

6-3-84. Monarchy. Of all human institutions the most persistent has been that of government. The function of ruling, or administering, of judging, the behavior of a group of people is as old as is human society; it is found as far back as there are records and memory. Philosophers from Plato & Aristotle to Locke and Hobbes to Mosca and Pareto have speculated upon the origins of govt, and the nature of the orderly state. Aristotle said that man is a political animal, meaning that our natural state is that of the regulated community under rules, or laws. Wherever mankind attempts to work together for common purposes, such as the general welfare, or the happiness of the group, or justice in social behavior, govt appears, because there can be no orgn w/o some pattern or underst of rule that clearly establ the pwr to make decisions and to accept responsibl for them. That is true in every kind of human grouping, the family, business orgns, relig groups, educat institus. But the term sovereignty is usually reserved for the ultimate authority of the political state, and it is that which has always created friction between the competing authorities for the obedience and respect of those who live under their rule. That tension is a conflict between differing sources of authority, for the fundamental probl of govt, or of any set of laws, or rules, is that of authority. By what right, we ask, does the cop in the beat tell us when to go and when to stop? That confrontation makes of govt a moral matter and brings it into the sphere we call relig, and it is that which is the theme of the lesson for today, text 1 Saml 12. Today we have a new month, a new quarter, and a new lesson series. We take a great leap backward, from the genl ltr of James which we read last month, to the beginnings of the nation of Isr in the promised land. Those of you w/long memories will recall that it was not quite 2 yrs ago, in fall term of 82, that we had a series of OT Hist, from the creation to the passover, to the promised land, to the time of the judges, and Gideon, and the profound theolog insight in Judges 8 that God is Isr's true King. Now this term we begin where that earlier series ended, with a unit whose title is the Rise & Fall of a Nation. 4 lessons are from the books of Saml, and the remainder of the 13 are from 1 and 2 Kgs. They will take us from the establmt of the kgdm to its greatness under David and Solomon, to its division into two parts, and to the fall first of one and then of the other, to the sorrow and humiliation of defeat and to the dark night of exile in Babylon. It is an excursion, then, into bibl history. Hist, to those who wrote, collected, and edited the traditions and accounts which became our scriptures, was not the same thing it became to the professional hists of 19th Cen. To them it was the record of God at work among mankind. Whatever happened had for them a relig meaning, for God was Lord not only of the creation but also of all that happened upon earth. Thus the secular hist might assert that in the 8th Cen BC world of giant empires in collision the continued existence of the small state of Isr as an indep monarchy was unlikely; but to the keepers of the holy place and the scrolls their existence depended upon the favor of God, and that was determined by their obedience to the covenant relatshp which God had graciously provided for them, first at Mt. Sinai after their release from bondage, and then repeated at important milestones along the way. The relig of Isr was an historical revelat of God to man; it was not something that happened in the abstract or the imagination. It was tied to time and place; faith was a matter of event as interpreted within the framework of the purposes and nature of a covenantal God. Event w/o faith meant little; it was faith that transformed the event into a confrontation w/dmty and made it a reality. But at the same time, faith w/o event was also w/o meaning, floating around as it did, in a world and a time-warped of its own. What made the relig of Isr unique was its assertion that God acted in time, God intervened in history, and out of that action arose all we human beings need to know about God's nature and purpose for us. Faith inspired that historical record, and it is only by faith that it could be understood, and that is also true for us today. We cannot underst the meaning of reality to those ancient people until we accept their interpretat of events, until we stand where they stood and adopt the perspective from which they viewed their world and their time. And when we do we can better underst, and appreciate, our own relig faith, for we stand in community w/those Isr historians and prophets, we are also involved in what these records revealed; we belong to it and it to us. Individually and collectively, we are part of the events, and the faith thru which the events are viewed, that is the story of Isr. In that perspective of poetry, and imagination, and event, and history, we can see our present with a clarity otherwise closed to us. Certainly that is the correct way to read the Bibl, and it is worth considering that it may also be the most meaningful way to read the history of our country, or the morning newspaper. With that brief background to the Bibl understanding of hist, let us turn to an equally brief background to the part of that hist we have for today. Coming to a particular event in the past is like walking overland and coming upon a river; we cannot underst it until we go up and down its course to see its origins and its end results. It was during the bronze age in the middle east that the story began, with Abrahm and Isaac and Jacob who becme Isr, and his 12 sons. To Egy went Joseph in slavery, but w/divine assistance he became chief minister to the Pharaoh, so he was in a position to save his family when famine struck. And there they remained, becoming themselves enslaved; it was Moses the father of the nation who led them to freedom and to the covenant and the comdmts. For a long lost generat they wandered in the desert, finally coming into the land of promise, the same country Abraham had himself come to so long before. It was now the

mid-13th Cen B.C., and for the next 2 cns their conquest of the land of Canaan went on; it was the time of the judges, the early iron age, and hist it was the age of the small states in that portion of the world; neither Egy nor Babyl nor Assyr was as yet strong enough to endanger the people of Palestine, where Shiloh was the principal shrine to Yahweh their God. The 12 tribes did not as yet make a unified nation; that happened when the last judge was replaced by the first king, and that is where we meet the river of Hebr Hist. 1 Sam 12: 13-15. This Chap contains Samuel's farewell address to his people, when he stepped aside after naming and installing Saul of the tribe of Benjamin as Kg. But there is some uncertainty in the editing of the records, for in Chap 15 we find Saml still in command of things. But no matter. One interesting point before we consider these lines: in v. 3 is the earliest use of the Hebr word Messiah to mean the Lord's anointed; in this case it refers to Saul. But in the verses I read there is a clear statement of the Bibl view of history, that which the scholars call the Deuteronomic view, because it appeared w/ those who provided the 2d giving of the law. Here is the Kg who demanded, Saml says; the Lord has set a Kg over you, a new day has begun. But the burden of Saml's sermon is that the new order of things has not erased the old covenant, or changed the old law. The covenant w/ God, as w/ all contrants, was a 2-way street: God will be your God, but only if you obey his cmdmts. There stands the Kg, but it is not the new govt that will guarantee security and prosperity; that will come only as you fear God and serve him. Now hear this, you who expect a new president or congress or law or amendmt, to bring us to perfection and well-being; here the word is clear. In this world security and bumper crops are the gift of God, so repent and obey. For rebellion, and immorality, and injustice, and arrogance will bring an end to the little world we thot eternal. To prove his point, Saml offers a sign. 1 Sam 12: 16-18. A miracle, or unusual event, that proves the truth of a prophetic revelat is called a sign, which is what this is. Usually there is no rain in Palestine from April to Oct, the early & late rains that James mentioned in last wk's reading. Here at the time of harvest came rains, an event as rare as snowfall in summer. It was offered as proof that the people had committed a grave sin in asking for a Kg; it was wicked of them. Now what is the connection between thunder & rain at harvest-time and the mistake of a Kg? Saml promised rain, and it came immediately; that proved that God favored Saml as his prophetic voice; it was not God's will that he should be replaced. In the same way that God controlled the thunder & rain he ruled the future; he held the fate of the nation in his hands. And the sign scared them silly. They were like children in their need for signs before they would believe, and that same shallowness that made them frightened made their commitmt a short-run thing. But seeing the rain they made confession, v. 19. Pray for us, they begged the old judge, pray, that we die not; better that they pray for themselves, better that they grow a faith that reaches beyond supernatural signs, a faith that will not evaporate when the sun comes out. How many promises are made to God in the tempest, or in the dark, that are forgotten when the fear blows away? But even w/ that, Saml offers comfort. vv. 20-22. You have indeed done this wicked thing, but serve the Lord, turn not aside from folwg him. The memory of past failure must never overshadow future behavior; it must be forgotten as we turn back to the right path. The Lord will never reject the truly penitent, but will take them again unto himself. Note that in v. 19 the people asked Saml to pray for them, for that miracle made them think that God was in some spl way the God not of the people but of Saml--please pray for us to the Lord YOUR God, they said. But now look at v. 22; Saml assures them that the Lord will not cast them away, for they are a chosen people, a people for himself. God is not Saml's private property, you need no priest or intermediary. For his name's sake, is the reason given; God acts w/ favor toward Isr not because Isr is worthy of it or because Isr is more righteous than other people; no, it is because of God's will. Here is the doctrine of Grace. Of his own free choice God linked his name w/ future security and existence of Isr. But again the Deut warning, vv. 23-25. Here is an interesting suggestion: is it possibl to sin by refusing to pray for those we do not like, those who have done evil? Saml says he should not sin vs. God by refusing to pray for them, even tho he is their God as well as his. God works thru men's prayers as well as thru their actions; this line tells us that by refusing to pray for those who need it we sin by limiting the scope of God's mercy. And isn't that a startling thing! As if I have my hand on the faucet, and by turning off the water I can control the work of God in the world. Read v. 23, and think about it. The farewell address then closes w/ a final reminder of the link between behavior and event, between obedience and the very survival of the nation. And with that may we meditate upon what we have read. First is the emphasis upon the divine pwr in work in history. When Isr was loyal to God he came to their aid; when they turned to other gods, he abandoned them. This theory of hist tells us that each of our decisions, and actions, has its conseqs; nothing in this world is free; we pay for what we do. There is an even more signif thing to consider, and that is the importance of secular govt to the people of God. Saul was a Kg, not a priest, yet the Lord set him over the people. There can be no line drawn between the sacred & the secular, between Samuel & Saul. For ultimately, God is King over all, over time, and tide, and nature, and human events. We will all learn this, & confess this, before the end. But how much fear, and pain, and hunger, and bloodshed, will we endure until we do?

6-10-84. Jealousy. One of the most often repeated warnings given in the wisdom of the human race is against the corrosive feeling of jealousy for one more successful than we. Shakespeare wrote plays whose action turns upon the workings of that green-eyed monster that drives away our reason. In a novel published earlier this year, the most recent serious work I could find on the subject, Joan Didion has a character say, you see how the green comes out, and again, I detect just the slightest tinge of lime, or, positively chartreuse, for as the bard of Avon noted, green has been the color of jealousy. Green with envy, is an easily-recognized expression. And it is destructive, a self-destructing attitude, a knife we cut ourselves with when we get to brooding about how well another person is doing, and how poorly we appear by comparison. That is the theme of today's lesson; it is more wisdom than it is religion, for it is aimed at a pattern of behavior we can do something about for ourselves. Religion provides us a faith that redeems those conditions within us which are beyond our power to eradicate or to improve. But within that framework the theme is worth our facing up to, and thinking about. And best of all, it is expressed in one of the best-known descriptions of personal character to be found anywhere, text 1 Sam 18. Last wk we read the farewell address of the elderly Samuel, last of the Judges and ancestor of the first Kg of Isr. Saul he was, of the tribe of Benjamin, son of Kish, a tall man, and comely, one who had all of the qualities of leadership except the essential quality of obedience. Much has been made of the fall of the mighty Saul, who should have succeeded; he had so much going for him. Why he failed is not within the assigned readings for these lessons; I invite you to read of it in 1 Sam 15. God ordered him to attack the Amalekites, an enemy tribe living in the southern part of Judea; the order was to do battle w/ them, and slay every one of them, and leave not a single living creature of them--man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass, all were to be destroyed. Forth went Saul w/ his 200,000 infantry, and he utterly routed the hapless Amalekites. But he did not kill them all; their Kg Agag surrendered and was allowed to live, and of the fattest and sleekest of the flocks & herds Saul thought it a waste to destroy. The fatlings and the lambs, as the record puts it, were taken as booty. Reasonable enough, we might say; but right in human sight is not obedience in the judgment of God. So the word of the Lord came to Samuel, the old prophet, and it was a doom-saying to Saul the Kg. I repent that I made Saul Kg, God said, and he withdrew his presence from the Kg, and at the same time began to raise up a successor, the young shepherd and musician David, credited in one version of the miraculous victory over the Philistine giant, Goliath of Gath. That is the stage-setting for the story we have today, and it is a tragedy for the older and a triumph for the younger man. 1 Sam 18: 5-9. There are three steps in the tragedy of Saul the Kg, and in these lines we see the first of them. V.5 is the motive for what happened, it anticipates what happened, and the end of the story. Saul's hatred and fear of the young David began with the brilliant successes of the young man in battle. It is a sad thing to me to see a once brilliant and popular leader darken and become embittered because one of his underlings had more ability than he. Wherever Saul sent David he was successful; he won his battles by his leadership and his example to the troops. Victory inspired confidence; all of the regiments wanted to go into battle under David's leadership, because his tactics prevailed, because he kept them alive. This past wk, w/ 40th anniversary of the invasion of Normandy, some of us old fogies have been remembering the days of our youth, when we tasted the salt sea off the Cotentin peninsula and smelled the distinctive odor of the hedgerow country. Most people, on either side, give a good acct of themselves in battle when their morale is high; morale is a mysterious mix of food and some rest on occasion and pride in the outfit, but most of all it is the product of competent leadership. Well-led, even a defeated army holds its head high; when that charismatic leadership gives that indefinable but very real spark that turns a group of men into a tightly-knit unit, that takes its objective, then something very special happens to them. That happened with David; he won battles by skill and by force of personality, and the people praised him for it. That was more than Saul could take. When the army was returning from a victory it was greeted, in Oriental fashion, by a chorus of women, singing and dancing before the marching troops. And what they sang grated upon Saul's ears. They chanted responsively as they danced, one group saying, Saul has slain his thousands, only to be topped by the other group, chanting even more loudly, and w/ exultation, And David his 10 thousands. Saul simply could not swallow that insult, for so it was to him. There have never been but a few people in high place who can take invidious comparison with others w/o wincing, or a pang of pain. And yet the key to success in high places is to get others to work for you, competent people to take commands, and to fill administrative offices, intelligent & imaginative people who make the suggestions that make things work. No leader is well served by incompetence, or by squelching the voices of those who have better ideas than they. Saul might well have given David a medal, or a triumphal procession, or a natl holiday, knowing that David's victories made him look good as Kg. But that takes character, a commodity that is never in adequate supply among us. How many of us, even on our small stages, can praise one who does a thing better than we can do? Established cooks are jealous of newcomers whose dish is more eagerly demanded; gardeners and flower growers, automobile drivers, sales clerks, whatever be the activity, find it difficult to see and sincerely respect another's ability. I heard of a story, which may be fiction but still has a truth in it, of a surgeon, an elderly man, who had

once been the best in town, now supplanted by a younger and more able surgeon; so jealous was he that he had someone call the younger man every hour or so during the night, so he could not sleep, and so could not do his operation the next day. In the story the patient died on the table, victim of the jealousy of an older man. Literature and life are both filled with people suffering from Saul's ailment--the green-eyed monster, the slightest tinge of lime, positively chartreuse. The germs of that disease are in us all. Saul was very angry at the popular acclaim for David, and from that day he resented, not so much David's successes as he did his popularity, for public opinion mattered greatly to him. And that is where Saul's tragedy began. 1 Sam 18: 10-12. The second stage was the attempt to murder the competitor. In a church in Venice is a painting of Saul casting a javelin at the harp-playing David; it is in two parts, one on one side of a choir-loft, the other on the other side, so that in imagination the viewer can see the spear fly across that space, to pin David to the wall, a thrust the young man easily evaded twice. Suspicion and jealousy made Saul lose what ever judgment and self-control he had. Note that unexpected phrase in v. 10--an evil spirit from God took possession of Saul, so that he raved in the house. The writer of this history understood that all things among men were under God's control, the bad along w/good, so he could ascribe evil to the purposes of God. Some of us reject that view, and to explain evil, describe a second God at war w/God. That is not the point here, which is instead the madness of Saul, the insanity which was produced by his jealousy, that led him to the point of murder. The picture of the ravaging King, and the calm singer has been described by Robt Browning in a poem that all should read, or re-read. The lesson is that envy, allowed to grow unchecked, becomes madness and murderous. In the 3d stage, Saul sent David away from his presence. 1 Sam 18: 13-16. It is in vv. 12 and 15 that we can trace the course of Saul's illness--Saul was afraid of David, and then he stood in awe of David. It is a picture of the growing terror of a once-mighty man for a less experienced one, and that w/o reason. There is no evidence that David wanted to overthrow the Kg whom God had anointed and then rejected--though that rejection was not widely known. Cold dread enveloped a spirit once bright and fearless, gnawing suspicions became reality in his tortured imagination. Favor w/God and man, which once was his, was now the gift of that upstart shepherd boy. Twice is it repeated, in 12 & 14, that the Lord had departed from Saul but was w/David; it says also that David behaved himself wisely in all his ways, in KJV, which really means both prudence and success, as the newer reading puts it--he had success in all his undertakings. And yet Saul had begun so well--chosen by God, anointed by Samuel, crowned to the cheers of his people, his policies praised for their wisdom and moderation. For a brief moment Saul & David stood together upon the same platform, but then one began to fall victim to a fatal illness, while the other steadily arose in power, and success, and popularity.

