

The Sabbath School. INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Second Quarter Lesson 11, June 10, 1900

DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. Mark 6: 14-29. Read Daniel 5. Compare Matthew 14: 1-12. Commit Verses 21-24

GOLDEN TEXT.—Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess: but be filled with the Spirit.—Eph. 5: 18. HISTORICAL SETTING

Time.—John was imprisoned in March or April, A. D. 28. He was beheaded a year later, in March or April, A. D. 29.

Place.—Jesus in G. G. Jilee. John was imprisoned and put to death at Macherus, a strong fortress and castle on the borders of Arabia, nine miles east of the northern end of the Dead Sea. The feast at which Herodias demanded the head of John the Baptist was probably held in this castle.

Note also through this lesson the contrasts between Herod and John. A TRUBLED CONSCIENCE, OR A MARTYR'S CROWN.—vs. 14-16. And king Herod. Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, who, thirty years before, murdered the innocents at Bethlehem. He was ruler over Galilee and Perea. Heard of him. Of Jesus. And he said to his officers (Matthew) That John the Baptist whom he had murdered was risen from the dead, and thus was firm and dangerous and terrible in his faithfulness than before when he reproved the king. Therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him. He thought that John had brought back with him the larger powers, those diviner gifts, which the spirit receives when it enters upon the heavenly life. Others said, Perhaps they said it to quiet Herod's conscience. That it is Elias. Greek for Elijah. But... Herod... said. Impelled to this opinion by his guilty conscience.

THE WICKED KING AND THE FAITHFUL PROPHET.—For Herod himself. Influenced by personal reasons, not urged by other. Bound him in prison. At Macherus, according to Josephus. For Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife Herod was married to the daughter of Artas, an Arabian king, but abandoned her for the sake of Herodias. Herodias was "an able, ambitious, unprincipled, but bewitching and ensnaring woman." When she married Philip, she probably expected that, as the eldest son of Herod the Great, he would be heir of the whole kingdom; but now Philip was poor; his brother Antipas was rich. For John had said, Herod probably invited John to preach before the court. It is not lawful for thee, (1) because he had put away his lawful wife. (2) He had persuaded Herodias to forsake her husband, Herod's brother Philip. (3) He had married Herodias, his niece and sister-in-law, contrary to the law.

Why John Reproved Herod. Herod's course was bringing untold evils upon the people. Aretas, indignant at the affront Herod had put upon him, had declared war; and at the very time of John's reproof, preparations for war were actively going on. John could not effectively denounce the sins of the people if he let sins in high places go unreproved.

Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him. She regarded him as her enemy. And would have killed him. To stop his mouth. E. Herod John must die, or her whole life was lost. For Herod feared John. There is nothing so cowardly as a guilty conscience, or so to be feared by evil-doers as a holy man who voices the truth of God. He feared him, also, because of his influence with the people (Matt. 14: 5). And observed him, "guarded him," kept him safe from the attempts of Herodias to kill him. And when he heard him. He seems to have been fascinated by John, whose strong character overawed him at times. He did many things. His conscience being touched, he tried to make a compromise with it by doing a variety of good things from which he would otherwise have abstained. He wanted to please Herodias, but he dare not kill the prophet, on account of the people. Herod was afraid of everything except God. John feared God, but no other being. He hoped that John would change. Perhaps he enjoyed the prophet's denunciations of the sins of others.

When a convenient day was come, for Herodias. Made a supper, or banquet feast. The supper was the meal of the day, taken toward or at evening, and often prolonged into the night. To his lords, the nobles and state officers. High captains. Greek, "commanders of a thousand." The daughter of the said Herodias: even of the queen. Not a common dancing girl, but her own daughter, was put to this degrading task, for the accomplishment of her malignant purpose. Her name, according to Josephus, was Salome, a daughter

of Philip, Herod's brother. Came in and danced, usually with the accompaniment of tambourines or bell attached to the fingers, and with songs. "Dancing women were abundant, and in such banquets it was common for them to appear." "No reputable maiden could ever have done what she did. The dancing girls in the Orient are exceedingly popular as entertainers, but their profession is one the practise of which, it is not much to say, ruinous alike to themselves and to the spectators." And pleased Herod. The scheme succeeded. He was enraptured with her faultless grace and skill, "fascinated by the novel spectacle of a high-born and charming girl going through the voluptuous movements of an Oriental dance." It was a shrewd scheme to take advantage of Herod's half-intoxicated condition. Whatsoever thou shalt ask, etc., a wild and reckless promise that could have been made only by one who had lost his wits by drunkenness.

