

Introduction

Archeological finds can help shed light on the context in which the Torah was written. Many cuneiform texts we find in the region have close parallels to the Torah. Some of the best examples of these parallels can be found in the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) law codes. I couldn't find an easy to access chart showing these comparisons so I made one myself compiling many of the direct comparisons.

The giving of the Torah at Sinai is traditionally dated between the 15th and the 13th Century BCE, while the ANE law codes are mostly much older. Of all the ANE law codes excavated, the most famous example is the [Code of Hammurabi](#) from Babylonia, dated to the eighteenth century BCE. In the tables below, you'll encounter four other texts besides the Code of Hammurabi:

Code of Lipit-Ishtar

This is one of the oldest law codes we have and it's written in Sumerian. It's from the city of Lisin in southern Mesopotamia and dates to the twentieth century BCE.

Laws of Eshnunna

Written in Akkadian, this comes from Eshnunna, a city to the north of Babylon, and is dated about thirty years earlier than the Code of Hammurabi in the eighteenth century BCE

Middle Assyrian Laws

Also written in Akkadian, this text originates from Middle Assyria and is dated to the fourteenth century BCE.

Hittite Laws

Finally, this one is written in Hittite from the Hittite capital Hattusha in Anatolia, which dates between 1650-1500 BCE.

All of these law codes can be found in the book [Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor](#) which is where I drew most of the translations. See there for a longer introduction on each text if you want more in depth context. If you're interested in learning more about the ANE cultures and history of that time period, I recommend [these videos](#) from Bar-Ilan University.

The ANE Laws and the Torah are similar in both form and content. The form is called casuistic: If this happens, then do this. The beginning of the sentence states the circumstances of a hypothetical case, followed by the legal consequences. They are also strikingly similar in content, with many of the hypothetical circumstances as well as the punishments being the same. Now without further ado, let's get into the texts so you can see for yourself.

1. Talionic punishments (do to him what he did to the other person)

Not only does it use similar language, it even uses the same examples of breaking a bone, putting out an eye, and knocking out a tooth.

Leviticus 24:19-20	Code of Hammurabi, 196-200
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<p>וְאִישׁ כִּי־יִתֵּן מוֹם בְּעַמִּיתוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה כֵּן יַעֲשֶׂה לוֹ: If any party maims another [person]: what was done shall be done in return—</p> <p>שָׁבַר תַּחַת שִׁבְר עֵין תַּחַת עֵין שֵׁן תַּחַת שֵׁן כַּאֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן מוֹם בְּאָדָם כֵּן יִגְתֵּן בּוֹ: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The injury inflicted on a human being shall be inflicted in return.</p>	<p>196. If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out. [An eye for an eye]</p> <p>197. If he break another man's bone, his bone shall be broken.</p> <p>...</p> <p>200. If a man knock out the teeth of his equal, his teeth shall be knocked out. [A tooth for a tooth]</p>
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2. Limitations on terms of debt-slavery

Torah puts a limit of six years, while Hammurabi puts a limit of three years.

Exodus, 21:2-3	Code of Hammurabi, 117
<p>כִּי תִקְנֶה עֶבֶד עֲבָדִי שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים יַעֲבֹד וּבִשְׁבַעַת יֵצֵא לְחֶפְשִׁי חֲנָם: When you acquire a Hebrew slave, that person shall serve six years—and shall go free in the seventh year, without payment.</p>	<p>If any one fail to meet a claim for debt, and sell himself, his wife, his son, and daughter for money or give them away to forced labor: they shall work for three years in the house of the man who bought them, or the proprietor, and in the fourth year they shall be set free.</p>

3. The right of the injured to receive compensation for damages and medical costs

Torah says to pay for both his not working and his medical fees. Hammurabi has just medical fees, while the Hittite Laws has both his work and medical fees.

Exod 21:18-19:	Code of Hammurabi, 206	Hittite Laws 10
<p>וְכִי־יִרְיֹבֵן אֲנָשִׁים וְהִכָּה־אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ בְּאֶבֶן אֹו בְּאֶגְרֹף וְלֹא יָמוּת וְנָפַל לְמִשְׁכָּב: When [two] parties quarrel and one strikes the other with stone or fist, and the victim does not die but has to take to bed:</p>	<p>If during a quarrel one man strike another and wound him, then he shall swear, "I did not injure him wittingly," and pay the physicians.</p>	<p>10 If anyone injures a person and temporarily incapacitates him, he shall provide medical care for him. In his place he shall provide a person to work on his estate until he recovers. When he recovers, his assailant shall pay him 6 shekels of</p>

