

# Hammurabi | Hammurabi's Code (1700s B.C.)

Hammurabi (reigned c. 1792-1750 BC) was the sixth king of the Amorite First Dynasty of Babylon. He had created one of the first written law codes in human history. His code, which was named after him, contained 282 laws that were carved on to eight foot high stone pillars for all to see. These laws cataloged a number of crimes and their punishments, which had little or no provision for pleading innocence. They are a fine example of the strict "eye for an eye" view of jurisprudence and help to give us insight into the development of early Near Eastern customs.



When Anu the Sublime, King of the Anunaki, and Bel, the lord of Heaven and earth, who decreed the fate of the land, assigned to Marduk, the overruling son of Ea, God of righteousness, dominion over earthly man, and made him great among the Igigi, they called Babylon by his illustrious name, made it great on earth, and founded an everlasting kingdom in it, whose foundations are laid so solidly as those of heaven and earth; then Anu and Bel called by name me, Hammurabi, the exalted prince, who feared God, to bring about the rule of righteousness in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil-doers; so that the strong should not harm the weak; so that I should rule over the black-headed people like Shamash, and enlighten the land, to further the well-being of mankind.

Hammurabi, the prince, called of Bel am I, making riches and increase, enriching Nippur and Dur-ilu beyond compare.... When Marduk sent me to rule over men, to give the protection of right to the land, I did right and righteousness in . . . , and brought about the well-being of the oppressed....

3. If anyone bring an accusation of any crime before the elders, and does not prove what he has charged, he shall, if it be a capital offense charged, be put to death.
14. If anyone steal the minor son of another, he shall be put to death.
16. If anyone receive into his house a runaway male or female slave of the court, or of a freedman, and does not bring it out at the public proclamation of the major domus, the master of the house shall be put to death.
17. If anyone find runaway male or female slaves in the open country and bring them to their masters, the master of the slaves shall pay him two shekels of silver.
22. If anyone is committing a robbery and is caught, then he shall be put to death.
23. If the robber is not caught, then shall he who was robbed claim under oath the amount of his loss; then shall the community, and on whose ground and territory and in whose domain it was compensate him for the goods stolen.
48. If anyone owe a debt for a loan, and a storm prostrates the grain, or the harvest fail, or the grain does not grow for lack of water; in that year he need not give his creditor any grain, he washes his debt-tablet in water and pays no rent for this year.
129. If a man's wife be surprised (caught in the act) with another man, both shall be tied and thrown into the water (and drowned), but the husband may pardon his wife and the king his slaves.
132. If the "finger is pointed" at a man's wife about another man, but she is not caught sleeping with the other man, she shall jump into the river for her husband. (and drowned)
153. If the wife of one man on account of another man has their mates (her husband and the other man's wife) murdered, both of them shall be impaled.
195. If a son strike his father, his hands shall be hewn off.
196. If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out. [An eye for an eye]
197. If he break another man's bone, his bone shall be broken.
198. If he put out the eye of a freed man, or break the bone of a freed man, he shall pay one gold mina.
199. If he put out the eye of a man's slave, or break the bone of a man's slave, he shall pay one-half of its value.
200. If a man knock out the teeth of his equal, his teeth shall be knocked out. [A tooth for a tooth]
205. If the slave of a freed man strike the body of a freed man, his ear shall be cut off.
223. If a physician make a large incision with an operating knife and cure it, or if he open a tumor (over the eye) with an operating knife, and saves the eye, he shall receive ten shekels in money.
229. If a builder build a house for someone, and does not construct it properly, and the house which he built fall in and kill its owner, then that builder shall be put to death.

LAWS of justice which Hammurabi, the wise king, established. A righteous law, and pious statute did he teach the land. Hammurabi, the protecting king am I....

The king who ruleth among the kings of the cities am I. My words are well considered; there is no wisdom like unto mine. By the command of Shamash, the great judge of heaven and earth, let righteousness go forth in the land: by the order of Marduk, my lord, let no destruction befall my monument....

In future time, through all coming generations, let the king, who may be in the land, observe the words of righteousness which I have written on my monument; let him not alter the law of the land which I have given, the edicts which I have enacted; my monument let him not mar. If such a ruler have wisdom, and be able to keep his land in order, he shall observe the words which I have written in this inscription; the rule, statute, and law of the land which I have given; the decisions which I have made will this inscription show him; let him rule his subjects accordingly, speak justice to them, give right decisions, root out the miscreants and criminals from this land, and grant prosperity to his subjects....

If a succeeding ruler considers my words, which I have written in this my inscription, if he do not annul my law, nor corrupt my words, nor change my monument, then may Shamash lengthen that king's reign, as he has that of me, the king of righteousness, that he may reign in righteousness over his subjects. If this ruler do not esteem my words, which I have written in my inscription, if he despise my curses, and fear not the curse of God, if he destroy the law which I have given, corrupt my words, change my monument, efface my name, write his name there, or on account of the curses commission another so to do, that man, whether king or ruler, priest, or commoner, no matter what he be, may the great God (Anu), the Father of the gods, who has ordered my rule, withdraw from him the glory of royalty, break his scepter, curse his destiny. May Bel, the lord, who fixeth destiny...order a rebellion which his hand cannot control.... May Belit, the great Mother...turn his affairs evil before Bel, and put the devastation of his land.... May Ea, the great ruler [and] thinker of the gods...withdraw understanding and wisdom from him.... May Shamash, the great Judge of heaven and earth...shatter his dominion, annul his law, destroy his way, make vain the march of his troops.... May Sin (the Moon-god), the Lord of Heaven, the divine father...take away the crown and regal throne from him.... May Adad, the lord of fruitfulness...withhold from him rain from heaven, and the flood of water from the springs, destroying his land by famine and want.... May Zamama, the great warrior, the first-born son of E-Kur...shatter his weapons on the field of battle, turn day into night for him, and let his foe triumph over him. May Ishtar, the goddess of fighting and war...change his grace into evil, and shatter his weapons on the place of fighting and war.... May Nergal, the might among the gods...cut off his limbs with his mighty weapons, and shatter him like an earthen image. May Nin-tu, the sublime mistress of the lands, the fruitful mother, deny him a son [and] give him no successor among men. May Nin-karak, the daughter of Anu...cause to come upon [him] high fever, severe wounds, that cannot be healed, whose nature the physician does not understand....

## Reflecting on What You Have Read

40PTS

1. What was the creator's purpose in making this primary source?
2. What are some things we can learn about Babylonian society by reading Hammurabi's Code?
3. What is the most common punishment for breaking the law? What do many of the laws protect?
4. Does it matter that an infraction of the law is deliberate or accidental?
5. Are the laws/punishments the same for all people of Babylonia? Cite the text backing your answer.
6. What is valued more in Babylon, human life or property? Explain your answer.
7. What can we learn about Babylonian society from this text? Consider: treatment of women, government, & religion.
8. Based on these laws in this excerpt, what kind of problems did Babylonia have?
9. How is the punishment of these laws different from the laws today?
10. Do you consider these laws fair? Explain.