

this is a sign that His death is near, and that being lifted up, He will draw all men unto Him. But, as the Gentile world seeks the Saviour, the Jews reject their Messiah, so John closes the first half of his Gospel with the awful words, "Jesus departed, and did hide Himself from them" (ch. 12 : 36); and summarizes the reasons of the tragedy, ch. 12 : 37-50.

LESSON XXIV.

POLITICAL CONDITIONS OF PALESTINE

The political ideal of the Jews was the theocracy. The church and the state were to be one. Everything that belonged to the state was meant to be religious. But the Jews had rarely been free to realize this ideal. They were usually the subjects, sometimes the slaves, of great empires. They struggled for national existence, and they hated their conquerors, for they believed that they were foes of their religion.

HEROD THE GREAT—When Jesus was born Herod was the ruler of Palestine. His right to rule was derived from the emperor of Rome, who gave him the title, "King of the Jews." Palestine had been under Roman dominion from its conquest by Pompey in 63 B.C., and remained so till the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Herod possessed traits that gave him some claim to be called "great"—a commanding presence, physical vigor, wide culture, devotion to philosophy and history, fondness for Grecian and Roman art. But along with these, especially in later life, were gross vices; he was cruel, ambitious, sensual; several members of his own family were murdered by him and he gave the command for the slaughter of the innocents. In his dying hour, knowing that there would be rejoicing when he passed away, he told his sister Salome and her husband Alexas to shut up the principal Jews in the circus at Jericho, and put them to death when he expired, that there might be mourning at, though not for his death. This cruel command was not carried out, and the death of the tyrant was welcomed as a relief.

HEROD'S SUCCESSORS—Upon his death in 4 A.D., the kingdom was divided into three parts, but none of his sons received the royal title, and the rule of the empire became more direct. His son Philip had the territory farthest from Jerusalem, the northern part

of what lay east of the Jordan. He was the husband of Salome, daughter of Herodias.

To Antipas, another son, fell Galilee and the land known as Perea, east of the Jordan. It was he who put John the Baptist to death and ruled over Galilee during the life of Jesus. Jesus called him "that fox," Luke 13 : 32. He was sly, immoral, unscrupulous. Tiberias on the Lake of Galilee was built by him.

Herod's principal heir was Archelaus, who received Judæa, Samaria, and Idumea. In the year 6 A.D. he was deposed, and his territory was made an imperial province under a Roman officer called procurator. This officer was the representative of the emperor, had command of the army, and saw to the collection of taxes. During the lifetime of Christ, Judæa and Samaria were governed by procurators, of whom the best known was Pontius Pilate.

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE—The procurator was the chief authority, and he alone could sentence to death. Practically all other offences were left to the Jewish courts, the highest of which was the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem. This body, made up of 71 "elders," had sole authority in certain matters, and was the court of appeal in others. In the New Testament narratives of the trial of Jesus it appears as the court of jurisdiction, Matt. 26 : 57; Mark 14 : 55; 15 : 1; Luke 22 : 66; John 11 : 47.

TAXES—Taxes were levied by Rome and went to the imperial treasury. The official by whom, or by whose authority, they were collected was called a publican. The name primarily meant one who superintended the revenue, but in the New Testament it also included one who attended to the actual collection. It was customary for a publican to lease the customs of a particular district for a fixed sum, gaining whatever was in excess and making good any deficiency.

The tax-gatherer was universally hated because he was the servant of a foreign government, and because the money he collected went to support that government. If a Jew took part in this work he was regarded as peculiarly lacking in patriotism. No man who valued his reputation would accept the office, so that it fell into the hands of the worst class in the community.