So this is a lesson in character and personality, biography used to teach morality, the failure of one who should have succeeded offered as a laboratory experiment for the rest of us. And there are lessons here that we need to think about. One is about that green-eyed monster, jealousy. It has two roots, and they are often, if not always, found together. One of them is guilt, and the other is failure which produces guilt. There is no occasion for jealousy in the competent person, for he knows his ability and his divine calling. Someone else may be doing an excellent job, but then so is he or she, so there is no need for, or room for, envy to lift its head. But when a person of limited ability tries to step in oversized boots and cannot run, and is overtaken by a fleet-er of foot, then it is that the less able seeks revenge by railing at the successful. And that means envy, and the seed of jealousy. There is always more self-love than anything else in jealousy. Know thyself, said the ancient Grks; love neighbor as thyself, said J, and these are antidotes to envy. I have heard of people whose most oft-repeated prayer is for the public humiliation by failure of another person, for that would mean that they could continue their mediocrity and goofing-off. An old Engl proverb says it--a nightingale dies for shame if another bird sings better. Does the sales record, or the batting average, or the garden crop, or the singing voice, of another person, make us resentful? Beware, for that is the entering splinter of envy, and that is a mortal sin because it is destructive. Failure, and guilt, these are the roots; failure we all must live with at times--I cannot be seven feet tall, or run a mile in 4 minutes. But guilt is a spiritual matter, a burden we need not bear. There is hatred in envy, hatred of self for failing, hatred of another for succeeding, hatred of the world, or of God, for making a world like that. It is that which destroys and w/o gain of any kind. In 17th Cen Rich Burton said that every other sin was connected to some pleasure, or has some excuse; only envy lacks both pleasure and excuse. What does it profit a man to hate the successes of others? there is no fun in it; eat your heart out, is the expression. It hurts not the hated, but the hater--somebody said that envy shoots at others and wounds herself. And what to do about it? It is easier to say than to do, but there it is. The germs of envy are in us all; the only way to keep them weeded out of our thoughts and actions is to think less of our reputation and more of our duty, to regard it as a very small matter indeed what people think of us and very important what God thinks of us; to consider a career a vocation, a call of God, who gave life and strength and talent to do it, and do the best we can with it, and glory in the work of others. Saul had ability, but David had more, and that ruined Saul. Pity God it does not happen to us.

6-17-84. Temple. Everybody who works w/children has a story about how they misunderstand the words of something familiar. One little girl said that her class was doing their guzzintas--2 guzzinta 4, 4 guzzinta 8. Another child wanted to sing that Xmas song about round John virgin, and another asked for the one about Mike Huntry--Mike Huntry, tis of thee. You all remember that song about the congregated cross-eyed bear. In that same style is one a student told me about; when she was 5 she heard that song about a mighty forest is our God, and that explained something she had wondered about. Where does God live, anyway? Now she knew; God lives in a mighty forest. She told her mother that she was going out that afternoon to find it, and find God. And that is the theme of today's lesson. Where does God live, and does it matter what answer we give to that question? Text 2 Saml 5 & 7. Last wk we saw the first Kg of Isr, Saul, as he suffered some kind of mental or nervous illness, the result of his jealousy of the young David, and of his knowl that God had w/dr his support of Saul. In these brief glimpses of Bibl hist we do not read of Saul's end, on Mt. Gilboa, where he and 3 of his sons were killed in battle with the Philistines; read of it in the closing chaps of 1 Saml. Another son, named Ish-bosheth, succeeded his father, but he was murdered soon after taking the throne. With that the Isrs turned to the popular hero David, that shepherd boy who had done so well as a ldr in battle, a turn of events that contrib to Saul's darkling mind. The one thing David wanted to do in his reign was to unify his country, give it a time of peace, and build a permanent home for that odd-shaped box they called the Ark of God, which was for them the symbol of God's presence among them. When he asked the prophet for permission to build a temple on the hill of the Jebusites, on Mt. Zion, which he had conquered, the answer he got gives us much food for thought. But before that we have another passage to consider briefly, and has to do w/poetic image of the shepherd king. 2 Saml 5: 1-3. The early chaps of 2 Saml tell of a five-year period of desperate battle w/Philists for control of the land which bears their name, Palestine, or the land of the Philists. Those fierce people came very close to a compl defeat of the Isrs, but gradually David got the upper hand. 7 yrs after David became Kg, the ldrs of all the tribes came to his hq camp at Hebron to acknowl him ldr of a reunited people. For many events of Bibl Hist we have two separate accts, one in the Bks of Sam or Kgs, and another in the Chrons. For these verses we have a verbatim acct in 1 Chron 11, which you may use for comparison. Here come the tribal ldrs, called elders, to accept David as their Kg. You may well wonder about their sincerity, since it took so long for them to come to that submission. But hear their protestats of loyalty, in vv 1,2. Three reasons they gave for making David their Kg--he is their brother (we are your bone & flesh), he has been their true ldr in war, so long ago as the days of Saul (you led out and brought in Isr, which is that interesting idiom for mil ldr shp), and he was all along the chosen one of God to be their ldr. With all that good sound logic, of relatsip and good sense and divine calling to top it all off, you may question their honesty. But they did come willingly, they were not driven together, or defeated and compelled into the union of the tribes. But note the poetry in the elders' act of submission--the Lrd said you shall be the shepherd of my people Isr, and their prince. It was a particular tender picture to a people who kept sheep, and the image of shepherd who led and protected and fed the flock was a continuing one. The best-beloved of the Psalms is the 23d, where the faithful are like sheep and God is the shepherd. The passover, Isr's annual re-enactmt of their redemption from slavery, used the innocent lamb as the sacrifice, and J told Peter to feed his sheep and care for his lambs. Here the dual roles of shepherd and prince are held to be the functions of ldrshp under God. In choosing ldrs for polit or relig posit here are the qualities to look for; princes and shepherds--the Latin word is pastor--are under obligat to feed people the truth, to hold out before them a goal and a purpose, and to encourage them to make the effort to reach them. God set David as shepherd and prince of the united Kgdm of Isr, and we are told (v.3) that the elders on one side, and Kg David on the other, entered into a covenant--the dier translat reads league. The word means contract between two parties--you do this and in return I'll do that, the basic formula of everyday life, and it would be helpful if we knew what the terms of the contract were. For what it is worth, we may speculate that it included some clause guaranteeing the equality in David's administr of the tribes to the North, already being called ISR, and already feeling that they were 2d class citizens to the tribe of Judah, which had the land around the new capital and the new temple-site. The 10 northern tribes entered into agreemt w/2 sou tribes, that made David Kg and his nation united. It was thus similar to our own constitut, in which, unfortunately perhaps, the word shepherd does not appear. But now we turn to that puzzling and provocative chapter 7. 2 Saml 7: 1-16. That is a long passage to read and to remember as we discuss it, so I ask that you follow along in your Bibl, for there are probs and possibilities here that we need to consider. First, the text itself. This chap 7 is the most controversial in all of Samuel, and one of the most carefully studied and debated chapters in all the OT. Indeed, it wuld be possibl to spend a lifetime reading and pondering and comparing notes about these few lines. The reason, as you heard, is the confusing parophecy of Nathan, and the argumt here presented as to why David would not be permitted to build the permanent home on Mt. Zion for the ark of God. According to many of those who study such things, the chapter originally began as a Psalm, #

89, to which I direct your careful attn and comparison. Many agree that at base what we have here is a poem, but that two editors, or groups of editors, have added to and amended the basic work. One editor added some lines, in which I am assured are the most barbaric and crude Hebrew to be found anywhere, which is a paraphrase of the Psalm in wretched, almost illiterate language. And then that same, or another, editor, softened the harsh rejection of a permanent temple by adding v. 13, which says that though David cannot build a temple, his son will do so in time to come. If you read vv. 12 and 14, omitting 13, you will see that even in transl there is no break in the thought. ~~But enough of textual talk; let's get to what we have.~~ (One other considerat; in the parallel acct in I Chron 22 another reason is given why David cannot build the temple; God said he had shed too much blood he was a man of war.) Here we read that David's conscience hurt him because he was living in a palace built of sweet-smelling cedar-wood, but the ark of God was still kept in a tent, the tabernacle that had gone w/people on their wanderings, that was taken down and put up with each move of the nomads. He explained his plan to Nathan the prophet, and Nathan heartily endorsed the Kg's plan. But in the night the word of God came to Nathan, saying that the proposal was all wrong, because it ran counter to the purpose and the nature of God. God told Nathan that he did not want a permanent temple, that he had never dwelt in a house, that he had been in all the places the people of Isr had gone, and never in all those yrs did he ever complain to the ldrs and the judges--shepherds of his people Isr--never did he complain that he had no house of cedar. And he wanted no house now. And from that he made some gracious promises to David, which is the covenant, or contract, between God and the shepherd king. I have given you great victories, God said to David, I cut off all your enemies before you--in passing we should note that the later explanat that David could not build a temple because he was a man of war, should be read in the light of these lines. God would mark out a land for his people, and he would plant them there, where they may live in peace, where violence and affliction will no more visit them. And to David there is another promise, in v. 11. It is a pun a play on words, of two meanings of the word house. It is also a dramatic turn-about; David cannot build a house for God, but God will make a house for David. Here the word is used in two senses, as dwelling-place, and as dynasty, or family that follows from father to son as ruler. These lines are from the psalm 89, where the word is not son but seed, transl descendants; the house of David that God will establ will be forever, eternal. The early Xns seized upon these covenant promise and made of it one of their proof-texts of the messianic hope; Nathan prophesied the coming of Xr, and the prophecy was repeated many times in the holy word. When the angel announced to Mary the approaching birth of her son, (Lk 1) the words referred to this promise to David--he will be called the son of the most high, and he will have the throne of his father David, and will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kgdm there will be no end. We are a long way from Nathan, who said that to David, but the words reverberate down the corridors of the centuries; the promise is sure. When David comes to die, out of his body will come a son, for whom God will establ a kgdm, and he will be chastised w/stripes of men--do you hear in this those suffering-svt poems in 2d Isa?--and his throne will be establ forever. Those are the words of the covenant w/David; now let us meditate upon them. The scholars suggest that in Nathan's word to David we have a rather late attack upon the temple in Jerus--God does not want a building to dwell in. However that may be, we also have a profound insight into the nature & purpose of God. First, it is necessary to say something for that group who supported and built and then defended the temple in Jerus, one wall of which is still intact. It is a unifying force, it is a symbol of the work of God, who brought his people to that land and to that steep hill. It was also a purifying force, that kept the sacred scriptures intact, that interpreted the law and with the yearly cycle of festivals called people to remember their past and their present obligats. The psalmist was right when he said he was glad when they said unto him, let us go into the house of the Lord. How lovely is thy dwelling-place, oh lord of hosts; even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest, at thy altars, my kg and my God; a day in thy courts is better than a 1000 elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. All that aside, let us take another look at that tent, which may not be wickedness after all. The temple stood in the way of the worship of a more universal God, for it meant that those who would sacrifice in the right way must make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. But the God who lives in the tent goes wherever humble and penitent people call out to him. To make of relig an institut is to nail it down, and preserve its form and much of its spirit. But there is also a danger in it, that what began as a way to find God becomes an end within itself, a thing we recite by rote while our hearts are still at work, or on the beach, or planning dinner. The God who lives in the tent is with us at work, and on the beach, and cooking dinner. Wherever we go, God is there ahead of us, striking the tent, and driving new tent-pegs, to a new location on the map, or in history. These lines ask us to approach the cathedral with great caution, for God may not be in the resplendent architecture, but in a simple tent. The God in the tent is the God of all history, the God of the individual who may be lost, or frightened, or discouraged. No, David, a mighty forest is our God; the little girl heard it wrong, but she got it right just the same.

6-24-84. Absalom. Many yrs ago I heard a speech by a psychiatrist who told of having a patient who began an angry statement about how much he hated God. When he had finished, the dr quietly asked, ~~and~~ ^{said} I know how much you hate God. Now I want to know how you feel about your father. And his guess was correct; it was the father, and the boy's attitude toward his father, that was his problem. The lesson for today is in two parts, and there are two themes, but the important one is the relationship of fathers and sons, and the rebellion of one son against his royal father. Text 2 Saml 15. Why is it that there should be so much friction and bad feelings between fathers and sons, fathers and children? Last Sun was father's day (the more appropriate day for such a lesson as this) and I saw a report on the newsreels about all those millions of fathers who abandon their children and their families, and refuse to pay child support. The story said that Amer fathers are now 4 billions behind in their payments, and courts & judges and police are kept busy trying to round up runaway dads. It was different in simpler days; more people were willing to accept the responsibility for their actions, though if the Dickens novels are at all truthful, fathers of the past may have been even more cruel to wives & children while supporting them than are modern runaways who abandon them. And with all that, how are we going to deal with the 5th comdmt, to honor parents so that the days of our natl independence will be long in the land that God has given us? How honor a cruel parent, or have any respect for one who runs away from his parental responsibilities? And if God is like our father, & our father shows no goodness or mercy, then we can underst why there are sons who hate God. The family is fundamental to society, for it is that which provides & nurtures the next generat, and in the opinion of nearly every observer it is an endangered species. So let us take a look at the consequences of one father's misconduct, and see what lesson there may be in it for us. The father in this drama is David, Kg over Isr, shepherd boy and talented poet, who became Kg after the failure of the house of Saul. And the house of David came very near to the same kind of failure. Last wk we read that celebrated chap 7 of 2 Saml, where there is the prophecy that out of David shall come one whose kgdm shall be forever, but until that time David did not behave at all well. In these sessions we have only selected passages; the biogr of David as given in 2 Saml is one of the world's masterpieces of literature, one of the greatest biogrs ever written. I hope you will all read it for yourselves, the entire book of 2 Saml, to see how the ancient author handled character, and personality, and motive, for it is a classic. David's trouble began on two levels; one was his taking great numbers of wives and concubines, by whom he had a large number of children; they & their mothers squabbled and plotted among themselves over the succession to the throne, over which of them would be the one to inherit that prophecy we read last week, and there was, as the old folks used to say, trouble in the home. And then that story about Bath-Sheba, taking a bath in the courtyard of her home, observed by the Kg from an upper story of his palace, taken as another mate for the Kg; her husband, for she was married, was Uriah, whom David ordered to be sent into the hottest part of the battle where he would be killed. It was adultery and then murder, and the prophet Nathan told David that his deed was known. Repentant, even sick with remorse, the Kg wrote some of his most moving poetry out of his depths; he was forgiven, he was later called a man after God's own heart, but there is a price to be paid even for forgiven sin. In David's case it was the misconduct of Amnon, one of his sons, with Tamar, his daughter by another mother that began the difficulty. Tamar was the sister of Absalom, and to avenge ~~his~~ her humiliation and shame he killed his half-brother. David, king and chief judge and therefore defender of law & morality, could not punish Absalom because he was himself guilty of a similar crime; but he could not forgive Absalom because his crime was a repulsive one. That is the background to the passage we have today. Absalom was permitted to return to Jerus but he was unforgiven and still without his father's favor, which strengthened his sense of injustice. And he knew his father was also a guilty man. It sounds like a Shakespeare play, or a Grk tragedy, but it a slice of very human and very messy reality. Hear the description of Absalom's plotting to overthrow his father. 2 Saml 15: 1-6. The story of Absalom's rebellion is one of the world's great tragic dramas, for all of the actors are driven by, and are destroyed by, the weakness in their own character. Read that part of the life of David in Chaps 13-20. The 6 verses I read give us the background to the tragedy; the sword would never depart from David's household, the prophet Nathan had said, and now the dragon's teeth are beginning to sprout revolt. In the original we are told that Absalom's plotting went on for 40 yrs, which you will see in v.7 if you are folwg the older translat; 4 is more realistic. But note the ways Absalom plotted to replace his father; he used all the tricks of a sweet-talking politician in an election year. It's of course totally beside the point that this is an election year, and already the baby-kissing and the handshaking has begun. Take a look at the vain, headstrong, basically weak Absalom, a young man w/ a large store of craftiness and an even larger measure of ambition; he was a spoiled child in a grown man's body--which happens, by the way, far more often than you might think--he had a child's selfishness and unreasoning temper, but he had a man's passions and feelings. It is a dangerous combinat, it is still w/us, and it is still dangerous. See him as he works his way w/subjs of his father. First he got himself a private army, a bodyguard to run beside his chariot; it is the first require-

