Leviticus - Commentaries by James M. Freeman

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 149. Forbidden Offerings

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Leviticus 2:11. Ye shall burn no leaven, nor any honey, in any offering of the Lord made by fire.

Maimonides assigns as a reason for this law that it was “the practice of the idolaters to offer only leavened bread, and to choose sweet things for their oblations, and to anoint or besmear them with honey” (Reasons, etc., p. 275).

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 164. Fruit of Young Trees Forbidden

Leviticus 19:23. Ye shall count the fruit thereof as uncircumcised: three years shall it be as uncircumcised unto you: it shall not be eaten of.

The fruit of young trees was not to be eaten until the fourth year after being planted, because of certain heathen superstitions. Maimonides says that the idolaters believed that unless the first-fruits of every tree were used in connection with certain idolatrous ceremonies the tree would suffer some great harm, and perhaps die. They further made use of magical rites for the purpose of hastening the bearing of fruit. The law in the text was aimed at this folly, for as no fruit could be touched until the fourth year, the Hebrews could not offer the first of the fruit as the idolaters did; nor would it be of any use to seek, by incantations and sprinklings, to hasten the coming of the fruit, since they could not eat it before the time designated, and long before that it would come naturally.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 160. The Victim's Head

Leviticus 16:21. Both his hands upon the head of the live goat.

It was customary among the Egyptians for the person offering sacrifice to wish that all evil might be kept from him and fall on the head of his victim. For this reason the Egyptians would not eat the head of any animal, but sold it to the Greeks or else threw it into the river.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 158. Ranges

Leviticus 11:35. Whether it be oven, or ranges for pots, they shall be broken down.

Some think that instead of “ranges for pots,” we should read “pots with lids.” Others refer the words to some arrangement by which two or more cooking vessels could be used at once, thus economizing fuel. Rauwolff (cited by Harmer, Obs., 1, 465) describes an apparatus he saw among the Arabs which may have been similar to the “ranges” spoken of here. A hole was dug in the ground about a foot and a half deep, into which the earthen pipkins were put filled with meat and with covers on. Stones were piled around the pots on three sides of the little pit, and on the fourth side the Arabs threw the fuel. In a short time the heat was intense, and the meat cooked. The expression “broken down,” in the text, may refer to the taking apart of the rude structure.