



Obviously, everyone is anxious to avoid saying anything nasty about Judaism, like ‘Ah, the OT God of Vengeance’ and so on – so what do you think it’s about? Discuss in pairs, then share with the group

Now look at the next handout. It’s taken from an early law-code, written (as the illustration at the top shows) in a script made by pressing a wedge-shaped stylus into wet clay (and since most of the buildings of the day were made of wood, when they burned down, hey presto! Pottery libraries!). It’s called *cuneiform*, meaning, in Latin, ‘wedge shaped’ (*cuneus* = wedge). Original, eh?

What strikes you as the real difference between Hammurabi and (say) Leviticus 24:

*Anyone who maims another shall suffer the same injury in return: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; the injury inflicted is the injury to be suffered.*

It may help if you have a look at Exodus 21:

*When a slave-owner strikes the eye of a male or female slave, destroying it, the owner shall let the slave go, a free person, to compensate for the eye. If the owner knocks out a tooth of a male or female slave, the slave shall be let go, a free person, to compensate for the tooth.*

Discuss in pairs, and then share your thoughts.

It’s clear that the ‘law of retribution’ isn’t a new Hebrew idea – Hammurabi is writing about 1800 BC and limits mafia-style blood feuds. Perhaps what is different is not *limitation* but *justice* – that the worth of a human being isn’t linked to their status. Which would feed into our next point, for which I need a right-handed volunteer....

How does that little demonstration chime in with the earlier point about human worth? Is this key to understanding this passage? What are its implications?

### **‘On Divorce’**

Study the three passages offered alongside the Matthew 5 version. What do you observe? (How, by way of an aside, does this compare with John 8.4-7?)

In pairs, study Matthew 5.32-32. Note down anything which strikes you. Is there anything missing from the text which we would expect to find?

Deuteronomy 24.1 reads:

*Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable\* about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house*

But what does ‘something objectionable’ mean (\*literally ‘not to find grace in his eyes’)? The interpretation of the verse in was down to different schools of Rabbis; roughly, this went as follows:

- Rabbi Shammai (50BC-30AD) and his school said it meant adultery. Only adultery was a legitimate reason for divorce.
- Rabbi Hillel (C1 BC-early C1 AD) and *his* school said that it could refer to any reason why a wife lost favour with her husband. It could be her cantankerous temper, the fact that she talked to a stranger in the street, or that she burned his bread.
- Rabbi Akiva (AD 50-135) said: ‘Even if he found another more beautiful than she.’

Does that add anything to your thinking? Discuss in pairs and then share with the group as you feel able.

**In the group** reflect on the following:

- What questions would you put to Jesus about his teaching?
- Is it legitimate to set aside what Jesus says? How do we stop it becoming a ‘free for all’?
- What is the driving issue, to your mind, about Jesus’ thinking on Divorce? Is it at odds with ours?