

THE LESSON OUTLINE.

Homely Lessons in Christian Living.

- I. GOD IS GLORIFIED BY THE MARTYRDOM OF HIS SERVANTS.
Herod killed James with the sword. v. 1, 2.
 Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. *Psa. 116. 15.*
 Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. *Acts 5. 41.*
- II. GOD IS GLORIFIED BY THE PROLONGED LIFE OF HIS SERVANTS.
The Lord brought him out of the prison. v. 17.
 He preserveth the way of his saints. *Prov. 2. 8.*
 With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation. *Psa. 91. 16.*
- III. THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH IS TO PRAY WITHOUT CEASING.
Prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God. v. 5.
 Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest. *Isa. 62. 6.*
 Men ought always to pray, and not to faint. *Luke 18. 1.*
- IV. THE CHRISTIAN OBEYS EVERY DIVINE COMMAND.
So he did. v. 8.
 To obey is better than sacrifice. *1 Sam. 15. 22.*
 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. *John 15. 14.*
- V. EVEN THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN GOD SOMETIMES LACK FAITH.
When they saw him, they were astonished. v. 16.
 If....he had answered me; yet would I not believe. *Joh 9. 16.*
 Their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. *Luke 24. 11.*

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

We may assume that by the generous help of the Church at Antioch the believers in Jerusalem suffered comparatively little from the "dearth" that devastated Judea. How long Barnabas and Saul remained in Jerusalem we are not told. "About that time" persecution came to the Christians from a new source. Herod Agrippa I, a consummate politician, had by the Roman emperor been made king of the tetrarchies ruled in our Lord's day by Philip and Lysanias, and a little later of the tetrarchy of Galilee and Perea also; later still another emperor added to Agrippa's dominions Judea and Samaria; so that at the time of which we now study he ruled over a territory as large as that governed by his infamous grandfather, Herod the Great. He was regarded by the Jews as a model ruler, for he was scrupulous in the observance of the Mosaic law and liberal in governmental measures. The jealousies that had arisen in the minds of the authorities of Jerusalem against the believers in Christ had been carefully noted by Herod, and, characteristically, he took the side of the chief priests, and now undertook to do what they had failed to do—destroy the Church by killing its leaders. We have in our lesson an account of the murder of James the son of Zebedee, of the arrest and miraculous liberation of Peter, and, though not in the printed verses, of the midnight meeting of the Christians for prayer in behalf of Peter. Innumerable questions that arise about this episode in the history of the early Church can have only one adequate reply, "God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform." Why he allowed James to be killed and preserved Peter we cannot say; but the details of the story are so filled with moral and spiritual suggestiveness that we need not mourn over the absence of what is not revealed.

I. WHAT HEROD DID.

Verse 1. The rather vague note of time with which verse 1 begins is characteristic of Luke. Until *Herod the king stretched* ["put"] forth his hands to war ["afflict"] certain of the church the Christians had been enjoying a long period of peace, during which Christianity rapidly spread. It will be well for the teacher to mark the distinction between this Herod (Agrippa) and the two who are mentioned in the gospels (Herod the Great and Herod Antipas). Besides these there was a second Herod Agrippa, mentioned in Acts 26.

2, 3. *He killed James the brother of John with the sword.* Of this apostle little is known beyond his family relationship (he was the son of Zebedee, and brother of the John who wrote the gospel) and his peculiar intimacy with Jesus. He was one of three whose companionship was sought by our Saviour in the climactic hours of his life. To say that a man was "killed with the sword" is almost equivalent to saying that he was beheaded. The early Christians used to tell that the soldier who arrested James, and whose duty kept him during the trial standing beside the apostle, was convinced