<p>אם-יָקוּם וְהִתְהַלֵּךְ בַּחוּץ עַל-מִשְׁעָנֵהוּ וְנָקָה הַמַּכָּה רַק שְׁבֻתוֹ יִתֵּן וְרָפָא וְרָפָא: {ס}</p> <p>if that victim then gets up and walks outdoors upon a staff, the assailant shall go unpunished—except for paying for the idleness and the cure.</p>		<p>silver and shall pay the physician's fee as well.</p>
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4. Laws on when pregnant women are struck and then miscarry

The Torah says to pay money for the miscarriage and to punish with “life for a life” for other serious damage. Four other law codes talk about this scenario and are all similar to the Torah with either both these punishments or one. The Middle Assyrian Laws even use the same phrase, “life for a life.”

Exod 21:22-25	Codex Lipit-Ishtar Paragraph D-F	Code of Hammurabi 209-214	Hittite Laws 17-18	Middle Assyrian Laws A 50-51
<p>22. When [two or more] parties fight, and one of them pushes a pregnant woman and a miscarriage results, but no other damage ensues, the one responsible shall be fined according as the woman's husband may exact, the payment to be based on reckoning.</p> <p>23. וְאִם-אֶסְיוּ יְהִיָּה וְנִתְּנָה נֶפֶשׁ תַּחַת נֶפֶשׁ:</p>	<p>D If [a...] strikes the daughter of a man and causes her to lose her fetus, he shall weigh and deliver 30 shekels of silver</p> <p>E If she dies, that male shall be killed</p> <p>F If a... strikes the slave woman of a man and causes her to lose her fetus, he shall weigh and deliver five shekels of silver</p>	<p>209. If a man strike a free-born woman so that she lose her unborn child, he shall pay ten shekels for her loss.</p> <p>210. If the woman die, his daughter shall be put to death.</p> <p>211. If a woman of the free class lose her child by a blow, he shall pay five shekels in money.</p> <p>212. If this woman die, he shall pay half a mina.</p> <p>213. If he strike the maid-servant</p>	<p>17 If anyone causes a free woman to miscarry, he shall pay 20 shekels of silver.</p> <p>18 If anyone causes a female slave to miscarry, he shall pay 10 shekels of silver.</p>	<p>A50 If a man struck a married woman and caused her to miscarry, the striker's wife will be treated in the same way: he will pay for the unborn child on the principle of a life for a life. But if (the first) woman died, the man is to be executed: he will pay for the unborn child on the principle of a life for a life. If (the first)</p>

But if other damage ensues, the penalty shall be life for life		of a man, and she lose her child, he shall pay two shekels in money. 214. If this maid-servant die, he shall pay one-third of a mina.		woman's husband has no son, and she has been struck causing a miscarriage, the striker will be executed, even if the child was a girl: he will still pay for the unborn child on the principle of a life for a life. A51 If a man struck a married woman who does not rear her children [44] and caused her to miscarry, he is to pay two talents of lead.
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5. The rule to split the meat and proceeds from a dead ox and a live ox after the latter killed the former

This law from Exodus is directly mirrored in the Laws of Eshnunna.

Exodus 21:35	Laws of Eshnunna 53
<p>וְכִי־יִגָּף שׁוֹר־אִישׁ אֶת־שׁוֹר רֵעֵהוּ וּמָתוּ וּמָכְרוּ אֶת־הַשׁוֹר הַחַי וְחָצְרוּ אֶת־כַּסְפּוֹ וְגַם אֶת־הַמֵּת יַחֲצִיּוּ:</p> <p>When any party's ox injures a neighbor's ox and it dies, they shall sell the live ox and divide its price; they shall also divide the dead animal.</p>	<p>If an ox gores another ox and thus causes its death, the two ox-owners shall divide the value of the living ox and the carcass of the dead ox.</p>

6. The right to kill a burglar at night but not during the day

Exod 22:1-2	Laws of Eshnunna 12-13
<p>אִם־בַּמַּחֲתָרֶת יִמָּצֵא הַגֵּנֵב וְהָכָה וּמָת אִין לֹו דָמִים:</p>	

