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## Hammurabi's Code of Laws

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**Abstract:** This article gives a comparison of the Ten Commandments with the laws of Hammurabi of Babylonia.

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## HAMMURABI'S CODE OF LAWS.

BY A. A. RAMSEYER.

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Three years ago, (December, 1901, and January, 1902) there was found in the ruins of Susa, the ancient capital of Persia, a stone covered with engravings; this stone originally stood in the temple of Ebabbara at Sippar, in Babylonia, but was carried to Susa (or Shusan) by a victorious Elamite king. The cuneiform writings upon it contain the code of laws of Hammurabi (or Ammurabi), a Babylonian king, supposed to be Amraphel, the king of Shinar, mentioned in Genesis xiv, a contemporary of Abraham, and said to have lived about 2,250 (or 2,150) years before Christ.

The translation of this code of laws has excited much comment, on account of their striking similarity to the laws given through Moses, infidels claiming that Moses merely copied his code from Hammurabi's. However, a superficial examination would show how unfounded such a claim is, and how much superior, morally, the laws of Moses are, compared to those of Hammurabi.

For instance, we read in Exodus 21: 15: "He that smiteth his father or his mother, shall be surely put to death." In Hammurabi's code\* it stands: "If a son smite his father, his hands

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\* A translation of Hammurabi's code is found in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, now being published by Funk & Wagnalls Co., New York. See *Improvement Era* for December, 1904.

shall be cut off." It appears from this that the father alone, was protected against a cruel son, but the mother was not. The law of retaliation, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, (Exodus 21: 24) is the same in the Babylonian code—Hammurabi's code gave a slave his liberty in the fourth year, while the Hebrew slave was made free in the seventh year (Exodus 21: 2), but "when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him." (Deut. 15: 12-14). The merciful provision of Exodus 21: 26-7, giving a slave his liberty, if his master in smiting him made him lose an eye or a tooth, is lacking in Hammurabi's laws. The law of Moses provided that the death of a slave, under the hand of his master, was to be avenged (Exodus: 21 20); Hammurabi's laws punished a man only when he maimed another man's slave.

The wise law providing a city of refuge for those guilty of unpremeditated manslaughter (Exodus 21: 13), in contradistinction to the premeditated murder (21: 14) is not to be found in Hammurabi's code, which, however, possesses some humane provisions, such as remitting the rent for land on account of failure of crops, preserving pledged property, etc. Otherwise it is a strictly business law. It lacks the moral force of Moses' regulations, it is not adorned with a table of ten commandments, culminating in the great warning, "Thou shalt not covet!" For, says James (1: 14,15): "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

But after admitting the superiority of Moses' code of laws over that of Hammurabi, how can the striking similarity of these two sets of regulations be accounted for?

In looking at the features of a Jew and of an Arab, chiseled out of stone, their similarity cannot be denied, only that those of the Jew show a mental refinement lacking in the face of the wild roamer of the desert. But their common ancestry is unmistakable. So with the two codes of laws; there must be a common ancestry.

The Lectures on Faith, in the book of Doctrine and Covenants,

may unravel this mystery. In Lecture II: 39 (page 17), we are informed "that Lamech the father of Noah, Methuselah, Enoch, Jared, Mahalaleel, Cainan, Enos, Seth, and Adam (the complete list of the patriarchs from Adam to Noah in reversed order) were living at the same time, and beyond all controversy, were all preachers of righteousness." Further, in Lecture II: 42, 43, 44 (page 18), we find "that Noah was 84 years old when Enos died, 176 when Cainan died, 234 when Mahalaleel died, 366 when Jared died, 595 when Lamech died, and 600 when Methuselah died. We can see from this that Enos (the grand-son of Adam), Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah, all lived on the earth at the same time; and that Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Methuselah, and Lamech, were all acquainted with both Adam and Noah. From the foregoing it is easily to be seen, not only how the knowledge of God came into the world (by God revealing himself to Adam), but upon what principle it was preserved; that from the time it was first communicated, it was retained in the minds of righteous men, who taught not only their own posterity but the world; so that there was no need of a new revelation to man, after Adam's creation to Noah, to give them the first idea or notion of the existence of a God; and not only of a God, but the true and living God."