ment of the rebel; history is full of examples of people, Hitler & Mussolini are but two, who began with a chariot and horses, and 50 men to run before. Here are the trappings of power, the visible evidence of power, dazzling splendor, the armored limousine with the guards running alongside, the imperial appearance. His father David was a much simpler man; many people are impressed by that show of glitter, that ostentation. But that was not all; he offered to do for people what the King did not do--oh, if I were only King, then I could do something about you poor, you oppressed, for that section called Bedford-Stuyvesant in New York--the last two presidents went there in their campaigns and made promises, which have not been kept. How modern is Absalom's appeal...the show of interest in a person's private life, the pointing with scorn at the incompetence of the present government, the kiss of presumed equality. I would give you justice, he told people. Beware the man who makes glib promises to get your vote, for he may well forget them when he no longer needs them. Leaders have the obligation to tell people the truth, however harsh and unpleasant. But Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. Now, you know he could not do that if those hearts were not already critical of the failures of the government; no rebel has a chance when justice is available under the present order. But then comes the explosion of the carefully planted bomb. 2 Saml 15: 7-12. Note another factor in the charlatan's plotting--the use of devotion to conceal rebellion. How many prophets are there, up and down this beautiful land, who are using religion as the pretext of turning the country over to its despoilers? I must go to Hebron to worship God, to fulfill a vow, Absalom said; the ark of the covenant was now in Jerusalem, there was no need for him to go to the old army HQ to worship. Have you thought that when this country loses its bill-of-rights freedoms from government it will be to 100% Americans, draped in Old Glory, and sporting the words of true religion? So David sent his son away with a blessing. All thru the countryside went the couriers of revolt, giving the secret sign, and with the young man went 200 innocent lambs; unsuspecting people are the best tools of evil men; these were simple people who knew nothing. Have you thought that when this country is brought low it will be because ignorant people, who know nothing of history, or human nature, or even of simple morality, agree to go along with the traitor? And the conspiracy grew strong; it even reached into the palace and the King's prime minister, who went over to the enemy. And that is where this passage ends; I hope you will read the rest of it for yourselves, how David fled his capital, how the two sides faced each other in battle, how that long hair that Absalom had been so proud of, that he combed so lovingly, caught in a tree limb, and there he was killed. And in one of literature's most moving scenes, David the father ~~was~~ dead son--got the bad news--O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son. And the day of victory in battle was turned into a day of mourning. Now there are some lessons here that we need to think about. One of them is the suffering that sin, misconduct, brings to us. Every deed we do has its price, and we must pay it. God loves us too much to shield us from the consequences of our choices, even when our spirits are renewed and lifted up in the forgiveness of God. We must all sleep in the bed we have made for ourselves, we must all drink the water we have dipped out of the well. Another lesson is the wound that a guilty conscience is. Had David not himself broken the rules of his society he could have enforced them in his own household. Feeling guilty himself he could not be the defender of right, & from that flowed, inevitably, like the film of a terrible accident played in slow motion, all that sorrow, and grief, and mourning. A bright & promising career was ended, needlessly; it was a high price to pay. The tuition is always high in the school of experience, but many of us will learn in no other. But most of all this is a lesson in family strength and weakness. Fidelity and integrity are put to the test in our most intimate relationships, and it is there that we show who we really are. And it is also true that the family, like the canary in the coal mine, is the test of the health of society. And there are forces at work in society that work against family solidarity. One of them is the notion that authority is a bad thing, that children should be allowed all the freedom they demand. I read a story about a couple who watched in the children's bedroom while they knelt before a doll, and a tape cassette, and a hockey stick; see, the mother said, they will find God if we just leave them alone. No, the psychologists tell me that children are more secure when they know where the boundaries are, and when discipline follows promptly upon any breach of the limits. The family may be either a patriarchy or a matriarchy, father dominated, or mother ruled, but it may not be neither. Nor does a 6-yr old know better how to make wise choices. Out there on the campus are some newly-planted trees; each is held by wires tied to posts driven into the ground, so they will grow straight and tall. This is the twig-bender; when they are stronger the sticks will be taken away, no longer needed. But to take away guidance, and judgment, and experience, to give liberty to those who cannot control it, to permit morality to be anything I want to do, or what I think, that, my dear people is a prescription for disaster. David broke the law and his handsome son Absalom made war upon him, and died in battle. And the darts that killed him tore into the heart of David, and he mourned, for his son, but also for his broken family. O my son Absalom, my son, my son. It was a cry of contrition, out of a heart overflowing with pain. Out of the depths he cried, and God, who was his shepherd, heard him, and comforted him.

7-1-84. Solomon. Three centuries ago the essayist Jonathan Swift wrote that when a true genius appears in the world, you may know him by this sign, that the dunces are all in confederacy against him. To that there is a corollary, and it is that at the very moment that the true genius has appeared, and is at his work, something in the laws of human nature lead him to ally himself w/dunces of the world. The old saying is that there is no fool like an old fool; it is also part of folklore that there is no fool like a wise fool. The French minister Sully called James I of England the wisest fool in Xndom, for he was that anomaly a learned fool, and everybody knows they are more foolish than an ignorant fool. Pres Woodrow Wilson was himself a college professor and then a college president, so when the academic experts tried to tell him how to make peace in 1919 he knew better than to listen to them. All that is pertinent this morning, for the lesson is about Kg Solomon, who was the wisest man who ever lived, wiser yet than the wise men of the East & of Egypt. He was the 3d and last Kg of the united Kgdm, and when he became Kg the Lord appeared to him in a dream at Gibeon and offered to give him whatever he asked for. That was very likely Solomon's greatest moment, for he confessed his ignorance and his lack of experience; I am but a little child, he said, I do not know, so give me an understanding mind to govern my people, so that I can discern between good & evil. God was so pleased at that response, that did not ask for riches or long life, but rather for understanding to discern the right, that God promised Solomon a wise & discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you & none like you shall arise after you. Read his story beginning at 1 Kgs 3. We read that he was an authority on botany and Zoology; that he was a gifted writer credited w/ 3000 proverbs and 1,005 songs, and is listed as the author of 3 books in Bibl--song of Solomon, proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, and wrote two of the Psalms, Nos. 72 and 127. His fame was worldwide, and to his court came emissaries from all the nations of the earth. His wealth was legendary, his mines and quarries the subj of wondrous stories, his food storages made his country independent of famine, his commerce sent trading ships to bring gold and precious stones from the storied lands of all the world. Solomon's buildings gave addl evidence of his genius at organization. He was able to complete construction of the temple that David wanted to build but could not--altho David provided the plans, and collected much of the bldg material. We are told that the temple took 7 yrs to build, and was the wonder of all the country. He also built a palace for himself that took 13 yrs to finish, and the archaeologists are still finding artifacts from that age, and are learning more about it. It was the golden age of the Kgdm of Isr; historically it coincided w/ what is called the age of the small states. Heights are made to climb up; they are also for coming down, and Solomon's reign marked the decline of the chosen people. The topic of today's lesson is Sowing seeds of destruction, and that means that here we look at the weaknesses of a land at the very height of its power and its wealth, and paradoxically we also see the follies of the wisest man who ever lived. We can do only a highlight or two, so again I hope you will read the whole story for yourselves, 1 Kgs 3-11. Our first glimpse is from 1 Kgs 9: 1-9. As you hear, this happens when the temple and the palace were finished, and stood glittering in their resplendent beauty, and the temple had been dedicated & sanctified. It was a time of rejoicing and of miracle; the ark of the covenant was brought in a great joyful parade from the hill of Zion to the temple and was placed into the holy of holies behind the veil. Solomon offered a prayer of devotion; sacrifices were placed upon the brand-new altar and miraculously, fire from heaven consumed them, a symbol of the favor of God upon that place. And then a great feast was held; for 7 days it went on, and from one end of the city to the other. All were glad of heart at all that God had done for them. All was finished, and there was a let-down among them. Have you noticed how that happens to all of us? the successful end of a strenuous and demanding task is the beginning of a relaxation, even of a disappointment that the work is over, and it does not look so grand now as we thought it would. Then it is that people need a new vision, a new direction, a new purpose. It happened here. When the buildings were finished, then God appeared to Solomon a 2d time, as he appeared at Gibeon. That was the dream in which Solomon asked for the gift of a discerning mind. And in all the yrs since there had been no manifestation--the Grk word is epiphany, which means appearance--no sign of God's approval of what was being done. Now God appeared and spoke words of promise and words of warning. First, though, God gave his approval to the building. I have heard your prayer of dedication, he said, and I have consecrated this house you have built and put my name there forever; my eyes & my heart will be there for all time. Weighty promise, that; can you understand why even now pilgrims go every day to pray at the wall of that temple, the only part of it that has survived? But we should note the solemn choice set before Solomon, 2 alternatives designed to restore his energy and to inspire his obedience. Every one of us has to face those same decisions. The promise of God's presence, and of the continuing wealth & power of the Kgdm, is conditional; it depends upon that ancient covenant which the Bibl schols call the Deuteronomic. Vv 3-5 is the promise of blessing if we obey; vv. 6-9 are the threat of punishment if we do not. First the promise and its requirement. God will establish the royal throne forever as he promised David, but there is a cost in faith. We must walk before God in integrity of heart & uprightness. That means that we must always live in awareness of God's presence, and regulate all our thoughts & actions to the knowl of that presence. A child plays in happiness and in security when it knows that the

parent is watching nearby. To all of us it makes sunshine in a shaded place, and makes of life a song filled w/harmony. Then, w/v.6, begins the 2d part of the word, and in the Deut tradit it is a warning. The version I read conceals the change in pronoun which is in the Hebr; if you are folwg the older translat you will see in vv 4,5 the pronouns thou and thy, but in v.6 it becomes ye. That means that part 1 was directed to Solomon, because the pronouns are singular; the warning part is aimed at all of us--if YOU turn aside from folwg me, you or your children, and disobey, and take other gods, there shall surely come disaster. Let there be no doubt about it, you cannot cheat on the agreemt, you cannot go back on your pledged word. God always begins with the good gifts if we keep faith, but there is always the ruin that awaits the disobedient. ~~And~~ The harshest words in all the Bibl were spoken in order that they may never become real. The threat is always second, never first. The warning was against idolatry, against folwg strange gods made of stones or wood, made by the hand of man. We moderns do nothing so crudely as did the primitives, but we still fashion gods for ourselves, in our own image, and promising all those things we think life ought to give us. And they are, all of them, earth-bound and pleasure-centered. C. S. Lewis noted the human temptat in a pithy remark, aim at heaven and we get earth too; aim at earth and we get neither. Aim at hum-an goals, you people of Solomon's glory, and the very earth beneath your feet will be taken from you /your indep taken; this beautiful house where I have set my name will be a heap of ruins--v.8 in the KJV used a faulty source; the word is not high, but ruin. Tourists, and pilgrims, and people pas-sing by, will hiss, and will ask, why did the Lord do this to this rich land and this beautiful house? and the answer will come--they broke the covenant, they worshipped other gods, so the Lord has brought this evil upon them. This evil we bring upon ourselves, for this is a future we can avoid. The choice is ours to make. How much wisdom and discernment is there among us in these troubled days? There was not in Solomon himself, who was the wisest of men. 1 Kgs 11: 9-12. Earlier vvs. in this chap tell the dark history of Solomon's apostasy. It began when he contracted marriages w/ women from the nations round about, an ancient form of treaty alliances; that was bad enough, but then he built altars to their gods, and offered sacrifices to them. Three of those altars were on the Mt of Olives, east of the temple, across the deep valley, and higher than the hill of Moriah where the temple was. Of such folly was his wisdom the victim, and it is not easy for us to under-stand. To us has not been given the appearances of God to us, nor the grandeur of a rich and pwrfl KgdM, nor yet the promise of wisdom and discernmt. We have seen no fire from heaven consume the sacrifice upon the altar. All that was given to Solomon, and yet he went over to Olivet to build his pagan shrines, looking down upon the Temple which God had consecrated. Like the rest of us, he may have reasoned that God did not mean it, God would not punish, there is no judgmt, I am the mast-ter of my fate, I decide what is right and good and moral. And so the Lord was angry w/Solomon, & the judgmt was proclaimed. It would be postponed, because of David, until the next generat. But however long or short the time, the indictmt will come, and with it the punishmt. The wisest of all men faced in the end not the blessings of an honorable retiremt and the affections of a grateful people, but the grinding humiliation of knowing that from the most lofty wisdom he had been brought to the lowest and least excusable of folly. Solomon fell in shame and dishonor, brought down by the coarsest of lust, unable in his wisdom to control his own nature. And in that is the lesson for us in Solomon's failure. It is the folly that comes out of wisdom. Now, none of us can claim the extent of discernmt that was Solomon's gift; but every one of us has a strong point, a particu-lar talent that sets us apart from other people, and that gift, unless sincerely dedicated to the God who gave it, becomes the defect that can destroy us. Out of strength there comes the evidence of weakness, for strength is deceitful. Humility very quickly becomes pride in that very humility, honesty tempts us to betray the trust people put in us because we are honest, meekness so easily deteriorates into arrogance that thinks itself supreme. How often people boast that they would nev-er be guilty of this or that affront to the moral code, only to discover that character was no ef-fective defense against it. Every one of us has to live with the warning of Solomon before us; that the trait in ourselves we considered the strongest is in fact the chink in the armor that lets in the arrow. It is like the grain in a piece of wood; it is the grain that gives the wood its beauty, but if you want to split that wood you strike it along the grain. Diamond cutters look for the fa-cet in the stone that is strength but alsoweakness; a slight tap with the chisel divides that hard-est of gems. In this is the lesson for us; along the grain of our strengths is also the weakness. We become proud of them, and that brings us to grief; we leave them unguarded, knowing we are strong there. To boast of our thriftiness is to become miserly; to value our pwrity is to be priggish & snobbish; to claim strong convictions is dogmatism that divides and alienates others. There is the meaning of Solomon to us. He began by praying humbly for wisdom, for he was but a child, and he wanted to rule his people wisely. He wanted to serve his people well, to protect them and enrich them, and fill them w/joy and gladness of heart. The pwr and the pomp decieved him into thinking he could do as he pleased w/his life and faith. Power for became power over. And the storm came, and a greater than Solomon came, and soon thereafter that temple was a ruin. Be not deceived, God is not mocked, but turn, and repent, and receive the presence of the divine.

