

6 UNDERSTANDING ISAIAH

to face with the power of the Assyrian king who has destroyed Syria and conquered Israel. The Assyrian power comes down against Judah with overwhelming strength, as part of its endeavor to force all the nations to bow beneath its yoke. It appears that nothing human can protect Jerusalem. Yet God delivers Jerusalem in a most unexpected way, by suddenly destroying a large part of Sennacherib's army (Isa. 37:36).

About the same time King Hezekiah makes a friendly arrangement with the king of far-away Babylon. Isaiah points out to him that from this land of Babylon there is to come one who will destroy Judah and take the people into captivity as punishment for their sins. Hezekiah is thankful that this catastrophe will not occur during his own lifetime.

Manasseh follows Hezekiah and terrible persecutions take place during his reign, so that it becomes obvious to Isaiah and to the godly people of the land that God must punish the nation for the terrible wickedness that is being shown by the king and by the people as a whole. Punishment is so certain that the godly of the land begin to think of it almost as something which has already come.

In chapters 40 to 66 Isaiah turns his whole attention to the godly remnant and brings them words of consolation from God. He shows them that the exile is not to last forever. God will deliver His people and will pour out great blessings upon them.

The Outline of the Book

In approaching such a book as Isaiah it is helpful to see into what divisions it naturally breaks up. Here the analogy of American geography can be useful. The great chain of the Rocky Mountains forms a section of the United States that is different from anything east or west of it. In the book of Isaiah, there is a similar section, made up of chapters 36 to 39, which is distinct both from what precedes and from what follows. These chapters do not have the style of a prophetic discourse, but that of a narrative. In parts of this section one would almost think he was reading Kings or Chronicles, for these chapters are not mainly the declarations of a prophet, but an account of events in history. This naturally divides