

His brother Philip's wife....he had married her v. 17; heard him gladly, v. 20; laid hold upon John and bound him in prison, v. 17; sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought, v. 27. It is instructive to trace the downward progress of Herod. He took the first wrong step when he married Herodias. But his conscience was not entirely hardened by this first sin. He was still ready to listen to John and to follow his counsel in many things, but not to do the one thing which he should have done, give up Herodias. He kept near his side the cause of his departure from the right path and her influence over him became stronger and stronger, until at last she induced him to put John in prison. But even her persuasions could not lead the king farther in the ratification of her murderous designs, until she took advantage of a moment when strong drink and evil passion had stolen away his brains and drowned the voice of conscience, and obtained from him the sentence that John should be beheaded.

Herod had now cut himself loose from the one influence which would have kept him back from evil and gave himself up to the power which would drag him down. His course in the downward direction becomes more rapid. His next appearance in the Gospel story is when a certain Pharisee came to Jesus and warned him that Herod was likely to kill him. (Luke 13: 31, 32.) It was in reply to this warning that our Lord employed the only contemptuous words which we read of his ever having

uttered. He called Herod "that fox". Such was the Saviour's estimate of his character, a cunning, crafty, cruel, treacherous fox.

Then Herod again disappears from the pages of the sacred history, until we see Pilate sending Jesus to him for trial because he was the ruler of Galilee. (Luke 23: 7.) Herod was "exceeding glad" to see Jesus. (v. 8). He was not afraid of Him; he would not now have been afraid of John. A long course of sin had hardened his heart and seared his conscience as with a hot iron. He looked upon Jesus merely as one who might amuse him and his courtiers by working, for their entertainment, one of the miracles of which they had heard so much. (v. 8.) When our Lord refused to gratify their idle curiosity, the king with his men of war arrayed Him in mock splendor and then sent Him away. (v. 11.) This same Herod who had feared John, listened to his words, and obeyed many of his counsels, was now so sin-hardened that he could heap scorn and ridicule on the Master of John.

And it might have been so different with him. Had he only yielded to the persuasions and warnings of the Baptist, who knows but that he might have been led on step by step until he should have become a follower of Jesus? But because he would not retrace that first false step, he went on in the road which led at last to ruin. For, what hope could there be of a man who could not treat Jesus seriously? It is levity utterly incomprehensible and inexcusable.

*See Lesson 1*

#### POINTS AND PARAGRAPHS

To have heard of Jesus leaves us without excuse if we do not accept Him as our Saviour. v. 14.

Conscience makes cowards of us all. v. 16.

A good motto is to "Resist the beginnings"; for one wrong step leads easily to another. The downward road is steep and swift. v. 17.

Our truest friends are those who do not fear to rebuke our wrong doing. v. 18. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." (Prov. 27: 6.).

It is a good thing that wicked people are not able to do all the evil they desire to do. v. 17.

To do "many things" is not enough. We must keep the whole law of God. To fail at one point is to be guilty of all (James 2: 10). v. 20.

The tempter is always on the watch for a "convenient day" to lead us astray. v. 21.

How far sin carries those who yield to it! The queen, in her eagerness for revenge,