Lamentations - Commentaries by James M. Freeman

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 562. Hanging by the Hand

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Lamintations 5:12. Princes are hanged up by their hand.

By whose hand the princes were hung up has been a matter of discussion among commentators. Some suppose that the text means they hung themselves; others that they were hung by the hand of their enemies; others still that they were suspended by the hand, and in this helpless condition left to perish. In support of this last interpretation we give a statement by Roberts: “No punishment is more common than this in the East, especially for slaves and refractory children. Has a master an obstinate slave? has he committed some great offense with his hands? several men are called, who tie the offender’s hands and hoist him to the roof, till he beg for forgiveness. School boys who are in the habit of playing truant are also thus punished. To tell a man that you will hang him by the hands is extremely provoking” Oriental Customs, p. 142).

If this custom was practiced in the time of Jeremiah we can see how great an indignity was put upon the princes when they were punished after the manner of slaves.