<p>If the thief is seized while tunneling and beaten to death, there is no bloodguilt in that case.</p> <p>אם-זָרְחָה הַשֹּׁמֵשׂ עָלָיו דָּמִים לוֹ שָׁלֵם יִשְׁלֹם אִם-אֵין לוֹ וְנִמְכָּר בְּגִבְתּוֹ:</p> <p>If the sun had already risen, there is bloodguilt in that case.—[The thief] must make restitution, and if lacking the means, shall be sold for the theft.</p>	<p>12. A man who is seized in the field of a commoner among the sheaves at midday shall weigh and deliver 10 shekels of silver; he who is seized at night among the sheaves shall die, he will not live.</p> <p>13. A man who is seized in the house of a commoner, within the house, at midday, shall weigh and deliver 10 shekels of silver; he who is seized at night within the house shall die, he will not live.</p>
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7. Sanctions for the negligent management of one's own field that results in damage to a neighbor's

Exod 22:4-5	Hittite Laws 106-107
<p>כִּי יִבְעֶר-אִישׁ שָׂדֶה אוֹ-כֶרֶם וְשָׂלַח אֶת-בְּעִירָהּ וּבָעַר בְּשָׂדֶה אֲחֵר מִיֵּטֶב שָׂדֶהוּ וּמִיֵּטֶב כֶּרְמּוֹ יִשְׁלֹם: {ס}</p> <p>When any party who owns livestock lets it loose to graze in another's land, and so allows a field or a vineyard to be grazed bare, restitution must be made for the impairment of that field or vineyard.</p> <p>כִּי-יִתְצָא אִשׁ וּמִצָּאָה קִצִּים וְנֶאֱכַל גְּדִישׁ אִוֹ הַקֶּמֶה אִוֹ הַשָּׂדֶה שָׁלֵם יִשְׁלֹם הַמִּבְעֵר אֶת-הַבָּעִירָה: {ס}</p> <p>When a fire is started and spreads to thorns, so that stacked, standing, or growing grain is consumed, the one who started the fire must make restitution.</p>	<p>106 If anyone carries embers into his field, catches it while in fruit, and ignites the field, he who sets the fire shall himself take the burnt-over field. He shall give a good field to the owner of the burnt-over field, and he will reap it.</p> <p>107 If a person lets his sheep into a productive vineyard. and ruins it, if it has fruit on the vines, he shall pay 10 shekels of silver for each 3,600 square meters. But if it is bare, he shall pay 3 shekels of silver.</p>

8. The requirement that rapists of unmarried young women pay the raped girl's father, marry the raped girl, and can't subsequently divorce her.

Deut 22:28-29	Middle Assyrian Laws A 55
<p>כִּי-יִמְצָא אִישׁ נַעַר בְּתוּלָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא-אִרְשָׁה וּתְפָסָה וְשָׁכַב עִמָּה וְנִמְצָאוּ:</p>	<p>A55 If a man has taken and raped another man's virgin daughter, dishonoring her (she was living in her father's house, was not engaged, and her hymen had not been</p>

<p>If a man comes upon a virgin who is not engaged and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are discovered,</p> <p>וְנָתַן הָאִישׁ הַשֹּׁכֵב עִמָּה לְאִבִּי הַנַּעַר חֲמִשִּׁים כֶּסֶף וְלֹא־תִהְיֶה לְאִשָּׁה תַּחַת אָשֶׁר עָנָה לֹא־יוּכַל שְׁלָחָה כָּל־יָמֶיהָ: {ס}</p> <p>the party who lay with her shall pay the girl's father fifty [shekels of] silver, and she shall be his wife. Because he has violated her, he can never have the right to divorce her.</p>	<p>penetrated—since she had not been married), and no one had a claim on the father's house, [46] the father is to take the rapist's wife and allow her to be raped, and keep her, not returning her to her husband. It does not matter if the (original) rape was in the city, the open country, at night in the street, in a granary, or at a city festival. The father may give his raped daughter to her rapist. [47] If the rapist has no wife, he is to give 'the third' in silver (the virgin-price) to her father. [48] Then her rapist is to marry her, and will not be allowed to divorce her. [49] If the father does not approve [of the marriage] he is to be given 'the third' in silver for her virginity, and give her to whomever he wants.</p>
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9. Talionic punishment for false accusers

The concept of *kasher zamam*, do to the false accusers what they tried to do to the accused, is much expounded on in Masseches Makos of the Talmud. It has parallels in two law codes.

