**Hammurabi's Law Code**

**(1700s BCE)**

**1955. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Edited by James B. Pritchard and Translated by Theophile J. Meek. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Language modernized by Wayne Ackerson.**

*Originally one of many small city-state empires in Mesopotamia, Babylon became the center of a large empire under its king, Hammurabi. Hammurabi ruled from approximately 1792 to 1750 B.C.E., and was a tremendously successful ruler. Not only did he build an empire for his city, he also helped that city become the new Near Eastern cultural center. Hammurabi's scribes carefully maintained old Sumerian records, encouraged literacy among the upper classes, and made religious changes (elevating Babylon's patron god, Marduk, to the top divine position).   
  
Notwithstanding Hammurabi's military skill, his most noted contribution was the creation of the world's first written, comprehensive law code. Law codes had always existed (usually passed down orally), and some had been written, but even the previous written ones were not complete and comprehensive. Though usually called Hammurabi's law code, the collection of laws is more a list of decisions made by judges in the past than laws passed by the king himself. Hammurabi claimed that these laws were sanctioned by the gods, and had copies carved on markers to be placed in prominent locations such as temple courtyards. Despite Hammurabi's efforts at empire-building, within a few years of his death his kingdom began to crumble.*

[*In many translations, the word "seignior" is used to describe an upper class man or occasionally any man. Here, the word has been changed, for simplicity, to "upper class man"*].  
  
1. If an upper class man accused another upper class man and brought a charge of murder against him, but has not proven it, his accuser shall be executed.   
  
3. If an upper class man came forward with false testimony in a case, and has not proven the word he spoke, if that case was a death-penalty case, that man shall be put to death.   
  
4. If he came forward with false testimony concerning grain or money, he shall bear the punishment in that case.   
  
14. If an upper class man has kidnapped the young son of another upper class man, he shall be executed.   
  
15. If an upper class man has helped either a male slave owned by the government or a male slave of a private citizen or a female slave of a private citizen to escape the city, he shall be executed.   
  
16. If an upper class man has harbored in his house either a fugitive male or female slave belonging to the government or to a private citizen and has not brought him forth at the summons of the police, that homeowner shall be executed.   
  
17. If an upper class man caught a runaway slave in the open and has taken him to his owner, the slave's owner shall pay him two shekels of silver.   
  
19. If he has kept the slave in his house and later the slave has been found in his possession, that upper class man shall be executed.   
  
21. If an upper class man broke into a home through the wall, he shall be executed in front of the hole and then walled in.   
  
22. If an upper class man is caught committing robbery, he shall be executed.   
  
25. If a fire broke out in an upper class man's home and another upper class man, who went to help put out the fire, steals the goods of the home's owner, that upper class man shall be thrown into that fire.   
  
98. If an upper class man gave money to another upper class man for a partnership, they shall divide equally in the presence of god the profit or loss which was incurred.   
  
104. If a merchant lent grain, wool, oil, or any goods at all to a trader to retail, the trader shall write down the value and pay it back to the merchant, with the trader obtaining a sealed receipt for the money that he pays to the merchant.   
  
106. If a trader borrowed money from a merchant and has then disputed the fact with his merchant, that merchant in the presence of god and witnesses shall prove that the trader borrowed the money and the trader shall pay three times the amount of the original loan.   
  
128. If an upper class man marries a woman but did not draw up the marriage contracts for her, she is not his wife.   
  
129. If the wife of an upper class man has been caught while sleeping with another man, they shall tie them both up and throw them into the water. If the husband of the woman wishes to spare his wife, then the king may in turn order his subject spared.   
  
131. If an upper class man's wife was accused by her husband of adultery, but was not caught while sleeping with another man, she shall swear she is innocent before god and return home.   
  
134. If an upper class man was kidnapped and there was not enough money and food in his home for his wife to survive, she may enter the home of another, with no blame incurred by the wife.   
  
136. If, when an upper class man ran away from his town, his wife went to live in another house after he left, if that upper class man returned and wishes to take back his wife, the wife of the runaway man shall not return to him because he had abandoned his city and ran away.   
  
142. If a woman hates her husband so much that she says "You many not have me", her case may be investigated by the city council, and if she is careful and innocent, even though her husband has been going out and treating her poorly, that woman, without incurring any blame at all, may take her dowry and return to her father.   
  
