

UNIT 38

LAWS ABOUT ANIMALS

(Exodus 21:28-36)

The point that this brief section makes in the laws is that *one must ensure the safety of others by controlling the circumstances*. This pertains to neglect or carelessness with animals.

The first few verses deal with a goring ox (21:28-32), which is probably representative of any dangerous animal. If it gores so that the victim dies, then that animal must be stoned. But if it had happened before and the owner had been warned, the owner also must be put to death. But the owner can ransom himself with money in this case (v. 30). If the ox gores a servant, then the owner must pay for the slave. The simple point is that the lives of people must be saved from dangerous beasts.

A second case of negligence is found in verses 33, 34. If one digs a pit and the ox of another falls in, then the man must pay the owner for the ox. This is the only equitable arrangement. It would teach people to control their environment.

Finally, if two animals get into an altercation and one die, they sell the other and divide the money, unless there was negligence again. Here too one must keep control of dangerous animals for the sake of others. God's people were not only to deal justly and fairly when problems arose—they were to prevent danger for any living creature.