

Judges - Commentaries by James M. Freeman

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 237. Sports Witnessed From the Roof

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Judges 16:27. Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport.

This building must have been of great size to have gathered on its flat roof three thousand people. The blind Samson probably "made sport" on one side of the enclosed courtyard, where the spectators on the roof and the crowds within could see him at the same time. In Algiers, on occasions of public festivity, the courtyard of the palace is covered with sand for the accommodation of the wrestlers, who are brought there to amuse the crowd. Dr. Shaw says, "I have often seen numbers of people diverted in this manner upon the roof of the dey's palace at Algiers" (Travels, p. 217).

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 238. The Middle Pillars

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Judges 16:29. Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up.

The two "middle pillars" here spoken of constituted the key of the entire building: these falling, the house would be destroyed. Pliny mentions two large theaters built of wood, and planned with such ingenuity that each of them depended on one hinge. Dr. Thomson suggests, from his observations of the peculiar topography of Gaza, that the building was erected on a side-hill, having a steep declivity, and in such a position that the removal of the central columns would precipitate the whole edifice down the hill in ruinous confusion (The Land and the Book, vol. 2, p. 342).

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 221. Mutilation of Captives

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Judges 1:6. They pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes.

This was an ancient method of treating captured enemies. It rendered them permanently incapable of performing the duties of a soldier. According to his own confession (vs. 7) Adoni-bezek had practiced the same cruelties on many of the royal captives whom he had taken in battle. The Assyrian kings were addicted to similar cruelties. One of the ancient monuments bears an inscription which was put upon it by order of Asshur-izirpal, who began his reign B.C. 883. In this he says, speaking of a captured city, "Their men, young and old, I took prisoners. Of some I cut off the feet and hands; of others I cut off the noses, ears, and lips; of the young men's ears I made a heap; of the old men's heads I built a minaret" (Rawlinson's Five Great Monarchies, vol. 2, p. 85, note).