

# Hammurabi's Code Was It Just Answer Key

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ KEY \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_

## CODE OF HAMMURABI

Answer the following questions relating to the Code of Hammurabi.

1. What was the creator's purpose in making this primary source? Establish social order in his Kingdom.  
Create justice in order to be able to destroy the wicked and evil. That the strong may not oppress the weak.
2. What are some things we can learn about Babylonian society by reading Hammurabi's Code? They had the technology to do surgery, they have slaves, and a slave system.
3. What is the most common punishment for breaking the law? Death.
4. Are the laws the same for all people of Babylonia? NO On the test taking your answer  
187. If he breaks another man's bone, his bone shall be broken.  
188. If he put out the eye of a freed man, or break the bone of a freed man, he shall pay one gold mina.  
189. 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.
5. Does it matter that an infraction of the law is deliberate or accidental? No.
6. What do many of the laws protect? property
7. What is valued more in Babylonia, human life or property? property  
Explain your answer: Most laws regarding property are punishable by death. There seems to be no distinction between the value of what is stolen.
8. What can we learn about the treatment of women in this text? They were property of men. And if they strayed, they would suffer death.
9. Based on these laws in this excerpt, what kind of problems did Babylonia have? Theft, runaway slaves, problems between husbands and wives
10. How is the punishment of these laws different from the laws today? Laws today make distinctions between accidental and intentional crimes. Punishment today is more lenient than just death.
11. Do you consider these laws fair? Explain. Answers will vary.
12. If you had to rewrite the law, "If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out." What kind of punishment would you assign? Answers will vary.
13. Over three thousand years later Gandhi, an Indian activist said, "An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind." What do you think he meant? Eye for an eye has become known to start a revenge tale.  
Gandhi's quote speaks about the importance of forgiveness rather than "justice" for vengeance, eye for an eye can lead to a cycle of revenge, while forgiveness can end that cycle.

## Hammurabi's Code: Was It Just?

Hammurabi's Code, one of the oldest deciphered writings of significant length in the world, is a well-preserved Babylonian law code dating back to about 1754 BCE. Created by King Hammurabi of Babylon, this collection of 282 laws aimed to establish justice within the realm and provide a framework for social order. However, the question arises: was Hammurabi's Code truly just? This article will explore the historical context, the principles embedded in the code, its impact on society, and the contemporary debate regarding its fairness.

## Historical Context of Hammurabi's Code

Hammurabi reigned from 1792 to 1750 BCE in ancient Mesopotamia, a region that is often referred to as the "Cradle of Civilization." During his reign, Babylon emerged as a powerful city-state, and Hammurabi sought to unify his diverse subjects under a common set of laws. The social structure was complex, comprising various classes, including free men, slaves, and nobles.

The code itself was inscribed on a large stele, which was publicly displayed to ensure that all citizens had access to the laws. The inscription was written in Akkadian, the language of the Babylonians, and used cuneiform script. The prominence of the stele emphasized the importance of law in maintaining order and justice.

# The Structure of Hammurabi's Code

Hammurabi's Code consists of 282 laws, which are categorized into several types:

1. Civil Law: Regulations regarding property, contracts, marriage, and family. For example, laws governing inheritance and the rights of women are included.
2. Criminal Law: Offenses against the state or individuals, such as theft, assault, and murder. These laws often prescribed harsh punishments.
3. Commercial Law: Regulations concerning trade and business transactions, ensuring fairness in economic dealings.
4. Social Law: Rules addressing the responsibilities and rights of different social classes.

The laws are famously known for their principle of retributive justice, often summarized by the phrase "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." This concept aimed to ensure that punishments were proportionate to the offenses committed.

## Principles of Justice in Hammurabi's Code

At the heart of Hammurabi's Code were several key principles that reflected the values of Babylonian society:

### 1. Retributive Justice

The code's emphasis on retributive justice meant that punishments were often severe and aimed at deterring future offenses. While this approach may seem harsh by modern standards, it was intended to maintain order in a society where law enforcement resources were limited.

### 2. Class Disparities

Hammurabi's Code also exhibited differences in how laws applied to various social classes. For instance, penalties for offenses committed against a noble were often more severe than those for offenses against a commoner. This disparity raises questions about the code's fairness, as it perpetuated social inequalities.

