

John - Commentaries by James M. Freeman

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 801. Period of Maturity (8:57)

John 8:57. Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?

The Jews considered fifty years as a period of maturity in human life. The expression in the text is therefore not to be considered, as some have strangely done, to imply that Jesus was nearly fifty years old at this time, but simply that, still being a young man, it was impossible that he could have seen Abraham.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 799. Freedom by the Son (8:36)

John 8:36. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

It was a custom among some of the Grecian cities to permit the son and heir to adopt brothers, and thereby give them a share in the rights and privileges enjoyed by himself. To this some think reference is made in the text. Others think the reference is to a Roman custom by which the son, after his father's death, might, if he chose, give freedom to the slaves that were born in the house during his father's time.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 796. Contempt for Women (4:27)

John 4:27. Upon this came his disciples, and marveled that he talked with the woman.

Their astonishment was not only because of the non-intercourse of the Jews and the Samaritans, but also because it was unusual for a Jewish teacher to converse with women in a public place. The rabbins expressed their contempt for women by teaching that they were not to be saluted or spoken to in the street, and they were not to be instructed in the law.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 795. Drawing Water (4:11)

John 4:11. The woman saith unto him, Sir, Thou halt nothing to draw with, and the well is deep.

The wells in Palestine are usually deep. The depth of Jacob's well has been variously estimated by travelers from sixty-five feet to over a hundred. The best authorities give from seventy-five to eighty feet. To get water from such a depth a rope is fastened to the leathern bucket or earthen jar, which is let down into the well, sometimes by means of a pulley, and sometimes by merely sliding the rope over the stone curb of the well. It is not uncommon thing to find well-curbs with deep furrows in them, worn by the friction of the ropes which have for many years passed over them.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 810. Formal Condolence (11:19)

John 11:19. Many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

The formal visitation of condolence from friends took place immediately after burial, and lasted several days. As soon as They returned from the grave the mourners stood in a row, and their friends passed by, each speaking a word of comfort while passing. There were afterward visits of sympathy at the house, those on the third day being specially marked. It was thus that a large company assembled at the house of the sorrowing sisters.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 807. Double Names (11:16)

John 11:16. Thomas, which is called Didymus.

Both these names have the same signification, a twin; Thomas being Aramaic, and Didymus, Greek. It is said to have been customary for the Jews when traveling into foreign countries, or familiarly conversing with the Greeks or Romans, to assume a Greek or Latin name of similar meaning to their own.

John 10:22. It was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter.

This was a feast instituted in honor of the restoration of divine worship in the temple, and its formal rededication to sacred uses after it had been defiled by the heathen under Antiochus Epiphanes. This dedication took place B.C. 164, and an account of it is given in the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees 4:52-59. The feast lasted two days, and could be celebrated not only in Jerusalem but elsewhere.

In later times it was known by the name of the "Feast of Lamps," or the "Feast of Lights," because of the custom of illuminating the houses while celebrating it. The rabbins have a tradition that, when the Jews under Judas Maccabeus drove the heathen out of the temple and cleansed it from its pollution, they found a solitary bottle of sacred oil which had escaped the profane search of the heathen. This was all they had for lighting the sacred lamps; but by a miracle this was made to last for eight days, which period was therefore the time for the duration of the feast.

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