

Court Case: Farmer Refusing to Pay Rent

Characters: Judge 1 Judge 2
Farmer Landowner

Judge 1: Our next case involves this landowner, who has not received payment from this farmer, who rents land from him. Farmer, do you rent land from this landowner?

Farmer: *(Stands and rubs his hands nervously against the sides of his pants.)*
Yes.

Judge 2: Did you raise any crops on the land?

Farmer: Yes.

Judge 2: Why didn't you pay the landowner with some of the crops you raised?

Farmer: *(Gives a helpless shrug.)* I couldn't. The crops were destroyed when my field was flooded.

Judge 2: How did your field become flooded?

Farmer: *(Runs his hands through his hair nervously.)* I don't know, but I think the landowner is responsible.

Judge 2: *(Speaks forcefully.)* Landowner, come forward. Why does the farmer believe you are responsible for the flooding of his fields?

Landowner: *(Approaches the judges and seems unconcerned.)* Well, the canal that is on my property broke, and water flooded over several fields. I guess his field was one of those that was flooded.

Judge 2: *(Frowns.)* When was the last time you checked the condition of the canals on your property?

Landowner: *(Shifts his weight from foot to foot nervously.)* I've been quite busy and haven't had a chance to check them for several months. In fact, this has been a really bad time for me and my family. I don't even have any grain for myself.

Judge 1:

(Looks at the audience.) Members of the Assembly, you must now make a decision. You must decide whether the landowner or the farmer is responsible for paying the other and, if so, what the payment shall be. In making your decision, consider these laws from the Code of Hammurabi that you have before you:

1. If a person rents a field for cultivation, but does not produce grain on the field, he shall give to the owner of the field as much grain as was produced on an adjoining field.
2. If a person has neglected to strengthen a canal on his property, and the canal breaks, pouring flood waters into fields, that person who owns the canal shall make good the crops that were flooded and ruined.
3. If a person who owns a broken canal that poured flood waters into fields is not able to make good the ruined crops, that person and his goods shall be sold for money, and the farmers of the fields whose crops were ruined shall share the money.

Judge 2:

Ladies and gentlemen, you have heard the evidence and have read the laws. You must now judge the case.

Stop Here
& Discuss



- What is the legal problem in this case?
- Why didn't the farmer pay what he owed for renting the land?
- Why were the farmer's crops destroyed?
- Why did the landlord's canal break?
- What problems did the landlord claim to have?