According to the chronology of the Bible, Adam died in the 930th year of the world; Enoch was translated in the 987th, Seth, the son of Adam, died in the 1042nd; Noah was born only fourteen years after Seth's death, and 126 years after Adam's death; so that he was no farther removed from the last days of Adam than a child born two years ago, is from the days of the Declaration of Independence. And as the literature on the revolutionary days is not lacking by any means, but rather goes on increasing every year, so we must suppose that Noah was well acquainted not only with the religious knowledge of the patriarchs, but with the life of Adam, the doctrines taught by the Father of our race, pretty much as young boys and girls, in thirty or forty years hence, will be with the life of George Washington.

But apart from the knowledge of religious subjects possessed by Adam, and by him transmitted to his posterity, not only orally, but in writing as well, on plates of metal, or sheep's skins (parch-



ments), or perchance on papyrus, think of the wonderful amount of scientific knowledge obtained by our first father, both from the revelations of God, and from an experience extending over nearly one thousand years! This also he must have communicated to his posterity.

In chapter six of the Revelation of John, we read of the seven seals being opened, each vision showing the great characteristic event of one thousand years, for six thousand consecutive years; in verse 2 the following vision is depicted, "and I saw and behold, a white horse, and he that sat on him had a bow, and a crown was given unto him; and he went forth conquering and to conquer." The one sitting on a white horse with a crown on his head was Adam, no doubt, for on the morning of the creation he was made lord over the whole earth, dominion over the beasts of the earth and over the earth being given him (Gen. 1, 28.) His conquest of the earth must have been peaceful, like the conquest of the desert by the Latter-day Saints, his children colonizing farther and farther until every land and every clime had some representative of our first father. Not all of his children were obedient to the Gospel, as the case of Cain shows; others, undoubtedly, were as anxious to show their independence of any restraint, being a law unto themselves, and disturbing the peace of their brethren; for such Adam was prepared, the bow in his hand indicating the military authority he exercised or delegated to his faithful sons, he being the king of kings, in a certain sense, and lord of lords, during the golden age that immediately follows after the creation and the fall; for, let it be remembered, the consequences of the fall, short life, sickness, enmity, etc., came gradually, not at once.

During his millennial rule, Adam must have exercised his dominion and authority by means of wise laws and regulations, some being in the form of civil laws, for the guidance of all his children, good and bad; some were probably in the shape of carnal commandments, higher than the civil law in their spirit and aim, calculated for those only who, having embraced the first principles of the gospel, yet were not prepared to receive the highest principles, the celestial laws according to which the people of the city of Enoch lived. But all these laws must have borne a certain amount of similarity to each other, coming as they did from one

common source. There were the rights and privileges of all classes of people defined, protected, and Father Adam saw to it that every one of his sons and daughters bowed down to the authority of the law, transgression being visited with swift punishment, as the bow in his hand would indicate.

After Adam's death, his strong hand was missed; wise men there were still, but none had the right to rule as lord of this earth; their counsels were rejected, their rule disregarded, and there followed wars and contentions, as expressed in the 3rd and 4th verses of chapter six, of John's Revelation: "and when he had opened the second seal—there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword."

At the opening of the second seal, during the second millennium, the inhabitants of the earth, in a great measure, killed each other by the sword. "And the children of men were numerous upon all the face of the land. And in those days Satan had great dominion among men, and raged in their hearts; and from thenceforth came wars and bloodshed, and a man's hand was against his own brother, in administering death, because of secret works, seeking for power." (*Pearl of Great Price*, page 17, edition of 1879). This was not long after Adam's death.