### 3. Protection of the Weak

Despite the class disparities, the code also contained provisions aimed at protecting the weak, including women and slaves. For instance, certain laws addressed issues such as dowries and the treatment of slaves, indicating a concern for their welfare, albeit within the limitations of the time.

# Impact of Hammurabi's Code on Society

Hammurabi's Code had a profound influence on the development of legal systems not only in Mesopotamia but also across the ancient world. Its principles can be seen in later legal codes, such as those of the Romans and the Twelve Tables.

## 1. Legal Precedent

The establishment of written laws provided a clear guideline for legal proceedings and set a precedent for future legal systems. This clarity helped reduce arbitrary rulings by judges and contributed to a more structured society.

## 2. Centralization of Power

By codifying laws, Hammurabi strengthened the authority of the king and centralized power. It allowed him to present himself as a just ruler who governed according to established laws rather than personal whims.

## 3. Influence on Subsequent Civilizations

The ideas encapsulated in Hammurabi's Code influenced various cultures throughout history. For instance, the Ten Commandments of the Hebrew Bible and Roman law reflect similar principles of justice and societal order.

## The Debate: Was Hammurabi's Code Just?

While Hammurabi's Code laid the groundwork for legal systems that followed, scholars and historians continue to debate its justness. The analysis often hinges on several factors:

### 1. Perspective on Justice

Justice is a subjective concept, and interpretations of Hammurabi's Code vary:

- Proponents of the Code argue that it provided necessary structure and accountability in a time when societal norms were less defined.
- Critics contend that the harsh punishments and class biases within the code highlight its unjust nature.

## **2. Historical Context**

Understanding Hammurabi's Code requires considering the historical context in which it was created. The social hierarchies of ancient Babylon were vastly different from modern egalitarian ideals, leading some to argue that, within its time, the code was a progressive step towards organized governance.

## **3. Modern Implications**

In contemporary discussions about justice and law, Hammurabi's Code serves as a reminder of the evolution of legal systems. Modern laws strive to uphold fairness and equality, reflecting a shift in societal values since Hammurabi's time.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Hammurabi's Code stands as a monumental achievement in the history of law and governance. While it undeniably played a crucial role in shaping legal principles and societal order, its justness remains a topic of debate. The duality of its harsh punishments and protective measures reflects the complexities of justice in ancient societies. As we reflect on Hammurabi's Code today, it serves as both a historical artifact and a lens through which we can analyze the ongoing evolution of justice and law in our world. The legacy of Hammurabi's Code continues to resonate, prompting us to consider the balance between order, fairness, and the treatment of all individuals within a society.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is Hammurabi's Code and why is it significant?**

Hammurabi's Code is one of the oldest deciphered writings of significant length in the world, dating back to around 1754 BC in ancient Babylon. It is significant because it established one of the earliest forms of written law, outlining specific legal standards and consequences for various offenses, thereby influencing future legal systems.

### **Was Hammurabi's Code considered just by contemporary standards?**

While Hammurabi's Code introduced the principle of justice and established laws intended to provide order and fairness, many of its laws reflect a strict and often harsh system of justice that included severe punishments. By contemporary standards, it may not be considered just due to its unequal application of justice based on social class and gender.

## **How did Hammurabi's Code address social class differences?**

Hammurabi's Code explicitly differentiated between social classes, prescribing different punishments for the same crime depending on whether the offender was a noble, commoner, or slave. This approach raises questions about the fairness and justness of the code in treating individuals as equals under the law.

## **What are some examples of laws from Hammurabi's Code?**

Examples include laws that dictate that if a builder constructs a house that collapses and kills the owner, the builder shall be put to death, and if a son strikes his father, his hands shall be cut off. These laws illustrate the severity and retributive nature of justice in Hammurabi's time.

## **How did Hammurabi's Code influence modern legal systems?**

Hammurabi's Code laid the groundwork for the concept of rule of law, influencing later legal systems by emphasizing the importance of written laws and the idea that laws should govern society. Elements of proportional justice and the codification of laws can still be seen in modern legal systems.

## **Are there any criticisms of Hammurabi's Code regarding justice?**

Critics argue that Hammurabi's Code is fundamentally unjust due to its rigid application of punishment and the disproportionate penalties for certain crimes based on social status. Additionally, it reflects the patriarchal values of the time, often placing women's rights and status as secondary to men, leading to further critiques on its fairness.

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