Habakkuk - Commentaries by James M. Freeman

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 620. The Naked Bow

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Habakkuk 3:9. Thy bow was made quite naked.

The bow was often kept in a case made of leather or of cloth. To make it “naked” meant to take it out of its case in order to use it. The expression signifies a preparation for war, and is of the same meaning as “uncovering the shield.” See note on Isaiah 22:6 (#500).

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 619. Silence

Habakkuk 2:20. But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.

There may be a reference here to the profound and impressive silence which prevails in Oriental courts among the guards and officers who attend upon royal personages.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 618. The Use of Wood in Walls

Habakkuk 2:11. For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.

Kaphis,“beam,” is supposed by some to be a cross-beam for binding together the walls of a building. Jerome says it is “the beam which is placed in the middle of any building to hold the walls together, and is generally called by the Greeks.” Henderson, however, objects to this rendering. He says: “That it was not the wood itself is evident from the following: from, or out of the wood.” He prefers the interpretation given by the Mishna, and followed by some Jewish writers. According to these kaphis signifies a half brick. Rashi, the celebrated commentator and Talmudist, explains it to be “half a brick, which is usually laid between two layers of wood.”

There are numerous evidences to show that ancient architects used wood to unite and bind walls, and it may have been some such custom to which the prophet refers in the text.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 617. Worship of Weapons

Habakkuk 1:16. They sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag.

These fishing implements are used figuratively to represent the weapons of war by means of which the Chaldeans designed to take the Jews. It was customary among some ancient nations to offer sacrifices to their weapons. The Scythians offered sacrifices to a sword which was set up as a symbol of Mars. Herodotus says: “Yearly sacrifices of cattle and of horses are made to it, and more victims are offered thus than to all the rest of their gods” (Book 4, chap. 62). Grote, in speaking of the same people, says: “The Sword, in the literal sense of the word, was their chief god—all iron scimitar solemnly elevated upon a wide and lofty platform, which was supported on masses of fagots piled underneath to whom sheep, horses, and a portion of their prisoners taken in war, were offered up in sacrifice” (History of Greece, part 2, chap. 17). The Hindus, to this day, make offerings to their fishing tackle, to their weapons, and to their tools of various kinds.