Deut 19:16-21	Codex Hammurabi 1-4	Codex Lipit-Ishtar 17
<p>כִּי־יָקֹוֹם עַד־חֲמִס בְּאִישׁ לַעֲנוֹת בּוֹ סָרָה: If someone appears against another party to testify maliciously and gives incriminating yet false testimony,</p> <p>וְעַמְדוּ שְׁנֵי־הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־לָהֶם הָרִיב לִפְנֵי יְהוָה לִפְנֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים וְהַשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר יִהְיוּ בֵּימֵינוּ הֵהֱם: the two parties to the dispute shall appear before יהוה, before the priests or magistrates in authority at the time,</p> <p>וְדָרְשׁוּ הַשְּׁפָטִים הַיָּטֵב וְהַנָּה עַד־שִׁקְרָה הָעֵד שִׁקְרָה עָנָה בְּאִחֲיוֹ:</p>	<p>1. If any one ensnare another, putting a ban upon him, but he can not prove it, then he that ensnared him shall be put to death. 2. If any one bring an accusation against a man, and the accused go to the river and leap into the river, if he sink in the river his accuser shall take possession of his house. But if the river prove that the accused is not guilty, and he escape unhurt, then he who had brought the accusation shall be put to death, while he</p>	<p>If a man, without grounds, accuses another man of a matter of which he has no knowledge, and that man does not prove it, he shall bear the penalty of the matter for which he had made the accusation.</p>

<p>and the magistrates shall make a thorough investigation. If the one who testified is a false witness, having testified falsely against a fellow Israelite,</p> <p>וְעִשְׂיָתֶם לוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר זָמַם לַעֲשׂוֹת לְאַחִיו וּבְעֵרְתֶּם הָרַע מִקִּרְבְּךָ: you shall do to the one as the one schemed to do to the other. Thus you will sweep out evil from your midst;</p> <p>וְהַנְּשָׂאִים יִשְׁמְעוּ וַיִּירָאוּ וְלֹא-יִסְפוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת עוֹד כַּדָּבָר הַרָע הַזֶּה בְּקִרְבְּךָ: others will hear and be afraid, and such evil things will not again be done in your midst.</p> <p>וְלֹא תַחֲסִי עֵינֶיךָ נֶפֶשׁ בְּנֶפֶשׁ עֵין בְּעֵין שֵׁן בְּשֵׁן יָד בְּיָד רֶגֶל בְּרֶגֶל: {ס} Nor must you show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.</p>	<p>who leaped into the river shall take possession of the house that had belonged to his accuser.</p> <p>3. If any one bring an accusation of any crime before the elders, and does not prove what he has charged, he shall, if it be a capital offense charged, be put to death.</p> <p>4. If he satisfy the elders to impose a fine of grain or money, he shall receive the fine that the action produces.</p>	
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10. Guilt for a woman if taken sexually by a man in town but innocence if in a desolate place

Deut 22:23-27	Hittite law code, Sec. 197:
<p>כִּי יִהְיֶה נַעַר בְּתוּלָה מֵאֶרֶץ אִישׁ וּמִצָּאָהּ אִישׁ בָּעִיר וְשָׁכַב עִמָּה: In the case of a virgin who is engaged to someone —if another man comes upon her in town and lies with her,</p> <p>וְהוֹצִיאָתָם אֶת-שְׁנֵיהֶם אֶל-שֹׁעַר הָעִיר הַהוּא וּסְקִלָתָם אֹתָם בָּאֲבָנִים וְמָתָה אֶת-הַנַּעַר עַל-דְּבַר אֲשֶׁר לֹא-צִעֲקָה</p>	<p>If a man seizes a woman in the mountains (and rapes her), it is the man's offense. But if he seizes her in her house, it is the woman's offense;</p>

<p>בְּעִיר וְאֶת־הָאִישׁ עַל־דְּבַר אֲשֶׁר־עָנָה אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ רָעוּהוּ וּבְעִרְתֶּם הָרַע מִקִּרְבְּךָ: {ס}</p> <p>you shall take the two of them out to the gate of that town and stone them to death: the girl because she did not cry for help in the town, and the man because he violated his neighbor's wife. Thus you will sweep away evil from your midst.</p> <p>וְאִם־בִּשְׂדֵה יִמָּצָא הָאִישׁ אֶת־הַנֶּעֱרָה הַמְּאֻרְשָׁה וְהִחְזִיקָהּ הָאִישׁ וְשָׁכַב עִמָּהּ וְמָת הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־שָׁכַב עִמָּהּ לְבִדּוֹ:</p> <p>But if the man comes upon the engaged girl in the open country, and the man lies with her by force, only the party who lay with her shall die,</p> <p>וְלִנְעָרָה לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה דָּבָר אֵין לְנֶעֱרָה חֲטָא מוֹת כִּי כֹאֲשֶׁר יִקְוִים אִישׁ עַל־רֵעֵהוּ וְרָצְחוּ וְנָפַשׁ בֶּן הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה:</p> <p>but you shall do nothing to the girl. The girl did not incur the death penalty, for this case is like that of one party attacking and murdering another.</p>	<p>the woman shall die. If the woman's husband discovers them in the act, he may kill them without committing a crime.</p>
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11. The punishment to cut off a woman's limb when she grabs a man's genitals during a fight

