

The Code of Hammurabi

Over 3,500 years ago, King Hammurabi of Babylon ordered a scribe to chisel a record of his kingly deeds onto a slab of black stone. Among the things recorded was Hammurabi's Code of Law. Below are nine laws from the Hammurabi Code.

21. If a man make a breach in [breaks into] a house, they shall put him to death in front of that breach, and they shall bury him there.
25. If a fire break out in a man's house and a man who goes to extinguish it cast his eye on the household property of the owner of the house, and take the household property of the owner of the house, that man shall be thrown into the fire.
26. If either an officer or a constable who is ordered to go on an errand of the king do not go, or if he hire a substitute and he carry out this task, that officer or constable shall be put to death. His hired substitute shall take to himself his house.
128. If a man take a wife and do not draw up a contract with her, that woman is not a wife.
138. If a man put away his wife who has not borne him children, he shall give her money to the amount of her marriage settlement and he shall make good to her the dowry which she brought from her father's house and then he may put her away.
202. Is a man smite on the cheek a man who is his superior, he shall receive sixty strokes with an oxtail whip in public.
203. If the son of a gentleman smite the son of a gentleman of his own rank on the cheek, he shall pay one mina of silver.
204. If a common man smite a common man on the cheek, he shall pay ten shekels of silver.
205. If a man's slave smite the son of a gentleman on the cheek, they shall cut off his ear.

QUESTIONS:

1. What do laws 21 and 25 tell you about the importance Babylonians placed on household property?

2. What law indicates that a legal contract was necessary between husband and wife?

3. [a] According to law 138, what right did a man possess when his wife did not bear children?

[b] What rights did the woman have in this case?

4. [a] What law suggests that the power of the king was absolute? _____

[b] What was the penalty for disobeying the king? _____

5. [a] Which laws indicate that Babylonian justice depended on class? _____

[b] What distinctions did Babylonian justice make among these classes?