A Temperance lesson can be taught from this rash promise. Wine and strong drink distort the judgment long before they produce drunkenness. An auctioneer once said that men would bid higher under the influence of drink, which was therefore passed around freely. A drinking man is not a safe business man.

"O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths, to steal away their brains!"

A Kingdom for a dance. Herod was willing to give away half of his kingdom for the sight of an immoral dance. Poor fool! But how many in our day give away the whole kingdom of their souls, with health and hope, prosperity, peace, and goodness,—yes, the whole kingdom of heaven,—for the paltry price of a glass of wine. The race of Esau still lives, who sell their birthright for a mess of pottage. Said unto her mother, What shall I ask? Which of all the beautiful things off red her,—"palaces, jewels, gorgeous apparel,—all that a girl's heart could desire." The mother said, The head of John the Baptist. By what argument could she persuade her daughter to ask such a gift instead of riches, palaces, and jewels? Professor Parker puts these words in her mother's mouth: "Little for, you know not what you ask: what would all these things be to you and me, unquenched and outcast, as we may be any day if John the Baptist lives?"

What Shall I Ask? Here is an illustration of the mother's power to lead her child to good or evil. Every child in effect says to its mother, What shall I ask,—ask of God, of the future; shall it be earthly good or heavenly good, sin or righteousness, heaven or hell? And the mother, consciously or not, is, by words, by example, by training, by spirit, answering this question, and putting forward her child to good or evil. She came in straightway with haste. She could not have done it if she had taken time to think. Give me by and by (Old English for immediately), in a charger, a large dish or platter. And the king was exceeding sorry. Not penitent, but anxious and troubled. It was so different from what he expected. It was a gift burdened with danger. Yet for his oath's sake. Herod had placed himself in a dilemma compelling him to choose one of the evils,—to break a rash, wicked oath, or to commit murder. And... which sat with him. Probably if the oaths had been secret, he would not have hesitated to break them. The king sent an executioner. Probably to another part of the castle. The damsel gave it to her mother. Herodias seemed to have triumphed after a year of waiting. His disciples... took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb, and then went and told Jesus.

Herod and Herodias: Their Apparent Success, but Real Failure. They seemed to succeed, but their life was a failure. John seemed to fail, but his life was a marvelous success. They had riches and honor. They had all that luxury could give. They fared sumptuously every day, but their lives were a failure, for there were bitter ingredients in their cup of life which destroyed its fascinations.

From this moment began for Herod Antipas a series of annoyances and misfortunes, which only culminated in his death years afterwards in disrowned royalty and unapitied exile. And Herodias suffered all with him. "Our pleasant vices," it has well been said, "are made the instruments to punish us."

Herodias proved the curse and ruin of Herod. On account of her there was a war with Aretas of Arabia, the father of Herod's divorced wife, in which he was worsted. In A. D. 38, less than ten years after the murder of John, "Herodias' ambition, against her husband's better judgment, led him to Rome to solicit the title of king, lately given to Agrippa (Acts 12: 1), the brother of Herodias. Antipas not only failed, but was deprived of his dominions,

and banished to Lyons, in Gaul, where he died. All through his seeming prosperity his conscience was powerful enough to trouble him but not enough to restrain him from sin. No regrets that, like Herod's are weaker than the fear of man, no washing of hands like Pilate's, no tears like Esau's, can cleanse the guilty soul. John's life was short. His work lasted less than two years. He finished the work that was given him to do. His life was a completed whole. After the Messiah had come and was established, the work of the forerunner was ended.

John the Baptist has part in all the triumphs of Christianity for which he prepared the way. John lives through all ages by his example. He holds up before all men an ideal of heroism, courage, faithfulness to duty. He is a perpetual inspiration. John is one of the great cloud of witnesses who are watching the progress of the kingdom of God among men.

"If thou wilt be a hero and wilt strive to help thy fellow and exalt thyself, Thy feet, at last, shall stand on jasper floors; Thy heart, at last, shall seem a thousand hearts— Each single heart with myriad raptures filled— While thou shalt sit with princes and with kings, Rich in the jewel of a ransomed soul."