7-8-84. Revolt. One of the most imaginative & provocative of this century's Amer Hsts was Charles A. Beard. Shortly before he died in 1948 a friend asked him what he had learned from a half-century of reading and writing history. He took a piece of paper, and after a few seconds' thought wrote 4 epigrams. One of them could be a text for today's lesson, for it was, whom the gods would destroy they first make mad w/power. Today we have the story of the revolt that broke the unified Hebr Kgdm into two parts, and it is an acct of unrelieved arrogance and the madness that pwr brings. It is a lesson in how publ officials should behave, how they should use the pwr which has been put into their hands, but it is also a lesson for us individs who have no pwr, or only over a very small kgdm that may extend no further than ourselves. Text 1 Kgs 11, 12. Last wk we had a brief view of Kg Solomon at the height of his, and his nation's, pwr and wealth, and at the beginning of its fall. Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived, for the gift he requested of God was an underst mind to rule his people wisely and well. That gift he recd, but as we saw, out of wisdom came folly, and out of a wise rule for the country came his inability to manage his own household. He took a great number of wives from the neighboring peoples, and they seduced him to erect altars to the gods of their families. That was Solomon's foolishness, for he should have known better. He had the gift of wisdom, he had heard the promises and the warnings of God--you keep the covenant, you obey my comdts, you devoutly refuse to go off after other gods, and I will be your God, and I will protect the independence of your land, and I will assure its prosperity. He had seen the evidence and still he blt those pagan altars, and for that he heard the judgmt--the Kgdm would be broken, but because God had respect for David the final blow would not come while Solomon lived, but would come after, in the next generat. For that reason the last days of Solomon were bitter with might-have-beens. He knew he had failed, and failed at that very activity for which he was specially fitted. He was old, and tired, and weak. In fact, as we read the record of those sad years we are struck by the fact that the writers just ignore his existence. He is there, in the background, but his enemies are the subject, they are more prominent than he. No more telling comment can a writer make than to put into the background that person who should be at the center; it is, as someone said in another connection, like Hamlet with Hamlet left out. But Solomon, so long as he enjoyed the favor of God he was important to the historian; but when God forsook him--it was Victor Hugo who said that Napoleon lost at that last battle because God was bored with him--when God forsook him he became insignificant, no longer the leader. The sunbeam no longer shone upon that peak; it was now shining upon other, and much lower summits. A sad eclipse it was. When Solomon died c. 937 the next kg was one of his sons Rehoboam. That one is exhibit A in the case against hereditary succession, for he was a mistake; he was both stupid and arrogant; many of us are the one or the other, but he was both, and that was unhealthy for himself and also for the state he ruled. He took advice not from the mature and the experienced, but from the witless pleasure-seekers who attached themselves to him, and that turned out to be poison to the safety of the kgdm. Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad w/pwr, and in their madness they do that which destroys the only things they cherish. The other character in the story is Jeroboam--and how many Bible teachers have made bad jokes about those two names. As a young man he showed such ability that Solomon made him overseer of publ works and comdr of one part of his army. He betrayed his trust, for he used his position to stir up opposit to the govt of Solomon. It was not difficult to do, for people were resentful over the high taxes and the forced and unpaid labor that Solomon compelled them to perform to build the temple and the palace and the horse stables and the food storage barns. He had a native talent for arousing popular emotions, and he used it well. The result was that the glory that was the reign of Kg Solomon came crashing to an end and Jeroboam became first Kg of the northern Kgdm, or Israel. The prophecy of that event is the first of two scenes we have as today's texts. 1 Kgs 11: 28-33. This is what is called an acted parable, or prophecy. One day the plotter Jeroboam was walking out of Jerus when he met a prophet, Ahijah. As we learn a bit later in the story, Ahijah had an interest in breaking the unity of the Kgdm, because he was a priest at Shiloh, that altar which had been the center of Hebr worship until David took the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, and he was aldr in the effort to restore the primacy of the priests there. Whatever may have motivated him, his is a major part in the revolt, for he supplied the spark to the inflammable passions of people worn out and embittered by a Kg who demanded tribute and forced labor. Ahijah told Jeroboam that the govt could be overturned. He did it in a way guaranteed to arouse interest and curiosity. He was wearing a new robe, a bright clean new suit of clothes, worn so short a time. He took it off and tore it into pieces, into 12 pieces. There is overpowering sadness in that action, for its symbolism is unmistakable. That robe so new, that Kgdm so young, was torn apart. It was about a century earlier that Saul had been anointed Kg by the last of the judges, Samuel, it was about 70 years since David succeeded him. To David had been given the covenant promise; his Kgdm would be perpetual. Remember, 2 Sam 7, where God said, David, I will make of you a house, a royal line, that will be forever. And now, so soon, that bright new garment has begun to unravel, its fabric frays and tears. Throughout the Bible the new garment is used as a symbol of purity, or newness, of starting over again, after we put aside the soiled clothing with the unclean life. 12 pieces, and 10 of them thrust into the hand of Jeroboam, man of ability &

great ambition. Just as with Macbeth, when the witches' cauldron boiled and bubbled, and he heard that he was to be thane and then king, so Jeroboam's secret longings are set on fire. 10 of the 12 tribes are to be Jeroboam's, for this, says Ahijah, is the will of God. Only 1 tribe shall be left to Solomon's son, he said; that would be the tribe of Judah, the southernmost of the tribes. The 12th was little Benjamin, so few in number that it wasn't even mentioned; it did survive, for, as you know, Paul's boast was that he was of that tribe. But the msg was clear; the 10 tribes would be torn from the hand of Solomon, just as the pieces of cloth were torn from the new robe. The reason for the divided Kgdms is given in v. 33; Solomon has forsaken me, says God, and he has worshipped at the altars of three of the so-called gods of the nearby regions. He worshipped Ashtoreth, the god of Tyre and Sidon, to the north, and Chemosh the god of Moab, east across the dead sea, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, east of the Jordan river. Now, you might well say, what does that have to do with me, that Solomon in all his glory put up altars to three spirits whose names I cannot spell or pronounce. We would not be so stupid as that, would we? But take another look. Ashtoreth is a plural spelling, meaning that there were many of them; in other spellings the name is Satarate, or Ishtar, and among the Grks she was Venus, for she is the goddess of erotic love. Some yrs ago there was a novel whose theme was that promiscuity and pleasure were the ultimate goals of life, sensuality was like a religion. Astarte no longer ruling? don't you believe it. And Chemosh of the Moabites, that was the god who could not cross water, could not leave his native hills; he is the god of the clan, the nation, the tribe, the race, the nation. Worship of the state means that when we want something--food, or shelter, or a bumper crop, or prayer in the public schools, or an end to abortions, we do not go to God; we write our congressman. Chemosh a forgotten god? not on your life. And what about that other one? Milcom it is spelled here; his more familiar name is Moloch, and to him parents sacrificed their children, their own flesh and blood, to win his favor. His altar was a fire, and upon it infants were placed. He is the god who demands the best we have, but his touch is not life; it is death, his will is not our health, but our sickness; not our joy but our sorrow. He, too, lives among those to whom relig is a heavy burden, a yoke that is too heavy to bear, a sad thing w/o joy or singing, or merriment. We begin our worship with what we call a prelude; what follows is often dull and lifeless in many of our gathering-places. Would it surprise you to know that the Latin origin of the word prelude is before the game? Sensuality, and racial/natl narrowness, and pain and sorrow, that is what that unholy trinity mean. And they remain to this day as popular superstitions. Take a look around you, to see how Astarte & Chemosh & Moloch threaten the moral basis of the country, the home, the individual, to see how the ancient ethic has been seriously challenged, if not in fact defeated, by the worship of those idols. In the Bibl it meant punishmt, which may be delayed but not evaded. In the case of Jeroboam we have the scene of revolt. 1 Kgs 12: 12-16. This passage really does not make sense without what went before; read it for yourselves, in the earlier part of Chap 12. Kg Rehoboam received the petition from leaders of the northern tribes, with Jeroboam their ldr. They wanted a lighter load to bear, as the price of their loyalty to the Kg. Rehoboam first asked advice from the older men, the ones who had served Solomon; they urged him to agree to changes in taxes and duties. That sensible course he spurned; he knew better than they; he asked of his companions, the young men who had grown up w/him. They said, don't give an inch; instead, increase their taxes; tell them, my little finger is thicker than my father's waist; he beat you w/whips, I shall chastise you w/scorpions. And that is what he told the petitioners. You will obey whatever you are commanded, and you will not protest. That was too much; Israel came into existence at that moment. What portion have we in David? they asked, meaning, what future do we have in the govt at Jerus? To your tents, o Israel! ~~and~~ that was the battle cry, to arms, to the field of battle, And that is how to make two kgdms out of one. In this there are some lessons we need to think about. Politically, of course, the lesson is that compromise is the price of unity. People will sacrifice for their country so long as they perceive the sacrifices as equally shared by all. But when any group thinks itself second class, unprivileged, carrying too heavy a load while others pay no taxes at all, then there is risk of rebellion. But it is not enough to leave this for the class in political science. In these lines we have the central meaning of history as the writers of scripture saw it. The purpose of these events was to teach a lesson, and here we can see it clearly. It is the insistence upon monotheism, the one true God who gives life, and breath, and redemption from the sin of our foolish ways; there is also the strongest opposition to anything other than the highest and purest morality. The God of Israel is not like other gods that people chase after. They impose a price and return only emptiness, meaninglessness, discouragement. A few yrs ago there was a novel about the aimlessness of modern life; Marx is dead, the bill of rights abrogated, and God has withdrawn from the universe and left it to destruction. That is the way many people live, because they have not learned the lessons of this ancient history. There are no other gods, for there is no other like the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the father-God of Jesus. That God can draw beauty out of barrenness, courage out of fear, ~~and~~ love out of loneliness, darkness into light, silence into singing. That is the God who calls us to faith and to life.

7-15-84. Ahab. Some time ago I was driving with my family along a major highway, trying to get from here to there. All went well until we came to a place where the construction crowd had decided to put a new surface on the road, and to prepare it they had taken off the old. What was left was a subsurface of some kind. It was rough and bumpy and full of potholes. I slowed to a creep so we would not lose our eyeteeth, or break a spring. It must have been five miles of very unpleasant going. Then it was that we came upon a huge sign on the side of the road. It said, Caution, ~~sldw~~, road under repair. I thought it was a great joke to be warned long after the warning would do any good. As I thought about the events of the lesson for today I remembered that long-ago bumpy road and the warning that came too late. In the folklore there is a saying about locking the barn door after the horse has bolted. That may be the way most of us live; after everything has gone wrong then we read the instructions, then we get the warnings, then we learned that the road was bumpy & unpleasant. But the people who lived in the divided Kgdm of Isr and Judah after the death of Solomon had it the other way around. They got the warnings, they heard the rules, they knew what was expected of them if they broke faith. They did not believe it. They acted as though there were no judgment day, no end of the line, no price for arrogant disobedience. When I was a boy growing up there was a preacher in Memphis who did a sermon hundreds of times on the people and the events we have before us; his title was pay day someday. Even the ancients knew that the mills of the gods grind slowly, slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine, and sure. So let us turn to a history lesson nearly 2000 yrs old to see if it may have a word for us. Text 1 Kgs 16, 22. As examples of impudent disobedience and wilful wrong-doing we have two of the kgs of the northern kgdm, named Omri and Ahab. A fine pair they are indeed. But for ~~max~~ of them, ~~max~~ we have something which we do not have for many of the ancient bibl characters; evidence from a non-Hebr source of his existence and his deeds. There is in the Louvre in Paris a monument of blue basalt on which there is an inscription in the ancient Moabite language telling of a lengthy invasion of Moab by Omri and Ahab. The Moabite stone, as it is called, though broken, is solid evidence to support the Bibl references to these kings. And as we must do in these sessions, we read only a few verses of a longer account, so I hope you will read all of it, 1 Kgs 15 to the end of the Bk. The small portion we read begins with the story of a civil war for control of the northern Kgdm. 1 Kgs 16: 21-33. The record of the rulers of Isr was not an attractive one. Jeroboam was first, as we saw last week; his reason for breaking away from the govt at Jerusalem was to relieve the people from forced labor and high taxes and oppression. But it is one of the continuing truisms in history that each solution becomes the next problem, and often a more severe one than the one we thought we were solving with it. In the fifty yrs after Jeroboam seceded from the kgdm--and when did you hear of a northerner seceding from anything?--look at what happened. That Kgdm which was to relieve its people from oppression waded thru rivers of blood; four kings, or would-be kings, died violently. Jeroboam's son Nahab reigned 2 yrs and was murdered by Baasha; Nahab was himself removed by Asa, and then Elah, and then Zimri, who lasted just one week before he died in the palace, burned by a fire he himself set. Next was the part we read, about a struggle between Tibni and Omri for control, a civil war that Omri won. And with him we can see the bias of those who kept the records of those yrs; they were priests and scribes of the Jerus temple, who could see nothing good in the rebellious and profane north, and they told the story to suit themselves. As a source they had a collection called Tales of the North, but they left out anything good about these Kgs. And about Omri there were some things commendable. His record was summarized on the Moabite stone, and a long time after he lived we find him credited by the prophet Micah with providing a legal system for his Kgdm. He began a dynasty that lasted 40 yrs, which by the stds of the time was an incredible time; 4 kgs were in that line, before they too were swept away in fire & blood. But to take the acct as it stands, and set aside our modern awareness that it is inaccurate history because it is incomplete history, there are some important lessons for us here. One of them is that from the perspective the biblical values, the only thing that matters about a person is his or her relatsph to God. Nothing else that a person does, however large it may loom in the secular world, ~~matters~~ is of any importance beyond that. In the case of Omri we have a reign of 12 yrs, and the only thing worth mentioning is that for two talents of silver he bought a hill in the north country, from one Shemer, not a large hill, but a steep one, that rose about 300 feet above the plain around it, and on that hill he built his capital city. He called it Samaria because it was the hill of Shemer. The only other fact we have here is that Omri walked in the way of Jeroboam. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and he did more evil than all who were before him. In the case of Ahab we have a reign of 22 yrs, and the only fact we have of him is his marriage to Jezebel, daughter of the Kg of Sidon, the Canaanite city north of Samaria. Both her name, and her father's name, contain the name of the fertility god of the Canaanite people, Baal. And that's all; he married, and he served the god of his wife, he built not only a house for Baal but he also built an altar in it, and that is worse. He also built a grove, or, in older translation an Asherah, a shrine to Astarte, the goddess of erotic sensuality. Beyond that, we read that Ahab exceeded even his father Omri to provoke the Lord to anger, ~~than~~ all who went before him. In

