

"UNICORN"

By Mike Burnham

Let's look at Job 39:9-11, since it will be easier to establish a meaning where we know it is used in its normal sense. In the previous portion of this discourse, God had appealed to the lion, the raven, the goats of the rock, the hind, and the wild ass; and the idea was, that in the instincts of each of these classes of animals, there was some special proof of wisdom that could only come from God. The discourse is drawn from the instincts, habits, and power of the animal creation. Man could not even explain those things much less impart them.

God says that the great strength of the unicorn far surpasses that of man, and the fact that he could not be domesticated as other animals are, and made subservient to the purposes of agriculture, prove the divine wisdom and greatness of God, not man. The great strength and independence of the unicorn, and the fact that man had not been able to tame him shows God's own supremacy and power.

Looking at the other scriptures where it is used, we see that it had the following characteristics. 1) it was distinguished for its strength, Job 39:11; Num. 23:22. 2) it was an animal that was not subjected to the service of tilling the soil, and that was supposed to be incapable of being so trained, Job 39:9-11. 3) the strength of the animal was in his horns, Deut. 33:17; Psa. 92:10; 22:21. (the Hebrew word "reem" has in it no reference to horns, nor is there in the Hebrew an illusion anywhere to the supposition that the animal here referred to has only "one" horn. Wherever, in scripture, the animal is spoken of with any allusion to this member, the expression is in the plural, horns. The only variation from this is in Psalms 92:10, and there the writer is saying "my horn, singular, (or my strength, singular) shalt thou exalt like a unicorn, whose strength is one of its characteristics. The horn or horns of the "reem" were the principal seat of strength, and the instruments of assault and defense, Deut. 23:17. 4) there was some peculiar majesty or dignity in the horns of this animal that attracted attention, and that made them the proper symbol of dominion and of royal authority, Psa. 92:10, "my horn

shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn," where reference seems to be to a kingly authority or dominion, of which the horn is the symbol.

So with what known animal do these characteristics best correspond? The principal animals referred to by commentators are, the onyx or antelope; the buffalo or wild ox, and the rhinoceros. The antelope is not distinguished for its strength, nor is it known for being untamable, so I would drop that one. The buffalo has horns that are short and crooked, and also are not known for their strength in the ordinary sense. The buffalo also can be tamed, so I would also drop it. The rhinoceros on the other hand is known for strength being second only to the elephant and its horn or horns (some are known to have two horns) is erect, and perpendicular to the bone on which it stands, and so has greater power than it could have in any other position. They are entirely solid and justify all the allusions in the scriptures to the horn of the reem. Also the rhinoceros has never been tamed to my knowledge.