The Church Tramp.

Ignorance of the Bible.

"Significant Ignorance About the Bible," as shown among college students of both sexes, is the subject of an article in the May Century, by the Rev. Charles F. Twining. Sometimes ask yourself, he writes, whether the American people are really aware how far the Bible has ceased to be a force in both their literature and their theology. The Bible might continue to be a great boon to literature; or one can easily think that the Bible might maintain a high place in literature and yet lose its primacy in theology. The latter is causing it to lose its theological value, and, apparently, among the people it is ceasing to be known as a classic should be known.

In the early part of the college year of 1894-95, as the first exercise in a course of study in the Bible, I set for the members of the freshman class an examination paper composed of extracts from Tennyson, each of which contained a biblical allusion not at all recodite. To each of these thirty-four men twenty-two questions were put, which would demand seven hundred and forty-eight answers. The record shows that out of a possible seven hundred and forty-eight correct answers, only three hundred and twenty-eight were given.

So much for the first test. Five years later I made a like test of college girls. The questions were identical, with a single exception. Of all the questions, every one was answered correctly by just one girl, and, what is rather more remarkable, her knowledge was so exact that to her replies to a good many of the questions she added the book of the Bible in which the reference is to be found. Another girl omitted the reply to the reference to Hezekiah, and gave incorrect answer to the one about the miracle at Cana of Galilee. Another omitted the references to Hezekiah and to Peter's sheet, and answered incorrectly the question of Parash's darkness. . . .

The Bible societies may print the book by hundreds of thousands, but the people do not read it, or, if they do read it, they are not impressed by it. Its history, whether received as veracious or as fabulous, is not known. Its heroes are less familiar than Jack the Giant-killer or Jack the House-builder. Its poetry is not appreciated. The majesty and magnificence of its style, its deftness of phrase and sweetness of allusion, its perfection of literary form, as well as the profound significance of its ethical and religious teachings, are ceasing to be part of the priceless possession of the community. Explain the condition as best we may, point out the results as one ought, yet the first emotion is one of grief over their impoverishment of humanity.

Why Do We Do It?

It is surprising how little we know about the ancient origin of some of our most familiar customs, and how many things we do without knowing just why. Why do we have bows on the left side of our hats? In olden times when men were much in the open air, it was the habit to tie a cord around the crown of the hat and let the ends fall on the left side, to be grasped on the arising of a squall. They fell on the left side so that they might be grasped by the left hand, the right usually being more usefully engaged. Later on the ends got to be tied in a bow, and later still they became useless, yet the bow has remained and will probably remain till the next deluge or something of that sort.

Why are bells tolled for the dead? This has become so familiar a practice that a funeral without it would appear unchristian. Yet the reason is quite barbarous. Bells were tolled long ago when people were being buried in order to frighten the evil spirits who lived in the air.

Why do fair ladies break a bottle of wine on the ship they are christening? Merely another survival of barbaric custom. In the days of sacrifice to the gods it was customary to get some poor victim, when a boat was being launched, and to cut his throat over the prow, so that his blood baptized it.

Why are dignitaries defended by a salute when they visit a foreign port? It seems a curious sort of welcome, this firing off of guns, but it seems that the custom arose in a very reasonable way. Originally a town or a warship fired off its guns on the approach of important and friendly strangers to show that they had such faith in the visitors' peaceful intentions they didn't think it necessary to keep their guns loaded.

Why do we sometimes throw a shoe after a bride? The reason is not very complimentary. From old times it has been the habit of mothers to chastise their children with a shoe. Hence the custom arose of the father of a bride making a present to the bridegroom of a shoe as a sign that it was to be his right to keep her in order.

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THIS OUR STORY? Why every morning I have a taste in my mouth; my head is often feel dizzy, and I am getting so tired that sometimes I tremble, my nerves are all unstrung, getting pale and thin. I am tired in the morning as if I had done your doctor say? You are suffering from indigestion. This is his remedy? J. J. Adams' Sarsaparilla. You must not have constipated bowels if you expect the Sarsaparilla to do its best work. J. J. Adams' Pills cure constipation. Have a book on Paleness and Weakness which you may refer to for the asking. Write to our Doctors. You would like to consult with a physician about your condition. Write us freely all the particulars of your case. You will receive a prompt answer. Address, DR. J. J. ADAMS, Lowell, Mass.

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