Take a lesson from what is omitted,

more

the brevity of the record as we have it is an implied condemnation, and the tacit lesson that a person's ultimate commitment is the only permanent thing about him. 12 yrs for the father, 22 yrs for the son, all passed w/o comment here. > We can imagine times of excitement in that family, eager anticipation, joys and sorrows, friends, and dinners, and the beauty of the glistening land after a rain; we can guess at hopes and fears, victories large and small, defeats and discouragements, but none of the ordinary stuff of life is described here. It is all reduced to a small pile of ashes. Do you know how many thousands of green growing things lived and died and were then pressed into a few feet of coal to make the seam? That is what happened in this retelling of the story. Years did not count, the little details of 12,400 days were forgotten, the human touch lost in the mists. In that pile of ashes the only lump of metal that remained, in the perspective of the Bible writers, was the person's relationship to God. That abided, that was recorded, that determined everything else about him. Ships and sails and sealing wax, and cabbages and kings, they all come down to this in the end. What did we worship? what was the thrust of our life, how did we define its purpose, its goal, its nature? Authors write great biographies of great men & women, and some of them I have read w/ delight and reward. But to the subjects of those biogs, praise or blame mean little. What matters is not what we did so much as what we trusted; not so much the building we constructed but the foundation beneath it. Kings and presidents, scholars and snobs, generals of armies and captains of industry, leaders in beauty and fashion and the arts, what will their epitaph be if we apply to them the test that is used here? That nothing they--or we--did is of any consequence, it is full of sound and fury, signifying nothing, it washes away like the sand castle on the beach when the tide is in flood. And what is left? he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, or he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. There is another lesson in this, and that is the momentum of evil. Sports fans, and political commentators, like to talk about momentum, the big Mo, the accelerating tendency of the game. When a coach sees it begin against his team he calls time out to try to stop it. Look at it at work in these sparse, unemotional lines. First was the father, Omri, who did more evil than all who were before him. And then the son, Ahab. He did more to provoke the Lord to anger than anyone who was before him. Can you see that momentum rolling along? An evil father provides the environment and the model for the son to imitate, for the son even to outdo. Years ago one of my students misbehaved in a manner more repulsive than is usual for us evil-doers, and when I asked about her, I was told that if I knew her parents I would understand her. Sensuality, and lust, and thievery, and false witness, and anger, these build up in society like a flood; a trickle in the beginning, they grow until they push aside everything that gets in the way. How to stop it is not described here, but it is clear in other passages. What is needed is enough wisdom in sons to see the mistakes of fathers, to see that the selfish life is doomed to produce unhappiness and failure, and to resolve to refuse that pathway. Another lesson that is a corollary of that is that the smallest breach of the moral code, or the right worship, always expands into a great gulf. If you make a point on the ground, and with a transit mark one line, and then mark another only one degree away, ~~from~~ it does not take long before they are far apart. Jezeboam would have been shocked if anyone had called him an idolater; he would have been repelled by the thought of bowing down before the gods of other nations. He wanted an independent Kingdom because he was ambitious, and because he wanted to relieve his people of oppression. He would be the new Moses to lead his people out of bondage. But in 50 yrs there was in Samaria an altar to the Baal of Sidon, & the worship of Baal was poisoning the life of all Israel. From a tiny spring far up on the hillside there came a raging torrent, from a small, apparently harmless beginning there grew a monster. To the Bible it makes a difference what people dedicate themselves to, and there can be no halfway covenant, ~~no~~ saying, thus far and no further will I go, any more than a person can go halfway over Niagara falls in a barrel. And there is always the judgment. 1 Kgs 22: 37-39. I hope you will all read those chapters between 16 and 22, which tell the classic encounter between the prophet Elijah and King Ahab, and contain that searching question Elijah put--how long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. But in this brief passage we have the end of Ahab's sorry tale. Jezebel was thrown from the palace window to the street, where the dogs came and licked up her blood; Ahab was mortally wounded in battle, but remained in his chariot with his face to the enemy, until he died; his blood flowed into the bottom of the chariot. They washed it in the pool at Samaria, and the dogs came and licked up his blood; the clause that follows differs from the old to the new translation, and that because some excellent manuscripts use the Hebrew word meaning arms, or armor, and some others, equally respectable, use another meaning harlot. Take your pick. What matters is the judgment, the pay-day that always comes in the ledger books of God. It may come slowly--twenty-two years is a long time--but depend upon it, it comes. In the story of Omri and Ahab that is the lesson; down that road there are bumps, and a dead end. ~~But~~ the Bible never withholds the warning until you've driven down that way. It puts up the sign at the beginning, and it never lets us forget that we cannot limp between different opinions, or that we can escape the pay-day. Listen, and stop limping, and rejoice in repentance.

7-22-84. Jehu. Many people have defined history as a tale told in blood and thunder, and indeed, to read of the violence and dishonesty that has brought us to this moment would make one believe it. R. D. Laing, one of the best of the currently producing poets in English, said; Man's inhumanity to man remains a puzzle unresolved. Perhaps we should know why we are so bad at being good. Our purest thoughts are thick w/bloody stains of all the lives that have been shed to give us life to think them. Thus spake the poet's Muse and his own reading of the human spirit. Violent bloodshed is the trademark alike of the patriot and of the criminal, and both legal and illegal spend the largest proportion of the expenditures in studying war, in turning plowshares into swords, and pruning hooks into cannon. The Sat-night special recalls the less polite directness of the ancients, and a great number of people claim credit for pointing out that Sam Colt made all men equal, or that a Smith&Wesson beats four aces. The philosophers may tell us that violence is proof that the argument is weak, but we go right on, smiting people on the one cheek when they offend us. It is also much too common to see people who strive to do good by doing evil, who seek to defend the law of God by breaking the law of God. The road to Hell, as ~~We~~ all know, is paved with the most lofty of intentions; in one of his plays Geo B Shaw has a character say that the English are capable of the very worst offenses against propriety, but first they must convince themselves that it is God's will. A hundred & fifty yrs ago Jas Russell Lowell put it into a couplet: there's nothing we read of in torture's inventions like a well-meaning dunce with the best of intentions. That, speaking broadly, is the subj of the lesson for today, subj, reform, by force?, text 2 Kgs 10. This is 3d lesson in a unit on the 2 Kgdms, in our summer study of Bibl hist, entitled the rise & fall of a nation. The first in this unit was about Isr's revolt against Rehoboam who succeeded Solomon as Kg in Jerus. The second, last week, told of the idolatry of Omri & Ahab and how they weakened the moral cohesion of the people in the northern Kgdms, whose capital was now the city of Samaria. Now today we have an incident in which a new Kg of Isr named Jehu attempted by devious and dubious means to reform the life of his Kgdms. It is a lesson in means and ends, methods and results, and it tells us a thing or two we need to hear, and think about, in our own lives. 2 Kgs 10: 18-24a. The hist of the N Kgd of Isr was a restless and ugly story. As we saw last wk, Jeroboam led those people in revolt against the very real, and very stupid, oppression of the young Rehoboam, and he did it to give them relief from their burdens. But as so often happens in this best-of-all-possible worlds, when people plead for competent and compassionate ldrshp to lift their spirits at a time of tears and terrors, they find that they have merely exchanged one master for another more cruel. The new country which was to relieve its people from oppression became itself an oppression. Few of the rulers succeeded legally, or peacefully; murders and assassinations and plots and warfare for power became common. Ahab's conduct, we are told, was worse than anyone who went before him, and God determined to end his reign. A young man, Jehu, a charioteer in Ahab's army, was anointed next king and commissioned to destroy the house of Ahab. He took his mission seriously. He began by killing two of Ahab's sons, then he killed Jezebel by having her thrown out of the window into the street, where the chariot horses trampled her body, and the dogs ate it; Ahab died in battle, but he had 70 sons in Samaria--prob a general figure, not necessarily accurate--and Jehu ordered them all killed and beheaded and their heads put into baskets and piled into heaps at the gate of Jezreel. So Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab, as the record grimly puts it. He came to power by violence, and if we are to take the account of it literally it was by the command of God that he did that. His next task was to rid the land of the cruel and degrading worship of the Baal of Sidon, who demanded immoralities in the name of prosperity and fertile crops. He set about to do that by deceit and dishonesty. He first professed to be himself a Baal worshipper, one even more fervent in his zeal than was Ahab himself. Ahab served Baal a little, he said, but Jehu will serve him much. Now, we might expect the priests of Baal to be just a bit uncertain about Jehu's honesty in claiming to be one of them, for he had hardly cleaned the blood off his hands from killing Ahab and all his offspring, and represented all those murders as being at the express command of Jehovah God the Lord. That the priests of Baal believed Jehu, and did as ~~the~~ he suggested, is a commentary upon the sad state of morality in that benighted kingdom. Where people would themselves lie they readily approved, even applaud, the lies of others. Fidel, his very name is his condemnation, came to power under one disguise and then when his police were in place he exchanged it for another. History bks are filled with stories of people who won public confidence wearing one hat, and then without qualms put on another. Jehu is one of that number, or so they thought. He was just using Jehovah as his pretext, they said to one another; he ended the house of Ahab and fooled the people by saying it was by command; but really, he is one of us. Ahab only worshipped Baal because of Jezebel his wife, they said; Jehu will worship sincerely. It must have been with joy and relief that the priests and prophets and adherents of Baal heard the glad news. They came flocking to the great temple of Baal in Samaria; Jehu commanded that all should come for a great sacrifice, and any who stayed away would not live. That, too, should have been a warning to them. Bloody-handed Jehu would kill them if they did not show up, and with his record of violence they knew he meant every word. But to execute them for expressing

their freedom not to go to the sacrifice? I've heard preachers say, jokingly, I'd like to punish my people who do not come to worship, and I have read of many communities in which attendance upon religious activity is compulsory. In Calvin's Geneva there was a fine charged to absentees. If Jehu's conversion to Baal were real, if he had been a closet heathen all along, even as he claimed to follow the will of Jehovah in killing Jezebel and Ahab's sons, then he would know that they would come gladly, willingly, to the press conference where he went over to their side. And it is revealing how few of them there were. Of the professionals, those who ran the Baal business in Samaria, there were not any more than would fill that temple. In they went, loud in their praise of their new King, the one whose lies had helped him become King. How nice it would be for him to endorse the cause of Baal by offering the sacrifice. He even honored them all by giving each of them a new robe to put on, and that was considered a great honor to the ancients. Then came the sifting, for destruction, not for preservation--first messengers were sent out to be certain that all of the Baal bunch had come, and then Jehu gave orders that those in the inner court be questioned to make sure that no Jehovah spy in the crowd. V. 24 describes the confrontation. 1 Kgs 10: 24-31. There is the line-up, the priests of Baal in the temple, the guard outside to let no one escape. And Jehu carried the deception one step further; he went in to offer the sacrifice himself. The smoke of the burnt offering arose and filled the hall with its pungent odor...the ancients thought it must attract the attention of the gods, because burning meat would smell to high heaven. But it was all a deception, play-acting, a monstrous untruth. Jehu gave the order to the executioners, go in and slay them, slay them every one. In they went, cutting bodies that were defenseless and unable to get away; the chants of the ritual became the shrieks of the doomed. It was a massacre that wiped out the Baal blight. And then the pillage and destruction; the temple was pulled down, and they took something out and burned it; the original is not clear. The older KJV called it images, perhaps expecting that there would be idols in the place; the more recent translations call it a pillar, meaning pole, or support, perhaps with carvings. In glee the narrator of this repulsive scene boasted that Jehu had demolished the house of Baal, and that it was turned into a latrine, which means that it was desecrated in a way people have always done. V. 28 gives the vindication of such behavior--thus Jehu wiped out Baal from Israel. Note in that the emphasis placed upon the three sources of authority by which we justify our actions--king, idol, nation. But even in his riotous approval of that heroic deed, the narrator tells us that Jehu really did not mean it; he left the golden calves in Dan, and in Beth-el, and altho we read that God approved his actions and would reward them, we also read that Jehu was not careful to walk in the law of the Lord with all his heart, nor did he turn from the sins of Jeroboam, that rebel who took his people away from the temple worship in Jerus. So there are some interesting insights for us in all of this. One of them is the character of Jehu himself. He was possessed with zeal to serve God, and in the more primitive understanding of his day he won God's favor. But along with the flame there was a generous serving of smoke, and of soot, for even in zeal there must be honor and justice and reason. There is only a very fine line between the zealot and the fanatic; and the one is commendable while the other is part of the problem. Winston Churchill described a fanatic as one who couldn't change his mind, and would not change the subject. Geo Santayana said he was the one who redoubled his effort after he had forgotten his cause. Jehu was that kind of person, and that leads to another lesson for us--how we go about achieving our goals is as important in the outcome as is the choice of those goals. We talk much about priorities, and objectives, in life, but little upon the means by which we work. Goals are good things; lofty, and commendable, we set ourselves to love everybody, to make world peace, to give everybody a job and an education and good health. But if we try to do that by foul means we poison the process and also the product. What cheer is there to know that our hero Jehu has wiped out Baal from the land, when we read that he did it by lying to them? The Philippine rebel Emilio Aguinaldo came into an American camp bearing the pledge of truce, honorably given. There he was taken and executed. Do you wonder that Filipinos find it difficult even 80 yrs after to trust you? Ends matter, but means shape them, flavor them, color them. Reform is not made by force; violence does not bring peace, nor does it make peace. To fight a war, or beat plowshares into spears, in order to have peace, is like stealing to protect property, or killing to show respect for life. Jehu could say that God told him to go and kill; but that same God also said, thou shalt not kill. The apparent difference between the God of Elijah and the God of Jesus--and I say apparent on purpose--has been a bother to people thru the centuries. But we should have no difficulty in accepting the progressive nature of biblical morality, as well as the growth of human understanding of the divine nature. The God of love was preceded ~~him~~ in man's comprehension w/ God of righteousness who judged the wicked and condemned them. The wrath of God was mightier than the forgiveness of God in those simpler days. Jehu lived by his understanding of God's nature, and he, like many of us, kept those golden calves; over in one corner of his will he tried to shut God out. Our understanding may be clearer because of the incarnation, but we still see thru a glass, darkly. Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.

