Psalms - Commentaries by James M. Freeman

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 446. Green Oil

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Psalm 92:10. I shall be anointed with fresh oil.

Literally, green oil. Some interpret this to mean oil newly made; others an oil made from green or unripe olives, like the beaten oil of the sanctuary. See note on Exodus 27:20 (#135). Roberts suggests that it means “cold drawn oil,” or that which is pressed from the nut without the process of boiling. He says: “The Orientals prefer this kind to all others for anointing themselves; it is considered the most precious, the most pure and efficacious. Nearly all their medicinal oils are thus extracted, and because they cannot gain so much by this method as by the boiling process oils so drawn are very dear. Hence their name for the article thus prepared is also patche, that is, ‘green oil’” (Oriental Illustrations, p. 339).

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 433. Posture of the Face in Prayer

Psalm 35:13. I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom.

Reference is thought to be made here to the custom among Orientals of praying with the head inclined forward until the face is almost hidden in the bosom of the garment.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 430. Cataracta

Psalm 24:7. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors.

Allusion is thought to be made here to the custom of hanging gates so that, instead of opening in the ordinary way, they rise and fall as they open and shut. A gate of this description was called cataracta, because of the force and noise with which it fell. It was used in the fortification of towns, and corresponded to the portcullis of modern times; and is supposed to have been known in the time of David. See Smith's Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities, s. v. Cataracta.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 454. Caryatides

Psalm 144:12. That our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace.

It is thought by some that reference is made here to the Caryatides or columns representing female figures. These were common in Egyptian architecture, and their appearance was doubtless familiar to the Hebrews. The psalmist wishes the fair daughters of the land to be like “corner columns finely sculptured,” thus combining strength with beauty. He desires that they may be noted, not merely for loveliness, but for usefulness, holding up the social fabric, as pillars sustain a temple.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 449. Offerings for the Dead

Psalm 106:28. They joined themselves also unto Baal-peor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead.

Allusion is supposed to be made here to those sacrifices which were anciently offered by various nations to, or in honor of, the dead. Egyptian funeral tablets have representations of some of these feasts. The friends met together to eat the sacrifice or peace offering, which consisted of various articles—meat, bread, vegetables, and liquids. What was left by the mourners was eaten by the wild animals; hence, in the hieroglyphical inscriptions the jackal is styled “the devourer of what is set out for the dead.” The ancient Greeks had a similar custom. They met, after the funeral, at the house of the bereaved, and partook of an entertainment composed of a variety of animal and vegetable substances. The broken morsels which fell from the table were looked on as sacred to the departed souls, and could not be lawfully eaten. “These fragments were carried to the tomb, and there left for the ghost to feast upon; whence, to denote extreme poverty, it was usual to say that a person stole his meat from the graves” (Potter's Antiquities of Greece, vol. 2, p. 230).