

# Court Case: Citizen Accused of Stealing an Ox

**Characters:** Judge                      Witness 2  
                    Witness 1                      Citizen

**Judge:** We are here today to determine if this citizen is guilty of theft. An ox was found in his possession—an ox that may belong to his neighbor, a nobleman. Are there any witnesses to prove that the ox belongs to the nobleman?

**Witness 1:** *(Stands and speaks confidently.)* Yes, judge. I know the ox belongs to the nobleman. It has his mark on it, and I saw the ox on the nobleman's property the night before it disappeared. There is no doubt that the ox in question belongs to the nobleman.

**Judge:** *(Looks around the room.)* Are there any witnesses to speak for the citizen who is accused of stealing this ox?

**Witness 2:** *(Jumps to his feet and speaks forcefully.)* Judge, the citizen told me that he didn't steal the ox. He bought it from a stranger who was passing through the city. He had no idea that the ox was stolen and really belongs to his neighbor.

**Judge:** *(Frowns.)* Did you actually see the citizen purchase the ox from this stranger?

**Witness 2:** *(Looks at the floor and speaks hesitantly.)* No, but I'm sure the citizen wouldn't lie.

**Judge:** *(Speaks harshly.)* Citizen, do you have any witnesses to this purchase?

**Citizen:** *(Slowly rises to his feet and speaks sincerely.)* No, judge, I don't, but everyone in the city knows that I am an honest person.

**Judge:** *(Looks at the audience.)* Ladies and gentlemen of the Assembly, it is time for you to decide this case. You must decide whether the nobleman's ox was stolen and, if so, whether he shall receive compensation. You must also decide whether the citizen is guilty, and what punishment he shall receive if he is. In making your

decision, consider these laws from the Code of Hammurabi that you have before you:

1. If a person stole an ox or a sheep or an ass or a pig or a boat, and if it belonged to a church or to the state, that person shall make thirtyfold restitution (give 30 times the worth in return); if it belonged to a private citizen, that person shall make tenfold restitution. If the thief cannot pay, he shall be put to death.
2. If a person claimed that suspected stolen property found in his possession was sold to him by someone else, that person must produce witnesses to the sale. The person who claimed the property was stolen from him must also produce witnesses that support that claim. If the person in whose possession the stolen property was found cannot produce witnesses to the sale of the property, that person shall be put to death.

### Judge:

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?**
- **What was the social class of the person whose ox was stolen?**
- **How did the person who claimed the ox was stolen from him prove his ownership?**
- **How did the citizen defend himself against the charge that he stole the ox?**