7-29-84. Boasting. One of Aesop's most familiar fables tells of a frog that wanted to be as big as an ox. He blew himself up as large as he could, and then he asked another frog, am I as large as that ox? and the other frog said, no, you aren't. So the frog blew himself still larger, and larger, until in his desire to be something he was not, he burst. Aesop pointed the obvious moral, and for 2000 yrs the little story has stood as an example of the folly of reaching too far, of rejecting the role we are best fitted for, of continuing to think that grass grows greener in the other feller's pasture. We read the fable of the frog, and we grin. But it is an attempt to every one of us to act like that distended frog and let our enthusiasm replace our reason, and then we come to humbling failure. That is the lesson we have before us this morning, and it has something to say to us that has meaning for us as a nation, and a community, and a church, and as individuals living in this world. Text 2 Kgs 14. This is another lesson in our summer series on the rise and fall of a nation, Bibl hist of the Kgdm of Judah, strong, prosperous, and united, under David, and Solomon, but divided, rancorous, secular, and in the northern kgdm given to outrageous idolatry. Last week we read of Jehu and his destruction of the temple of Baal in Samaria. But as we saw, he did it by cunning rather than by principle, he did it by deceit, by lying, and by murderous bloodshed. He called together all the priests and worshippers of Baal; he said he was one of them, and they would celebrate a great sacrifice together. When they were all assembled, he ordered his troops to slay them, slay them every one. And then they pulled down the temple and burned its idols, and they desecrated the spot. It was a great victory for the true God of Abrah, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Moses and the burning bush. But the method, the means, took away whatever relig fervor might have been present. Relig zeal separated from ethical conduct does more harm than good. A relig goal attained by anti-relig means is tainted and destructive. Now today we have a lesson of which a part is taken from the annals of the kgdm of the south, Judah, to help us underst the lesson the Kg of the north, Israel, taught him. The two kings are Jehoash of Israel and Amaziah of Judah, and in this disreputable incident it was the southern king who behaved foolishly, and needed to learn that life imposes limits upon us, and it always punishes us when we try to reach too far, or be what we were not made to be. 2 Kgs 14: 1-4. In this introduction we have the standard announcement of the new Kg. Amaziah was Kg of Judah, the southern kgdm at Jerus, where was the temple and the treasures collected by David and Solomon and those who came after. He was a good man, he was true to his God, but he did not remove the idols and the shrines to the local fertility gods. V.3 says he did what was right, but v. 4 says he did not remove the high places, nor did he stop the worship that was going on there. The best we can say of him is that in comparison to the excesses of blood and idolatry going on in the other kgdm he was a good man, as moral and obedient as any Kg the Hebr people had before the 2d giving of the law. It really does not affect the lesson in any way, but to those who enjoy the details and want everything to be included, it must be said that there is no way in which the chronology of the reigns can be reconciled. Too many hands did the copying, and too many errors got into the text. If you take the time to add up the yrs of the kgs, from Jehu, who slew the priests of Baal, who became Kg in 841, to the fall of Samaria, 721, there is a discrepancy of 21 or 22 yrs between the two lines. And if we bring in archaeology, there is an Assyrian inscription that says that on top of that the time-line is almost 25 yrs too long. But no matter. Some would read for Amaziah nine yrs instead of 29 yrs. But what he did is the important thing; not how long it took him to do it. 2 Kgs 14: 7. What he did was to win a great victory over the Edomites, and it elated because it was unexpected. The war between the Isrs and the Edomites is one of the oldest conflicts in human history, and it is between blood relations. It began when Jacob defrauded his brother Esau out of his birthright, Gen 25:30 says that Esau was called Edom, which means Red, because he begged for some of that red pottage, he was so hungry. That is not far from the beginning of the story. Gen 27:41 says that Esau hated Jacob because of the father's blessing; Gen 36 says Esau took wives from Canaanites, and he lived apart from Jacob, and there began the hostility. In the final bk of OT, Malachi, the hatred is still in force--Jacob I loved, but Esau (Edom) I hated, said God, and you may read of it in the day's news, where the west bank of the Jordan is still the place of battle. The warfare between the descendants of the two brothers has raged unchecked, and it has been and remains a main theme in world history. The middle east is unsettled and knows no peace because of it. There is a lesson in it about family feuds, family jealousies and ill-will. How many families break up, and break apart, because of the same kind of selfish greed that led Jacob to take what was his brother's? How many brothers and sisters quarrel, stop speaking to each other, because of some item in the family that both wanted? How many wills are read in anger that endures for years, and in some cases even generations? But here is our Amaziah still battling Edom; their land was east of the Dead Sea. The valley of salt was the marshy and saline region south of the sea; Sela, the name means a rocky crag, is elsewhere called Petra, the rock city. The parallel acct in 2 Chron 25: 12 says that Amaziah's army killed 10,000 Edomites in battle, and captured another 10,000, and threw every one of the over the cliff at a rocky place. Sela, or Jok-the-el, is not mentioned in that version. But the important thing is that Amaziah won a great and an unexpected victory over the ancient enemy,

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and it deprived him of whatever judgment he had. He began to see himself as a military genius who should have a wider world to conquer. Surely he is the biggest Kg on earth--he is as large as any ox in the pasture. 2 Kgs 14: 8-14. Even tho Amaziah's victory over Edom was not decisive, and wld very soon continue, he saw himself as dominating the entire world. For his next target he selected the Kgdm of Isr, to the north. From any practical consideration it was foolish. The N Kgdm was larger, it had more people, it had a better trained and better equipped army. Still, Amaziah in the flush of his triumph over Edom challenged the Kg of Isr to battle. He sent a msg to Jehoash, come, let us look one another in the face. That is an idiomatic expression meaning, let us face each other in battle. It was a poetic term for a testing of strength, and it was used when two people engaged in a duel. When Jehoash got the msg it made him smile; he too had just won a great victory, over the Syrians, a war described in 2 Kgs 13; in fact Jehoash defeated the Syrians 3 times. Now that upstart Amaziah sends him a challenge. He replied with a fable about the thistle, the cedar, and the wild beast. The thistle, the lowliest plant in the forest, asked for the daughter of the cedar in marriage; the cedars of Lebanon were world-renowned for their height and beauty, and for the sweet perfume of their wood. Jehoash could not have stated more clearly than that his contempt for Amaziah; he was the cedar, beside which Amaziah was as the thistle, so lowly that a passing animal, a nobody, came along and trampled down the thistle. Here is disdain like the jolly green giant brushing aside a gnat. There was more in his reply than that. Sure, you licked Edom, and that's great. But don't let it exaggerate your strength. Be content with what you have, put up a triumphal arch, proclaim a holiday, but don't think yourself important. Stay at home, play in the little leagues; you are not big enough for the world outside your little backyard. Why should you provoke trouble--here I prefer the older reading: why shouldst thou meddle to thy hurt, that thou shouldst fall, and Judah, your country, with you? Now that is good advice. It is one thing to do battle when it is forced upon you, when your home and family and food crops are endangered. But here you are asking for trouble, meddling where you will be hurt. Delusions of grandeur, we call them, and they whisper to every one of us. You are bigger than he is; step on his foot. You are better at your trade than that one is; call him up and tell him so. Even in our religious life the tempter is there to tell us we are better, truer, more faithful, than all the rest. Some of us are so much more righteous than are all the rest of the hypocritical riff-raff who pester God with their selfish pleas for mercy--our pipe-line into the throne of the Almighty is unclogged. And when someone tells us just how weak or foolish, or proud, or irreligious, our attitude is making us, we refuse to listen. Did you hear it? v. 11 is the key, the text for a goodly proportion of this world's misery. We bring upon ourselves much of the troubles we have to endure. And Amaziah would not listen. There was the counsel of a friend, and he did not hear it. You are small potatoes, Amaziah; stay at home and be happy there. But he would not listen. He knew better. He'd just defeated the Edomites, and no one on earth could stop him now. The golden text for this lesson is one of the most familiar proverbs in the collection: pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall (16:18), and in its earliest Engl use had already (14th Cen) become pride goeth before a fall. It is a misquotation w/meaning, for the folklore shortens to point the lesson that pride makes us rash and foolhardy so that our feet slip from beneath us. The worst is that we will not listen. So Jehoash moved his army quickly into place, at Beth-shemesh, about 15 miles west of Jerus, and well within the land of the sou Kgdm. He forced Judah to fight upon its own soil, and he won a great victory, so that the survivors all fled to hide in their homes. On he came, into Jerus, where he took Amaziah a prisoner, he took hostages from Judah, the only time in all their troubles that the people of one of the two Kgdm's did that to the other; he destroyed about 200 yards of the city wall, and he looted the treasury of gold and silver objects. Amaziah lived on for 15 yrs or so, until a conspiracy against him formed, and he went into exile, where the plotters followed him and assassinated him. His body was brought back to Jerus for burial. His son Azariah succeeded him; he is the one whose name was spelled Uzziah in Isaiah's account his vision of God. Now there are some lessons we need to ponder about this incident in the life of the two kgdms. One of them is that good advice can sometimes come from a polluted source. One of the Bibl's most striking points is its utter honesty. These hist records were written and edited long after the events, and by the scribes in Jerus, the keepers of the chronicles and the scrolls. They had an abiding bias against the rebels of the north, who broke covenant with the Jerus temple, and went their own way. But it is remarkable that they included this acct of the flaw in their king's character, and the wise counsel that the idolaters offered. The folly was of their own, and they did not censor it, or destroy the record. It may be that to us, as a nation, and as indivs, may learn from those who are different from us, those we consider thistles to our cedars in human rights, and liberty. Are they more concerned than we about the needs of society, and about the group? If the shoe fits, we should wear it, even if it comes from the wrong side of the line. But the central lesson is of pride and destruction. The frog is not as large as an ox, there are things we cannot be and do. God gives the victory, and the talent, and the life; when we think we did it by ourselves we are on the trouble road, and it is a short road in this world. Let us confess our sins and errors, in all humility, for pride is forgetting God, and that goes before the fall.

Can our good thing come from Samaria?

8-5-84. Judgmt for Samaria. The educat of the younger generat is one of the crucial actv of any community. If it is ignored, or is not done well, then the values and the tradits of the society will be lost in a very few yrs. So as far back in time as we can see human behavior, some kind of educat has been going on. How the process is directed is a subj of continuing discussion. Broadly speaking there are two theories of educat. One assumes that the young should be introduced to a specific body of knowl and expected to master it, and because the young may hurt themselves they are rigorously watched and guided. The other view is person-centered rather than subj-centered and it offers a wide measure of freedom to the pupil. One of the major expressions of that idea came from Rousseau, who wrote a book about it. Everyone should be permitted to do anything he paeases--fall in to deep water, walk along the brow of a steep cliff, go into the pasture with the nervous bull, knock over the beehive, so long as that person is not protected from the conseqs of his action. If the results are unpleasant, ran the argumt, the child will not do that again. It is a method of teaching that seems harsh, and yet many communities have adopted it in whole or in part. The important thing for us here today is that it is the method God adopted in dealing with the covenant people. He made man in his own image, which is to say, with the pwr of choice, of moral judgmt, of saying yes or no to a course of action, and then he set up rules. You and I may break them; we are not puppets on a string, machines plugged into the wall, electronchips for storing away facts. We may do as we please. But there is always the condition, that we shall every one be held accountable, we shall have peace and prosperity if we are obedient, but we shall have our noses rubbed into the mess we made when we were not. That is the lesson for today. It is one of the main themes of the Bible, the warning signs are large and well-lighted, the path clearly marked. And yet it is the tragedy of humankind that we always think we know better, and then we come to grief. Let us look once more at those warnings, while there is still time, in the hope that it may make a difference.

Text 2 Kgs 17. This is the final lesson in a month's unit on the divided Kgdm, in our summer series on Bibl hist, subj ~~fact~~ rise and fall of a nation. Next week we begin the final segment of the story. But today we have sad but inevitable end of the N Kgdm, and the 10 lost tribes of Isr. That Kgdm began when Ahijah the prophet put on a new robe and went out to meet Jeroboam, a rebellious military comdr of the Kgdm Solomon ruled. The prophet ripped that robe into 12 pieces, and gave 10 to Jeroboam. It was a dramatized prophecy that 10 tribes would be torn away from the other two, and would declare their indep of Jerus and the monarchy of Judah. But the new govt that came into being to protect its people from oppression became itself an oppression, and even worse, an abomination. This month we have read a small portion of the unspeakable crimes committed by the rulers and the people of that doomed land. They had the freedom to live as they pleased, and it pleased them to go their own way, to imitate the customs and the morals of people living around them, to go deeply into debt to their God, to live on borrowed time and by borrowed standards. Now it was time for the payday. The bill came due. 2 Kgs 17: 5-12. Hists reveal their values and interprs in the way they organiz their materials, what they discuss and how much space they give it. The same is clearly true in this tale of catastrophe and stark horror told in dispassionate tones. Twelve words form the epitaph for a Kgdm; 12 verses, more than a column of type in my version, explain why the tragedy happened. It is therefore safe to assert that to the hist of this event, what happened was only a passing incident of no great significance. But WHY it happened was fundamental. Nowhere is the Bibl view of history more clearly stated. The purpose of OT hist was not to list events, but to declare the presente of God in human affairs. The theme asserts that nothing happens w/o God's knowl and permission. It was tragedy, it was misery, it was suffering. The Assyrs caught their Israelite vassal in treasonable behavior, which they could not accept. They came to deal with him. In ancient warfare the tactics were simple and brutal. For defense people built their cities upon hills and then walled them about, so invaders first drove people off the land, away from their crops and their homes, and into the walled cities. Then they sat themselves down to wait. If they were patient and could afford to maintain a beseiging army for years on end, in time the city must fall to them. Food, and water, and diseases from overcrowding, took away the strength and the will to resist. Children cried for a few grains of parched corn, and a few drops of water. People ate the rats, and then chewed on their leather belts. It was not pretty. In this case the seige lasted three years. Try to imagine what that meant to those people. Then underst what the writer here is telling us; in 18 words he told us what happened...the Kg of Assy invaded all the land...the Kg of Assy captured Samaria. But that is not the subject of the story to this hist, for the main portion of the acct is a description of the causes that produced national ruin. Since that is the main interest of the author, it shall be ours as well. As we analyze the record we see that it falls into three parts, breaking at v.13. Vv. 7-12, which we have heard, tell of Isr's sin, that provokes the Lord to anger, and that lead him to send prophets to warn people of the dangers of disobedience. Vv. 14-18 make up the third portion of the text, with the record of Isr's sin increasing in intensity, and once again culminating in the statemt that they provoked the Lord to anger. As we have the story, then, we have two degrees of guilt, one before and the other after, the prophets' warnings, and two stages to God's an-

Broke covenant w/ God, also pledge to Assy. They punished both parties.

ger--one that produced the sending of the prophets, and the other that brought in the Assyrian invaders. So let us look at these words to see what lessons they may have to teach us, nearly 3000 yrs after the events they summarize. First, in the passage I read, we have the statement of Israel's wrongs. V.7 says they sinned vs. the Lord their God, and there are volumes of meaning in that word their. It was not some strange God, some local deity who could not protect the people they drove out, whose remains they found scattered about in the ruins. This was their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt. That is the way those people identified their God; there was no image of him permitted, no name other than I am that I am, no special place where he lived. He was their God, the one who brought them out of the hand of Pharaoh, out of slavery. Three times in the OT these words are stated almost verbatim. The first time is in Deut 6, 10-12, where they were clearly warned--when you get into that new land, and the living is easy, and you live in houses you did not build, and take water out of cisterns you did not hew out of the stone, do not forget that you did not take the land by yourselves; you had help, it was God who did it, and not you at all. And then, in Hosea, chap 13, v.4 follows, read the same words--I brought you out of Egypt, and you forgot me, so I destroyed you, Israel. All sin is our headstrong effort to cut the cords of compassion that bind us to God, to break the chain, to deny our dependency, to forget the thousands of blessings he gave us. Sin is a short memory and a long ingratitude; it is a rejection of the real for the false, a refusal of that which satisfies and makes us whole and a yearning for that which has nothing to give but sorrow and guilt. Idolatry is only one of its forms, for it is not outward or material; it is inward and abstract. Every one of us who denies that we were created for a purpose, or that we owe anything to the creator, commits sin, and may expect to be called to account for it. Here people walked in the customs of the nations, the statutes of the heathen in the older version. The second half of v. 8 is so corrupt in the original that it is meaningless and should be omitted; we can only guess what it might have said. But we can ~~read enough to get~~ the message; some idolatry was imported and some of it was home-made; some came from the nations who were driven out, some from the kings of the country. In v. 9 the word secretly cannot be right, for they hid nothing; from the open country (watchtowers were put up where there were few people) to the main centers, they set up altars & idols; every hill was profaned, every green tree desecrated. And the Lord's anger was provoked. He responded with special pleading, 2 Kgs 17: 13. (Note, v.12, sin defined as disobedience--they did things God told them not to do. They had the freedom to ignore the covenant & commands, and they did.) The mission of the prophets in the great age of 8th Cen was God's reply to Israel's rebellion. That says something about the nature of God. The more the rebellion, the more God pleads for repentance; his anger is always comes as an appeal of his love, as the sun ~~prints~~ the rainbow upon the darkest clouds in the sky. God's grace increases as we try to get farther from him; none of us can ever go so far that we are beyond his reach. Then the final stage in Israel's apostasy, 2 Kgs 17: 14-18. The prophet's call from God leaves none of us as it found us; either it melts the ice in our consciences and brings us to repentance, or it stiffens our necks and our resistance. These stubborn people would not listen to the gentle voices of the prophets, they closed their ears to the truth. V.15 says it all too clearly; they followed vanity, & became vain, or in newer version, they went after false idols, and became false. However we read it, it says the same: the worshipper takes on the characteristic of the thing worshipped, we become the mirror of whatever we make ultimate. If we follow after emptiness we become ourselves empty; if we follow after mammon we become selfish. We are reduced to, or we rise to, whatever we make first. We read that these people forsook all the commands, and made images of two calves, they worshipped Astarte, the goddess of fertility; we read that they also worshipped the stars, the host of heaven, and they served Baal. They offered their infants as burnt offerings to Moloch, they turned to magic and crystal balls. Now the bills were coming in. The list concluded with the statement, they sold themselves to do evil. This is the slavery of the individual, and the nation, to that which destroys, and it leads to the second statement that it provoked the Lord to anger. This time it was not the call of the prophets that resulted, but the invading armies of Assyria. Israel has become like those nations God removed to give them the land of promise, and like them, it will be destroyed as they were. To be swept away is the certain fate of those who break faith. Now, there are some things we need to think about, in this act of the death of a nation. One of them is that in human history nothing is forever. We build our elaborate castles in the sand, and we say, look how civilized we are, how artistic, how technically perfect, how well we master space, and time, and information. And then comes the tide to wash it all away. The secular Hist explains it in secular terms, the Bible in spiritual terms. But there is no difference in the results. Another thing we need to note is that there is a price for disobedience, just as there is a reward for walking in God's way. And then, there is that emphasis upon consequences. We have the freedom to choose our values and to set our standards, and we should also know that we shall be held to an accounting. We cannot have it both ways. I tremble for my country, Tom Jefferson said, when I recall that God is just, and that his judgment is not withheld forever. How long is our memory, for promises made, for blessings bestowed? God promises peace to the righteous, and destruction to the forgetful, and the headstrong. Those captive Israelites, those 10 lost tribes, going off under guard, to oblivion, dragging their weary limbs, have something most important to say to us.

