

Acts - Commentaries by James M. Freeman

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 828. Complimentary Names (9:36)

Acts 9:36. There was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas.

Dorcas means antelope, or gazelle. This beautiful animal is much admired in the East, and it is a common compliment to tell a woman that she has the eyes of an antelope. It is also no uncommon thing among Eastern nations to name their girls after various animals noted for beauty.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 827. Reading Aloud (8:28)

Acts 8:28. Sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

From verse thirty it is evident that the eunuch was reading aloud. It is still a common custom of the "Orientals generally to read aloud, even when they do it for their own instruction only, and without any intention of being heard by others. They swing the head, and even the entire upper part of the body, from one side to the other as they perform the act, and utter the words with a tone which comes nearer to singing or cantillation than to our unimpassioned mode of reading" (Hackett's Illustrations of Scripture, p. 224).

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 855. The Skiff (27:16)

Acts 27:16. We had much work to come by the boat.

The skiff, or small boat, which accompanied the ancient sailing vessel was not taken on board, as with us, but was usually allowed to follow in the wake. In this instance, by reason of the storm, it was thought advisable to take it on board, but the task was one of great difficulty.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 853. Appeal - Roman - Councilors (25:11-12)

Acts 25:11-12. I appeal unto Cesar. Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Cesar? unto Cesar shalt thou go.

1. The Roman governors exercised supreme jurisdiction over the provinces; but all Roman citizens had the inalienable right of appeal. This right Paul saw fit to use, and thereby took the case out of the hands of Festus and removed it to a higher court.

2. The assessors, or councilors, were men learned in the law, whose business it was to sit in judgment with the governor, and advise with him on points of law. Festus turned to them to ascertain whether the appeal of Paul was admissible.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 835. Gods in Human Form (14:11)

Acts 14:11. The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.

It was a common opinion among the ancient heathen that the gods were accustomed to visit men in human form. Frequent reference is made to this opinion by classical writers. There was a tradition among this very people that Jupiter and Mercury had once appeared in Phrygia to an aged couple, Philemon and Baucis. In this visit the two gods were entertained by Lycaon, whence the name of the province, Lycaonia.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 833. Knocker Street Door (12:13)

Acts 12:13. As Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.

1. The door of an Eastern house usually has an iron knocker, consisting of a thick ring.

2. "The door of the gate" is the outer or street door; the door of the porch, or entrance way to the house. This outer door or gale sometimes has a smaller door cut into it, which can be more readily opened, and is more frequently used than the large door of which it forms a part. Some writers think that a door of this description is referred to in the text.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 829. Prayer on the Housetop (10:9)

Acts 10:9. Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour.

The housetop was used, not only as a place of idolatrous worship (see note on Leviticus 26:30) but also for the worship of the true God. To us this would, seem to be a singular place for prayer, unless one wished to indulge in Pharisaic ostentation; but the battlement around the flat roof of an Oriental dwelling (see note on Deut. 22:8, #201) might readily be used as a screen from public observation. It may be that one reason why the Jews prayed upon the housetop was that they might more readily look in the direction of the temple in Jerusalem. See note on Daniel 6:10 (#595).

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