2 Kings - Commentaries by James M. Freeman

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 354. Captive Gods

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2 Kings 18:34. Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah?

The Assyrian monuments give evidence of a custom which illustrates the haughty language of this text. It was the practice of Assyrian conquerors to take the idols which they found in the temples of the people whom they subdued and convey them to Assyria, where they were assigned a place in Assyrian temples as captive gods. Hence Sennacherib spoke to the Jews by his embassador informing them that the Assyrian deity was so powerful that none other could cope with him. The gods of all other people against whom the Assyrians had fought had been captured, and it was in vain for the Jews to expect their god to save them.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 349. Mode of Declaring War

2 Kings 13:17. He said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot.

This was an ancient method of declaring war, and is often referred to in ancient and classical writings. A herald came to the confines of the enemy’s territory, and, after observing certain solemnities, cried with a loud voice, “I wage war against you,” at the same time assigning the reasons for the war. He then shot an arrow or threw a spear into the country to be invaded, which was considered sufficient warning of warlike intentions. Thirty days were allowed for peaceable settlement; if no such settlement was reached during that time, hostilities began at the expiration of it.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 344. Priestly Robes

2 Kings 10:22. He said unto him that was over the vestry, Bring forth vestments for all the worshipers of Baal, And he brought them forth vestments.

Like the priests of almost all nations, the priests of Baal had their particular sacred robes which they used only while officiating. They were made probably of white byssus, and were kept in a particular wardrobe of the temple under the care of some person appointed for the purpose.