143. If she was not careful, however, but was too busy socializing and neglected her household duties and humiliated her husband, that woman shall be thrown into the water.   
  
148. When an upper class man has a wife who then gets seriously ill, if he has made up his mind to marry another woman, he may marry her without divorcing his wife. The wife shall live in his home and he shall continue to support her as long as she lives.   
  
149. If that woman has refused to live in her husband's home, he shall return her dowry to her and she may leave.   
  
153. If an upper class man's wife has caused her husband's death because of another man, the woman shall be impaled on stakes.   
  
154. If an upper class man sleeps with his daughter, he shall be forced to leave the city.   
  
155. If an upper class man chose a bride for his son and his son has slept with her, but later the man is caught sleeping with her, that upper class man shall be tied up and thrown into the water.   
  
157. If an upper class man sleeps with his mother after his father dies, both mother and son shall be burned to death.   
  
162. If, when an upper class man gets married, and his wife bears him children and later dies, the dowry belongs to her children and her father cannot claim it.   
  
163. If an upper class man's wife dies but had not had children, if his father-in-law returns the marriage-price that the upper class man paid, her husband must return the dowry to the father-in-law.   
  
164. If his father-in-law has not returned the marriage-price to him, he shall subtract the full amount of her marriage-price from her dowry and return the rest of her dowry to his father-in-law.   
  
170. When an upper class man's first wife bore him children and his female slave also bore him children, if that father during his lifetime claims the children of his slave as his own, thus having counted them with his children of his first wife, after he dies the children of both his first wife and his slave shall receive equal portions of his estate, with the first-born, the son of the first wife, receiving a better share.   
  
171. However, if the father during his life did not claim the children of his slave as his own, after he dies the children of the slave may not share in the estate along with the children of the first wife.   
  
185. If an upper class man adopted a boy and has raised him, that foster child shall never be reclaimed.   
  
186. If an upper class man, upon adopting a boy, seeks out the boy's parents, that child may return to his father's home.   
  
188. If an artisan took a son as a foster child and taught him his trade or craft, he may never be reclaimed.   
  
189. If he has not taught him his trade or craft, that child may return to his father's home.   
  
195. If a son hits his father, the son's hand shall be cut off.   
  
196. If an upper class man destroyed the eye of another noble, his eye shall also be destroyed.   
  
197. If he has broken another noble's bone, his bone shall also be broken.   
  
198. If he destroyed the eye or broken the bone of a commoner, he shall pay one mina of silver.   
  
199. If he has destroyed the eye or broken a bone of an upper class man's slave, he shall pay half the slave's value.   
  
202. If an upper class man slaps the face of an upper class man who is superior to him, he shall be whipped sixty times with an oxtail whip in public.   
  
203. If a noble slaps another noble's face who is of the same rank, he shall pay one mina of silver.   
  
204. If a commoner slaps the face of another commoner, he shall pay ten shekels of silver.   
  
205. If an upper class man's slave has slapped the face of a noble, his ear shall be cut off.   
  
215. If a doctor performed surgery on an upper class man with a bronze lancet and save his life, or he opened up the eye-socket of the man with a bronze lancet and saved his eye, he shall be paid ten shekels of silver.   
  
218. If a doctor performed surgery on an upper class man with a bronze lancet and has caused the man's death, or he opened up the eye-socket of an upper class man and has destroyed his eye, the doctor's hand shall be cut off.   
  
219. If a doctor performed surgery on a commoner's slave with a bronze lancet and has caused his death, he shall pay for the slave.   
  
228. If a builder built a house for an upper class man and finished it, the man shall pay the builder two shekels of silver per sar (a measurement of about 42 square yards).   
  
229. If a builder built a house for an upper class man but the house falls down due to poor craftsmanship and kills the upper class man, the builder shall be executed.   
  
230. If it has caused the death of a son of the home's owner, the son of the builder shall be executed.   
  
231. If it caused the death of the homeowner's slave, the slave shall be replaced or paid for.   
  
257. If an upper class man hired a gardener, he shall pay him eight kur of grain per year.   
  
268. If an upper class man hired an ox to thresh, it shall cost him twenty qu of grain.   
  
270. If he hired a goat to thresh, it shall cost one qu of grain.   
  
275. If an upper class man hired a long-boat, it shall cost him three se of silver per day.   
  
282. If a male slave has said to his master, "you do not own me", his master shall prove him to be his slave and cut off the slave's ear.