh	Isaiah 60:6: ...they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD.	Matthew 2:11: ...and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.
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These wise men, experts in the law, were present at the birth of Jesus to certify that his birth was fully in compliance with the law. They brought him gifts, because that is what the law required. They came from afar, because the law required that too. Down the big checklist they went, making sure that everything was done according to the law.

As God he made the law, and as a man he fulfilled the law.

**Matthew 5:17 (KJV)** Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

**Romans 10:4 (KJV)** For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Even his eventual death on the cross was accomplished because that is what the law required. According to the law, it is illegal for any human being to claim to be God. There is no exception given for this law for the special case of when a human being actually is God. The law is not written in such a way as to say, "No one can claim to be God unless he actually is God." What it says is:

**Leviticus 24:16 (KJV)** And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall be put to death.

So, Jesus as God cannot claim to be God, because the law says that any human who claims to be God is guilty of blasphemy and must be put to death.

### **Mark 14:61-62 (KJV)**

**61** But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? **62** And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Jesus didn't just say that he was the Messiah. To claim to be the Messiah would be a political move and would have caused a great deal of problem for the priests because it would mean trouble with the Romans. The Romans had on more than one occasion taken down people who claimed to be the Messiah. The Romans would certainly have taken offence to anyone who claimed to have royal authority separate from that of Rome. They would have acted swiftly with military force to anyone trying to force Rome out of Jerusalem.

But that is not why the Sanhedrin is worried. What concerns the High Priest is the religious law; the Law of Moses and of God. According to the law of God, anyone who claims to be God is guilty of blasphemy and must be put to death. So, when Jesus gets up and says, "I AM", he is answering a question that the Priest didn't even ask. The High Priest asks, "Are you the military leader who is going to drive out Rome?" Jesus answers, "I am the I AM. I am the one who spoke to Moses from the burning bush. I am not a military leader, I am God himself!"

### **Mark 14:63-64 (KJV)**

**63** Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? **64** Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.

### **The Hope of the Law**

According to the law, every human had to obey the Law of God.

According to the law, the sacrifices in the Temple pushed the sins of mankind forward in time.

According to the law, no man could claim to be God even if he was God.



According to the law, when God came to earth as a human being he would have to be put to death.

God wrote the law in such a way that everything in the law pointed to Jesus. Jesus was the endpoint of the law; he was the target at which all the law and the prophets were leading. His birth was the beginning of the end of the old law and the beginning of a new law; one where you and I can receive real salvation. Jesus is the start of a new law where our sins can be redeemed.

As God, Jesus made the law. As man, he was subject to that law. But as God he also made a loophole in that law so that he himself could escape that law. As brothers of Jesus and co-descendants of Adam, we can also use that same loophole to achieve salvation as well.

We live in the hope of eternal life; a hope we receive as the result of a baby born in accordance with all the law in Bethlehem. It is a hope that comes to us not because we have earned it, nor because we are entitled to it; it is a hope we receive at Christmas because it comes to us according to the law.