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Part 7: The Fertile Crescent 
1.5 The Code of Hammurabi 
From 2000 to 1600 B.C.E., the city-states Of Mesopotamia endured a period Of nearly continuous warfare 
that saw shifting alliances and frequent chaos. The most dominant personality of the age, Hammurabi, 
established his control over the region from about 1800 to 1750 B.C.E. and ruled from the city of Babv 
Ion. His great contribution to Western civilization was a series Of laws that sought to establish justice 
within his empire. This concept of equity, which remedied a arge number of abuses, influenced law 
codes yet to come, most notably those of Greece and Rome. In the following passages, note the con- 
tinual emphasis on fairness in the regulation Of property, trade, debt, family relations, and personal 
Injury. 
Source: "The Code Of Hammurabi" is from Robert F. Harper, trans., The Code Of Hammurabi (Chicago: 
Un'versity of Chicago Press, 19041. 
When the lofty Anu, king of the Anunnaki gods, and Enlil, lord of heaven and earth, he who determines the destiny of the 
landf pronounced the lofty name of Baby on; when 'wy made it famous among the quaners of he world and in its midst 
established an everlasting kingdom whose foundations were firm as heaven and earth; Itheyl . named me, Hammurabi, 
the exalted prince, the worshiper of the gods, to cause justice to prevail in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil, to 
prevent the strong from oppressing the weak: to go forth like the sun over the black-headed people, to enlighten the land 
to further the welfare of the people Hammurabi, the shepherd named by Enlil, am l, Who brought about plenty and abun- 
dance; . the pcAwrful king, he sun of Babylon, who caused light to go forth over the lands of Sumer and Akkad; the 
king Who caused the four quarters of the world to render obedience; the favorite Of Ishtar, am I 
When Marduk sent me to rule the people and to bring help to the country, established law and _iustlce in the lan- 
guage of the land and promoted the welfare Of the peop e. At that time Il decreedl 
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If a man bring accusation against another man, charging him With murder, but cannot prove it, the accuser shall be 
put to death 
If a man bear false witness in a case, Or does not establ'sh the testimony that he has given, if that case be a case 
involving life, that man shall be put to deaffl 
If he bear Ifalsel witness concerning grain Or money, he shall himself bear the penalty imposed in that ease 
If a judge pronounce a judgment, render a decision, deliver a verdict duly signed and sealed and afterward alter his 
Judgment, they shall call that judge to account for the alteration of the judgment which he has pronounced, and he 
shall pay twelve-fold the penalty in that judgment; and, in the assembly, they shall expel him from his seat of judg- 
ment, and with the Judges in a casc he shall not take Ins scat 
If a man practice robbery and is captured, that man shall be put to death 
If the robber IS not captured, the man who has been robbed shall in the presence of god, make an itemized statement 
of his loss, and the city and the governor in whose province and jurisdiction the robbery was committed shall com- 
pensate him for whatever was lost 
If it be a life that is lostl, the city and governor shall pay one mina about one poundl of silver to his heirs, 
If a man neglects to maintain lus dike and does not strengthen it, and a break is made in his dike and the water car- 
nes away the farmland, the man in whose dike the break has been made shall replace the grain which has been 
damaged 
If he is not able to replace the grain, they shall sell him and his goods. and the farmers 'Whose grain the water has car- 
ried away shall divide the results of the sale 
If a man opens hlS canal for irr.gatlon and neglects it and the water carries away an adJacent field, he shall pay out 
grain on the basis of the adjacent field 
If bad characters gather in the house of a wine seller and he does not arrest those bad characters and bring them to 
the palace, that wine seller shall be put to death. 
If a priestess who is not living in a convent opens a wine shop or enters a wine shop for a drink, they shall burn that 
woman. 
Ifa man be In debt and sell his wife, son, or daughter, or bind them over to service, for three years they shall work 
in the house of their purchaser or master; in the fourth year they shall be given their freedony 
Ifa man takes a wife and does not arrange a contract for her, that woman is not a wife.    
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Part 1: The Fertile Crescent 
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If the Wife Of a man is caught lying With another man, they shall bind them and throw them Into the water. 
Ifa man wishes to put away his Wife who has not borne him children, he shall give her money to the amount Of her 
marriage price and he shall make good to her the dowry which she brought from her father's house and then he may 
put her away. 
If a woman hates her husband and says, "You may not have me," the city council shall inquire into her case; and if 
she has been careful and without reproach and her husband has been going about and greatly belittling her, that 
woman has no blame She may take her dowry and go to her father's house, 
If she has not been careful but has gadded about, neglecting her house, and belittling her husband, they shall throw 
that woman Into the water, 
If a man set his face to disinherit his son and say to the judges, "I will disinherit my son," the judges shall Inquire 
into his record, and if the son has not committed a crime sufficiently grave to cut him off from sonship, the father 
may not cut off his son from sonship. 
If a son strike his father, they shall cut off his hand 
If a man destroy the eye of another man, they shall destroy his eye, 
If he break another man's bone, they shall break his bone, 
If he destroy the eye of a man's slave or break a bone of a man's slave, he shall pay one-half his price, 
Questions: 
1. In the code of Hammurabi, why does Hammurabi feel justified in setting forth this law code? 
2. What are some Of the penalties? 
3. Do they seem too harsh to be fair? 