We are informed that immediately before the flood, "the earth was corrupt before God, and it was filled with violence, and God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me, for the earth is filled with violence, and behold I will destroy all flesh from off the earth" (*Pearl of Great Price*, page 31). The most righteous had been gathered into Zion, the city of Enoch, which God had taken unto himself. The residue of the posterity of Adam were all corrupt, except Noah and his three sons. These God saved, while he destroyed the bulk of mankind through the flood. After this terrible judgment was over, the sons of Noah multiplied and spread again over the face of the earth; some among their posterity, after serving God for a season, departed from the true faith, while some of their children continued faithful. Hence Abraham writes that his fathers

had turned from their righteousness unto the worshiping of the gods of the heathens. (*Pearl of Great Price*, page 33.)

But the laws given by Adam did not perish altogether. Mankind, for their own protection, clung to those regulations that would preserve a certain degree of order, and when the third seal is opened and the third vision is shown (from the year 2000 to the year 3000 of the world), we see that commerce and traffic are introduced, which shows that a certain amount of order was kept, even after the chaos of the preceding age: "And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand, and I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, a measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine." (John's Rev. vi: 5, 6). This last sentence: "See thou hurt not the oil and the wine," would indicate that although war still had sway, yet it was regulated, so that olive trees and grapevines should not be wantonly destroyed during the contest. A similar provision was made in the law of Moses (Deut. 20: 19, 20), not to destroy fruit trees during war times.

The laws and regulations made by Adam during his reign as patriarch over this earth were found to work so well that for ages they were transmitted from generation to generation, even if they were not kept fully; and so it came to pass that Hammurabi's code of laws, is very likely nothing but a copy, more or less perfect, of those ancient laws, and if their meaning and phraseology show such a similarity to the laws given through Moses, it is on account of the common, divine origin of both, the laws of Moses being of more recent date, as compared to Ammurabi's code, if we accept the views advanced in the foregoing pages.

That Ammurabi's code should have its origin in the laws given by Adam to his posterity, need not be surprising, since most European nations are governed today by a great many of the laws handed down from the days of the Roman emperor Justinian (534 A. D.) As has been shown, Noah was intimately acquainted with six patriarchs who had communed with Adam. In like manner we can find in the second Lecture on Faith (Doctrine and Covenants, page 2), 52) "that Nahor, brother of Abraham, Terah, Nahor, Serug, Reu, Peleg, Eber, Salah, Arphaxad, Shem, and Noah, all



lived on the earth at the same time; and that Abraham was 18 years old when Reu died, 41 when Serug and his brother Nahor died, 75 when Terah died, 88 when Arphaxad died, 118 when Salah died, 150 when Shem died, and that Eber lived four years after Abraham's death. And that Shem, Arphaxad, Salah, Eber, Reu, Serug, Terah, and Nahor, the brother of Abraham, and Abraham, lived at the same time. And that Nahor, brother of Abraham, Terah, Serug, Reu, Eber, Salah, Arphaxad, and Shem, were all acquainted with both Noah and Abraham."

Noah surely took with him in the ark a great many records from the times of his fathers, the same as Lehi did, when he left Jerusalem to come to this country. Noah's descendants thus obtained the history and the laws, both civil and religious of the ancient (antediluvian) patriarchs; and their posterity, in spreading over Asia, must necessarily have had a knowledge of these things. Hence, Ammurabi, the cotemporary of Abraham, living in the third millennium, may have copied his code of laws from the records of Noah, carried by some of his sons, when they settled in Persia and in Babylonia, not very far from where the ark rested.

Salt Lake City.

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#### A WORD OF KINDNESS.

Drop a word of cheer and kindness—just a flash, and it is gone;  
 But there's half a hundred ripples circling on and on and on,  
 Bearing hope and joy and comfort on each splashing, dashing wave,  
 Till you wouldn't believe the volume of the one kind word you gave.  
 Drop a word of cheer and kindness—in a minute you forget;  
 But there's gladness still a-swelling, and there's joy a-circling yet;  
 And you've rolled a wave of comfort whose sweet music can be heard,  
 Over miles and miles of water—just by dropping a kind word.

—*Selected.*