Deut 25:11-12	Middle Assyrian Laws A 8
<p>כִּי־יִנָּצוּ אָנָשִׁים יִחָדְדוּ אִישׁ וְאִחִיו וְקִרְבָּהּ אִשְׁתּוֹ הָאֶחָד לְהִצִּיל אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ מִיַּד מְכָהוּ וְשָׁלְחָה יָדָהּ וְהִחְזִיקָהּ בְּמַבְשִׂיו:</p> <p>If two parties are fighting—one man with another—and the wife of one comes up to save her husband from his antagonist and puts out her hand and seizes him by his genitals,</p> <p>וְקָצַצְתָּה אֶת־כַּפָּהּ לֹא תִחַס עֵינֶיךָ: {ס}</p>	<p>A8 If a woman has crushed a man's testicle in a brawl, they are to cut off one of her fingers. If, in spite of being bound up by a physician, the second testicle is affected and becomes swollen, or if she has crushed the second testicle in the brawl, they are to tear out both of her nipples.</p>

you shall cut off her hand; show no pity.	
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12. Levirate Marriage (Yibum)

The Hittite code also mentions the father marrying the widow like Yehuda and Tamar and extends even past that to other relatives which would explain Boaz and Ruth.

Deut 25:5	Hittite code, Sec. 193 [2nd Tablet]:
<p>כִּי־יֵשְׁבוּ אֲחִים יַחְדָּו וּמִת אֶחָד מֵהֶם וְבֵן אֵין־לּוֹ לֹא־תִהְיֶה אִשְׁת־הַמֵּת הַחוּצָה לְאִישׁ זָר וּבָמָּה יָבֵא עָלֶיהָ וּלְקַחְתָּהּ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיְבַמָּה:</p> <p>When brothers dwell together and one of them dies and leaves no offspring, the wife of the deceased shall not become that of another party, outside the family. Her husband's brother shall unite with her: he shall take her as his wife and perform the levir's duty.</p>	<p>"If a man has a wife and then the man dies, his brother shall take his wife, then his father shall take her. If in turn also his father dies, one of his brother's sons shall take the wife whom he had. There shall be no punishment."</p>

13. When a thief is caught, he must pay a multiple of the item stolen

Exodus 21:37	Code of Hammurabi 8
<p>כִּי יִגְנֹב־אִישׁ שׁוֹר אוֹ־שֶׁה וּטְבָחוֹ אוֹ מִכְרוֹ חֲמִשָּׁה בָּקָר יִשְׁלַם תַּחַת הַשּׁוֹר וְאַרְבַּע־צֹאן תַּחַת הַשֶּׁה:</p> <p>When any party steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, that person shall pay five oxen for</p>	<p>8. If any one steal cattle or sheep, or an ass, or a pig or a goat, if it belong to a god or to the court, the thief shall pay thirtyfold therefor; if they belonged to a freed man of the king he shall pay tenfold; if the thief has nothing with which to pay he shall be put to death.</p>

the ox, and four sheep for the sheep.—	
Exodus 22:3	Hittite Laws 70
<p>אִם-הִמָּצָא תִמְצָא בְיָדוֹ הַגִּנֵּבָה מִשּׁוֹר עַד-חֲמֹר עַד-שֶׁה חַיִּים שְׁנַיִם יִשְׁלֹם: {ס}</p> <p>But if what was stolen—whether ox or ass or sheep—is found alive and in hand, that person shall pay double.</p>	<p>10 If anyone steals an ox, a horse, a mule, or an ass, when its owner claims it, [he shall take] it in full. In addition the thief shall give to him double. He shall look to his house for it.</p>

14. If a man dies without male offspring then the daughters inherit

In the Torah, this law comes after Tzelafchad's daughters ask Moshe for their inheritance.

Numbers 27:8	Lipit Ishtar B
<p>וְאֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל תְּדַבֵּר לֵאמֹר אִישׁ כִּי-יָמוּת וְבֵן אֵין לוֹ וְהִעֲבַרְתֶּם אֶת-נַחֲלָתוֹ לְבָתּוֹ: “Further, speak to the Israelite people as follows: ‘If a man dies without leaving a son, you shall transfer his property to his daughter.</p>	<p>If a man dies without male offspring, an unmarried daughter shall be his heir.</p>