Will we hear it, or will we follow behind them?

8-12-84. Hezekiah. There is something about the view that most of us take of life and the passing scene that makes it easier for us to be negative than to be positive. From time to time I am mildly distressed to see candidates elected to office ~~with~~ a campaign entirely devoted to attacks upon the opponent rather than promises for present or future behavior. Everybody knows that the malice of the gossip is rather to be preferred than is the constructive praise of another, and the work of art critics is much wider read when they slash with claws than when they soothe w/velvet gloves. I have a book filled with classic insults; I do not have, nor do I know of, a book of classic compliments. Someday I'm going to ask somebody why that is true. And I suppose it goes w/o notice that books about immoral people sell well, while books about honest and decent people rarely appear. Something there is that doesn't like goodness, and respectability, and patriotism, or so it seems. And so today we have something different to talk about; a genuinely good person in a position of leadership, a religious revival in the life of a nation, and a commendable instead of a despicable result of it. Text, 2 Kgs 18, ~~1-8~~. Today we have the first of 3 lessons on the course of the remaining Kingdom of the Hebrs. The title for the remainder of August is Judah Only, and the theme is the decay and destruction of the southern Kingdom, and w/this we end a yr's series of Bibl Hist, title, rise & fall of a nation. Last wk we read of the defeat and disappearance of the 10 tribes that inhabited the N Kingdom of Isr, an ugly story of misbehavior and infidelity that led to destruction. Now for today we have a lesson that is like a brief shaft of sunlight between two dark clouds, for we have before us the life of one of the OT's heroes, Kg Hezekiah of Judah. Those who wrote the account as we have it, 2 centuries after the event, used words in praise of Hezekiah that they used for no other Kg in the entire annals. In the way he conducted his reign there are some lessons for us, lessons that are positive rather than negative, lessons that say, go this way, instead of those other lessons that say, look what happens to people who break faith with God. 2 Kgs 18: 1-8. Here we have the usual introduction of a new king--in the 3d year of Hoshea Kg Of Isr, Hezekiah began to reign. That would be in the same year that the siege of Samaria began, for it lasted three yrs, and when it ended so did the Kingdom itself. But in this introduction note the differences; those who recorded the event found Hezekiah altogether acceptable. Here are words of praise that are not used for any other of the Kgs of either Isr or Judah; he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord; there was none like him among all the Kgs who went before him, and who came after. To those who judge the ruler on the basis of his relig piety, Hezekiah was the lofty peak between two dark valleys of bad judgment. There is one very significant fact in these words that is not immediately apparent, and that is the amazing, almost miraculous appearance of a good man between two abysmal failures. Ahaz the father was a thoroughly depraved man who could do nothing right. He had no other claim to power than his relation to Jothan his father; he had no honor, no courage, no judgment, no reverence for anything other than himself. He volunteered to become a subj of Assyria, and to please those dominant people he closed and locked the temple of Solomon, and put out the ancient lamps that symbolized the nation's prayers. Folwg that mudbath of apostasy came Hezekiah, who in his 29 yrs reversed the course of his nation of destruction. He was folwd by his son Manasseh who was as despicable as his father was moral. How can we account for the record of Hezekiah, who broke the pattern and brought however briefly a revival? The answer seems to be in the dedicat and teaching of his mother Abi, or Abijah, as she is called in the parallel acct in II Chron 29. She was daughter of Zebhariah who may have been the same person Isaiah mentioned as of good character and faith; whatever, she left her mark upon her family and her nation in the integrity and courage she taught her son. Her husband Ahaz had none of either, but her influence was decisive in forming Hezekiah. The son grew up in a house and in a land that exposed him to every form of degrading behavior and yet he was strong and true. Mothers who take seriously their responsibilities and their opportunities can change the course of history. It may be that our greatest need today is for dedicated mothers, who hold the future in their hands. And I am not being a male chauvinist pig; every son in the N.C. legislature who voted against ERA had a mother, and if she were disappointed in his vote she must bear a portion of the blame. If it is a man's world, and women are unfairly treated in it, then a generation of Hezekiahs after Ahaz could rewrite the rules and correct the wrongs. Mother's place is in the house or senate, yes, but it is also in the home. But those words should come not from some misinformed man, as you all know. Let us look closer at Abi's son Hezekiah, for his was a devout life, here is the positive, the good, the commendable, the model we may all copy. There is a basic similarity in devotion, whenever it appears. Hezekiah lived about 2700 yrs ago, and yet we can recognize him in every devout person we know today; he lived his devotion in a time of grave crisis and temptation, even as the devout among us do. There are four things said in these lines about the religious life, and we can take them as instructive. The Bibl, and history, are filled w/examples of how to make a mess of things, how to fail, how to play the game of life badly. Here is that comparative rarity, the rules for doing it right. And note that it begins with trust and it ends w/obedience, and that he went forth, and he prospered. Trust is the foundat of a successful life. V.5, Hezekiah trusted in the Lord the God of Israel. The OT is just as certain that there can be no relig w/o trust, as the NT is emphatic that

faith is the only safe footing for life. The relig life, which is another way of saying the successful life, the happy life, the rich and sunny life, is founded on simple trust, and everything else sprouts from that root, and without it nothing else will grow. Trust may begin w/knowl, but it is something quite different from knowl. People may know a great deal about how to stay healthy, and still suffer illnesses all their lives. Just the other day I read about an 18th Cen Russian head of state who over-indulged in the delights of this world until he was under dr's orders to moderate his diet, to eat no more of the Cossack's favorite meal, salt pork and raw beets. He laughed at the medical advice, and went out and filled his stomach with those forbidden foods, washed down with great quantities of barley water, and within two hours he lay dead. No, knowl is not enough for the full life. Trust means taking God at his word, it means taking his promises seriously, and in this is the secret of the triumphant life. Hezekiah trusted in the Lord God of Isr, and that is where every life of devotion must begin. You and I are given the same invitat, and the same opportunity, to trust, in the midst of all our troubles and diffics and toil and pain and conflict, and we will learn, as has every other who dared to do it, that in trust there is peace and security and a warm feeling that we, and our world, are OK, that we are doing what we were created to do, where we were guided to do it. Life offers no greater gift, and it begins w/simple act of confidence. That is the foundat, the first floor, the beginning from which all else grows. The second story is in V.6, in the older translat He clave to the Lord, in the newer, He held fast to the Lord. Clave, or cleaved, is one of those fascinating Engl words that mean directly opposite things. A meat cleaver is that which cuts a whole into parts, it separates; to cleave to the Lord means to become one with him. The earliest use of the word in that sense is in Gen 2, where a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. Do you hear the same spiritual tenacity here w/Hezekiah? He clave, he held fast. The same word was used of Ruth, in that lovely story of devotion--Ruth clave unto Naomi and refused to leave her. The first step in the life of devotion is trust. The second is a relatship to that which we trust, so close that it is like the miracle of marriage, so committed that we cling and will not turn back. As the ivy clings to the wall, else it falls, as the epoxy cement clings to what it touches, as the shipwrecked sailor holds to the bit of planking that keeps him above water, so the one who trusts holds fast to God, with all this strength, against all forces that would pull them apart. I have seen people try to remove ivy from a wall, only to pull the cement from tween the bricks, so tightly did the vine hold to its support. Here is the secret of that joy-filled life we all want for ourselves; on the foundat of faith we build a connection to God that is close and strong. The third step, also v.6, is the folwg, he departed not from folwg Him. The cleaving implies nearness to the point of union, so that the two become one; the folwg implies distance, a gap that is being closed. Here is a paradox, and we may well question how we can be both, holding fast, and following. Are they not contradictory? And yet all thru the Bibl we find the two ideas of union and pursuit put together; and it reveals a profound truth: that even as we cleave to God there is a vast distance between us that makes folwg necessary. However close we may live to God, we are still creatures who must press closer; however full our trust, it must still be made more full; however high we climb, there is always a still higher mountain towering above us. However deep our experience, it is ~~still~~ like holding one drop of sea-water, with the ocean's vastness still before and beyond. Trust, and union, and pursuit, these three, and then there is the fourth part of the life of devotion, obedience. V.6, Hezekiah kept the comdmts which the Lord commanded Moses. There is the outcome of it all, the headstone at the top of the column. The world is full of people perhaps even this class is full of people, who have attempted to assemble some item they have bought and when they have gotten it into a totally confused condition have said, let's look at the instructions from the maker. No amount of faith, or trust, or adhesion, or progress toward the Creator, is of any value if we do not follow the rules. No one has ever yet trusted and then been disobedient; it cannot be. No one has ever yet ordered his inner life to the faith, and then broken the moral code in his personal or business affairs. And there is an obvious corollary to that. It is that no outward obedience to the comdmts that is not based upon inner trust and confidence can succeed. It is empty, it is vain, to whitewash the outer walls, and leave pollution within. We do not build a house by starting with the roof-tree, but by pouring the foundations and making them deep. This is the only blue-print that works. If we want the comfort and joy that devotion can provide, then we must folw God's sequence, which is so clearly set forth here. Trust, then adherence to the point of union, then folwg to close that diminishing gap, and then obedience to the commands of God. This is Hezekiah's lesson for all of us. He tried to alter the trends that made for secularism and lack of faith. He broke the altars, he cut down the groves where the fertility goddess was worshipped, he removed the high places. He broke up the bronze serpent Moses had held up in the wilderness, which had with some justificat been regarded as a magical symbol. He restored the faith of the fathers, because he was himself a man of faith. Rudyard Kipling put it in poetry: The tumult & the shouting dies, the captains & the Kgs depart; Still stands thine ancient sacrifice, An humble and a contrite heart. Lord, God of Hosts, be with us yet, lest we forget, lest we forget.

8019-84. Josiah. The number one job of the historian is to convince the present that what happened in the past has meaning and is of value in the present. And not just the historian; people in other areas of life & study also face the awesome & pernicious force of presentism in the world. Not long ago I was reading a novel in which a character complained that he was expected to live by a set of ethical rules worked out by the Grks 2500 yrs ago. Why, he asked, should something that old have such a hold on the life of the present? Thomas Jefferson angrily demanded to know why the dead hand of the past should direct and restrict people who came later, whose conditions were different. And yet every attempt to escape the wisdom and experience of the past has failed, simply because it is like wasting a treasure to ignore what people have learned through long and in some cases painful experience. Over a 3000-yr period artists & scholars have cataloged and described the traits of human nature, what works and what does not. However technical modern life becomes, however computerized or space-oriented or scientific, all of that learning remains basic, because the human being is the constant in the equation. When John Keats was a young man one of his schoolteachers read to him from the dramatic translation of Homer by one of the Elizabethan poets, and so transported was he that he could not sleep. He said later that he felt like some watcher of the skies when a new planet swam into his sight, or like those explorers who stood on the mountain in Panama and first gazed upon the expanse of the Pacific ocean. Fortunate indeed is the person who knows the experience of reading from some work of the past and suddenly sees meaning, or feels the emotional thrill, that is in it. That is the subject we have before us this morning; that which had been lost was found, and when it was read aloud it was ~~like~~ like a full meal to a hungry wayfarer, it was like seeing a new planet, or a new ocean; text 2 Kgs 22, ~~RA~~. This is the second in a unit of 3 lessons on what happened to the southern Kingdom of Judah after the defeat and dismemberment of the northern Kingdom of Israel. This summer we have been reading in a series of lessons on the rise and fall of a nation, Biblical history, and now we near the end of the account with a group of giant steps on the high spots in the story of Judah. Last week we looked at Hezekiah, the most pious of all the Kings of that stormy time, and now we have another good man and a most interesting incident to read about. 2 Kgs 22: 18-13. Sometimes a fire on the hearth, left untended to burn itself out, will flare up in warmth and brilliance just before it dies in cold ashes. So it was with Judah. After Hezekiah came a series of very evil kings. His son Manasseh was only 12 years old, but old enough to undo the work of his father; he rebuilt the altars to the pagan gods, and even set up an altar to the Assyrian sun-god in the temple. He was called the most wicked King of Judah, and that may be a difficult judgment to make, for there are other contenders for the title; he was also the longest on the throne, 45 years. His son Amon, who bears the name of the Egyptian sun-god, was so bad he was assassinated after two years, and his successor was the 8-year old Josiah. For 18 years his reign was a blank, but when he was 26 things began to happen. He thought himself ready to begin a reform program, ~~that~~ ^{he started} began with a cleaning & repair of the temple, so long profaned or neglected. Out of that came an unexpected boon, the discovery of an ancient book of the covenant. ^{begin} Like many of us, Josiah gained more knowledge of God's will and God's way as he acted to do that will to the best of his knowledge. Not one of us can see all there is of God's will. It's like striking a match in Carlsbad Caverns and thinking we've seen in all. Once we went down into that fantastic cave system in N. Mex. It has 23 miles of caverns, but only about 3 miles are open to tourists. At one point the guide has everyone sit, and then turns out the light. It is the most complete darkness I've ever experienced. Now, if someone were to light a pencil torch and point out one stone in that huge 50,000-acre cave, & declare that to be the total of it, that would be a rough example of how little we can know of God's will and way. But as we act upon the little understanding of it that is granted to us, we find other dim patches of walkway becoming more clear. That happened to Josiah. He began setting the desecrated Temple to rights, because it was for Judah the symbol of worship and prayer and the covenant with God, and that much Josiah understood. He made a beginning right where he was; his point of departure was his limited understanding. And so must it be for all of us. As the priests and workmen cleaned & repaired the temple they discovered a scroll of the ancient covenant with God. I cannot explain exactly what happened, because I do not understand how it happened. Nobody can say for sure what scroll it was, or what it said; nobody can say how it had gotten lost. Some even suggest that there was no finding; the priests planted the scroll and then found what they had themselves put in the Temple. We can guess that the scroll contained most if ~~not~~ all of the present book of Deuteronomy, and also that it was found in the holy of holies, into which only the high priest could go, and into which no priest had gone for all those years since Hezekiah. But what happened, and how it happened, is not important to the story, or we would have an explanation. What does matter is the effect of the discovery. We can guess from the way the account reads that this was the only copy of that particular covenant agreement in existence; it was at the least the only copy known. Reading it taught people things they did not know about, it came as a shock, it opened whole new worlds of understanding of the religious obligation. It was like discovering a new and unknown planet, or seeing a vast ocean for the first time. Think for a moment how delicate ~~is~~ and uncertain is our link to the wisdom of the ages. There was only one copy of it, and that copy had been mislaid for so long that people had forgotten it existed. Like

a single surviving seed of an extinct plant, or the last egg of a species of bird, that scroll was the only window thru which Isr's spl relatshp to God could be remembered. Civilization is always like a candle in a high wind; each of us has an obligat to preserve and pass along its nature. And there is another matter: for the great majority of people in the world today the Bible is as much unknown country as it was in those yrs before Josiah. Even w/millions of copies in print, people seem to know less & less of its beauty and meaning. Recently I read a dramatic and moving acct of the air-raid on Nuremburg by the RAF in March 1944, the worst night of the war, the night nearly 100 bombers were shot down within a single hour. One survivor remembered his terror at the carnage going on about him, on a clear brilliant moon-lit night, as the planes blew up, or burned. He said he began repeating the 23d psalm and his panic left him. But how many today would know what comfort there is in the book? How can anything so old have any meaning for the present? Let us take care that the road-map that has come to us in so miraculous a way does not become lost to us and to our day. The high priest Hilkiah sounded amazed, filled w/wonder, w/awe, when he ^{told} his scribe Shaphan about the discovery; it sounds like he did not even know of the existence of such a book. He could not give it a name; it was "the" book; it is even possible that he could not read. He gave it to the scribe, who read it and saw its importance. He reported to the king, that we have found "a" book, again it is anonymous; and again he read it, this time to the king. It may be that Josiah too was illiterate. But he had underst; he knew what those words meant. Here were the comdts, here were the rules, and the solemn warnings if they were abused or forgotten, the glorious promises if they were kept sincerely and humbly. The effect of those words was immediate and complete; Josiah saw himself and his people in a new light, from a new perspective, from the reading of the word. He heard, and we have to guess from the language that it was for the first time, of God's watchcare over his people, of God's ideal for his chosen, of the condits of the covenant relationship. And there grew within him a sense of sin, of failure, of having missed the mark. He tore his clothing, as a symbol of that awareness. He was frightened because he knew he had forgotten the book and its rules, and he read there the assurance of punishmt for those who forgot or rejected the covenant. Now fear of punishmt is not best psychol motive for seeking God, but it is better than none at all. 2 Kgs 22: 15, 16. We leaped over v. 14, I think because of all the names so hard to pronounce; the Kg, we read there, sent to the prophet Huldah who was then living in Jerus, and asked about the validity of the warnings he found in the scroll of the covenant. Do you hear that? Josiah sent to ask of a woman who was a prophet? I hesitate to point it out, since the Bapt Conv took so harsh and so stupid a stand about women called of God to speak for him, but there were male prophets then living and teaching and writing in Jerus that year. Jeremiah was there, and so was Zephaniah, one of them ranked among the major, the other among the minor, prophets. If Huldah wrote down any of the oracles she rec'd, they have been lost to us. But she must have been in her day an even more trusted and dependable prophet than were those others. But don't tell anybody I said so, for they will fire me; and don't ever let them know you have read 2 Kgs 22. Now why did Josiah need to get confirmat from the prophet? Were not the words of the book clear enough? They were pwrful enough to make him tear his garment, but still he wanted to get proof he could hear. Or did he hope that there would be a softening of the punishmt, or perhaps that since the scroll was written God had relaxed his standards (cartoon, 2 people in Hell, one says, what I'm here for is no longer a sin) or re-defined sin and its conseqs. Some of us do the same thing; we hope that 2 sources of God's voice might contradict each other, that the living prophet might overrule the written word. Surely, we ask our spiritual counsellors, it doesn't mean what it says. But if that is what he expected he was disappointed, for Huldah's msg was consistent w/that in the book. Note how she addressed the Kg on the throne--tell the man that sent you to me. She was not impressed by Josiah's rank, or his royal lineage. Any other person would have gotten the same answer. We do not read her word; read it for yourselves, and see how it is in two parts, as are all of the msgs from God. One of them confirmed the grim promise of punishmt that was to come; there would be no softening of God's purpose. Last month a signal-man on the railroad, in whose body was later found an illegal drug, did not put up the warning, so that one train crashed into another, and people were killed. When the word is a warning it serves no good to withhold it. But then the other part spoke of God's mercy and God's love. There is in this story a lesson we need to hear. Josiah began by repairing and cleaing the long-unused temple; that led to the discovery of the bk, and then came the living voice of the prophet. That is the process by which you and I must revitalize our faith. We must begin w/institut, however much it needs a good cleaning-out, the roof fixed, the windows caulked. Then we hear the word read, and it begins to work its miracle upon us. And then we hear the preacher, the prophet, who proclaims to this day, and to these people, that eternal word. It may be old, but it is also new. In the Gulag, Alex Solzhenitsyn quoted a Russian proverb: dwell on the past and you'll lose an eye; forget the past and you'll lose both eyes. To neglect temple, book, and prophet is to lose vision, to become blind, to God, and man, and self.

and it may even come from an inspired woman.

Sad story we have today -

8-26-84. The End. You may have known someone who never ever lost a game, or a race, or first prize in the contest. Myself, I do not know any such person. Everybody I know has been at least once a loser, second best, substitute at the far end of the player's bench. Not too many years ago I entered a jar bb beans in the fair; they were the only one entered, and they won 2d prize. It would be bitter enough to swallow if there had been 20 entries, and if somebody had won first prize. But it is really the mark of failure to be the only entry, and still to come in second. I can laugh about that, because it does not really matter. The point is that we all have to live with the fact of defeat, and failure, and there are times when it matters very much. One of the most moving scenes in that novel *Gone W/T/Wind* takes place when Grandma Fontaine told about her people. They had always been losers, she said; they always guessed wrong, but always survivors. Run out of France w/Huguens, run out of Engl w/Cavals, run out of Scotl w/Bonnie Prince Charlie, run out of Haiti by the ~~Reds~~ *Reds*, now licked by the Yankees. In a world oriented toward success it is a sad thing to be a loser, to fail, to reach for something and not get it. In little things, like the ~~best~~ competition in the fair, and in big things, life and death, love and hate, we all know the sharp sting of the tears that come when we know defeat. Today we come to the end of our story of Bibl hist, and it is a catastrophic defeat that killed dreams as well as people, that brought sorrow to the chosen people, and it has some lessons we all need to hear. Text 2 Kgs 25. It was the preacher, Ecclesiastes, who said that there was a time for all things, a time to be born, and a time to die. Nothing in this life is for ever. Some see that as a curse, others as natural and in the plan of God. Whatever; in this summer term we have been reading and thinking about the rise & fall of a nation, some highlights of history of Isr; the establmt of the Kgdms w/Saul, and then David, and then Solomon, the divis of the Kgdms into two parts, and then the disappearance of the 10 tribes in the north when they were overrun and carried away into oblivion. Conditns in the southern kgdms of Judah were hardly better, but the punishment was delayed. Twice came faithful and reforming Kgs to the throne in Jerus, once w/Hozeiakh, and then w/Josiah. But most of the Kgs were not faithful, and the people did not compel their ldrs to keep the faith. They folwd the law of least resistance, they preferred pleasure to keeping promises, they denied the God of the desert and the escape from captivity, in favor of the spirits that lived in the richer lands along the coast. And the result was disaster. The record we have of it was written many times, and in many ways, for it was a humiliating shock to those people. There are three ~~MAJ~~ accounts of the fall of Jerus in the Bibl, and two of them are copied verbatim, one here in 2 Kgs, the other in final chapter of Jerem. Another version that is almost identical is in 2 Chron 36. They are alike in their unemotional, almost mechanical telling of what was painful, and moving, and told w/tears. For the sadness of the story we must read the bk of Lamentats, and some passages in the later chaps of Isaiah. But let us hear it again, and see it in its dramatic simplicity, and then what might be its meaning for us. 2 Kgs 24:20b-25:1-7. Zedekiah, poor man, had the misfortune to live when the world that had prevailed for more than a century was undergoing change; the long warfare for dominance between Egy and people to the north was tilting away from Egypt & to the Babylonians, fierce warriors who lived in the land between the two rivers at the other end of the fertile crescent. Chaldeans they are called here, and think for a moment about the irony in that; Abraham was living in Ur of the Chaldees when God called him, and by faith he went forth, not knowing where he was going. Now, centuries later, the inhabs of Chaldea have come to punish the puny state of Judah because it rebelled against them, and in favor of Egy. Imagine if you will, if you can, the known world divided between two super-powers; one says 'we will bury you', the other says they have outlawed the other, and the bombing begins in 5 minutes. Now imagine some tiny state caught in the middle, forced by the two giants to take sides, knowing the other will punish them if they guess wrong. There is an old saying that when elephants fight, the ants get squashed. Zedekiah's hawks wanted him to ally w/Egy, and defy Babylon; they thought they knew best. A stronger king may well have resisted them, and walked the tightrope between the opposing forces. But Zedekiah was not stronger; he gave in. And then came the invading Babylonians; first they defeated the Egys, who had promised they would never leave the Mekong, er, Jordan, valley, but they pulled out their troops, and the helicopters carried away the embassy. The power on the Nile was no help to them, poor ants, and the army settled down to besiege Jerus. They pitched against it, says the old 17th century verbiage, and that means they put down tents, they came to stay. It was in late December, probably 586 BC by our reckoning, that they came. No ancient city could withstand a determined siege; their only hope was that the besiegers grew weary, or could no longer afford the cost. This siege lasted 18 months, before there was no food in the city. We can imagine the suffering, of the old & the young; we can imagine the anger at those advisers whose policies had failed; we can picture the despair of those who knew they were losers, that history, that ought to be something that happens only to other people, was now going to happen to them. But not a word is here to tell us what were the writer's feelings; it is dispassionate. It was written during the exile, about the destruction of the capital city of the writer's country, and the temple of his faith, but here are no sighs, no groans. In fact the first 12 verses of chap 25 are one long sentence in Hebr, a series of clauses joined by the connective "and," clause heaped upon clause, as if each were a hammer driving

nails into a coffin, or clods of earth thrown into a grave. The story is in 2 parts--what happened to the king, and what happened to the city. On the north side, where there was no steep cliff, but a wall to protect the people, an opening was forced in the wall, and in came the invaders. W/their barbarous and pagan names, they ~~saw~~ burned and destroyed and killed. Seeing all was lost the weak Kg w/his mil ldrs, crept out between 2 walls, down a ravine, into the deep valley to the east, over or around the mount of Olives, down the road to Jericho. The invaders gave chase, and caught the Kg in the valley of the Jordan, at Jericho. And again, think a moment of the irony; it was at that very spot that Joshua led his forces when first the Isrs came into the land of promise, and now in humility the Kg is captured in the act of trying to cross the river in the other direction, and at the very same place. The end came at the place of beginning; as one commentator put it, the cradle was also the coffin. Then came the meeting of the two ldrs, at Riblah, far to the north, at the foot of the mountain of Lebanon, their names professing their beliefs; Nebuchadnezzar means Nebo, protect the crown, or boundary, of the land; Nebo being a Baby1 god; Zedekiah means Jehovah is righteousness. Still more irony; the pagan served as punishing rod for the unrighteous, the man who did not live up to his name. The idol did not overcome, ^{NE} for the defeat of the unbelieving worshipper of the true God was really the triumph of the righteousness that the name proclaimed. There Zedekiah saw his sons murdered, the last thing he saw, for then his eyes were put out, and the darkness gathered its folds about his defeated head. They bound him, though helpless, and carried him away into captivity. There is a Jewish legend that he was forced to turn the mill, but that may be a holdover from the story of Samson. Jeremiah tells us (Ch52) that he was kept in prison until he died. With him died the kingdom of Judah. The other part of the story tells what happened to the city. 2 Kgs 25 8-12. More than a month went by while the avengers decided whether to keep the city and garrison it as an outpost against Egy, or to destroy it as an object lesson to others in their Empire. Then they came. They burned the palace, the homes of the well-to-do, and the temple. 400 yrs had passed since Solomon built that temple, and that palace, and began the practice of idolatry to appease his many wives. Read the rest of the chapter, to see how the temple was razed and its treasury looted; the great 7-branched candlestick was taken out of its place, and all that is left of it is the carved image of it we see on the triumphal arch erected by the looters. Thus ended the holy place of those who would not keep faith with its holiness. The city walls were torn down, and all of the people of influence were deported to live in captivity among the conquerors. The little people were left to till the fields so the occupiers could profit from their victory. Shed a tear for them, for all of them, for those who were uprooted and expelled from the promised inheritance, and for those forced to live in the land but not to know liberty or the free produce of their labors. We saw the rise of the nation, and the kgdm; now watch its fall; stand a moment in memory. This event, like the redemption from slavery in Egy, is one of the major facts in OT hist. It meant something to the people who collected the memories of survivors and put them together in this book. History was to them an object-lesson to teach a permanent truth. So let us think about it together this morning, for it made such an impression upon those to whom it happened that they wrote it down, and preserved it, so that all those who came after--and that means us--would not suffer the same fate out of ignorance of it. The Span-Amer philosopher Geo Santayana said it: those who do not know the past are condemned to repeat it. The first thing it tells us is that a disaster is the judgment of God, and it comes about through disobedience. Now, I know that idea is no longer considered valid; it certainly is not popular. But wouldn't it be a frightening thing if there really were any substance to it? We tell ourselves that we are above all that; that is primitive, childish, that we can do as we please about morality, or faithfulness to a promise, or to pay our taxes honestly. But what if we are wrong, that these ancient verities do matter? This past week there was a story in the news about the increase of violence in Amer families--only riot, or warfare, are more dangerous. What if it makes a difference, that our survival as a nation depends upon our relig practices at home and in the town? In the Roman ltr Paul said, ~~that~~ ^{if} God spared not the natural branches, neither will he spare you. There is the lesson; departure from God is not mature idpendence, it is suicide, it is ruin. And there is another lesson, and that is how patient God is with wrong-headed people, how slow he is to punish, how reluctant and unwilling. For 400 yrs, twice as long as our republic has lived under its own control, God suffered disobedience; he sent the prophets, he sent smaller disasters to show people they were not in command of the world, he even gave them the example of their northern brethren. And men mocked: where is the promise of his judgment? surely we can do as we wish; because God is patient and his judgment is so long delayed, we tend to live as if it had been cancelled. Hear the warning, and heed ~~them~~. How then do we live with defeat, with losing the game or the contest or the war? First we learn the lesson of the defeat, we drink deep of the bitter cup, because the gall is humbling. Then we take the defeat as proof that God's promises are sure, that it was not God, but ourselves, who failed. And then we hang in there; we learn to sing the Lord's song in a strange land, we take whatever comes, and we thank God it was no worse. For his mercy endureth forever, while his judgment is but for the moment. Oh Lord our God, how excellent is thy name in all the earth.