

2 UNDERSTANDING ISAIAH

historical accounts in the books of Kings and Chronicles. At many points in the following discussion attention will be called to helpful insights received from examination of the historical background.

While all that Isaiah wrote had a very definite meaning for the people of his own day it must always be kept in mind that Isaiah wrote not only for his contemporaries but also for future generations. That portion of the utterances of the prophets which God caused to be preserved as part of His inerrant Word had important meaning for future believers as well as for those who heard him speak. This is true not only because of the similarity of later situations to those of Isaiah's time; the teachings that the Lord led the prophets to preserve are often so expressed as to reveal great truths about God and about God's plans. Sometimes these truths are explained in detail; at other times they may be hard to understand fully until we examine related aspects of New Testament teaching.

The New Testament books often quote or refer to a passage in the Old Testament as proof of some New Testament doctrine. Sometimes the relevance of the quotation is not immediately apparent, or its use may even seem far fetched. The reason for this is that the New Testament teaching is never based on the few words that are quoted, but always on the whole teaching of the passage from which the quotation is taken. Many parts of the prophetic writings are better understood when we know how New Testament writers referred to them, and the New Testament passages are better understood when we have a real understanding of the situation and context involved in the relevant Old Testament passages.

Another principle that is vital for the understanding of Isaiah is to recognize that sometimes he has the whole nation in mind with particular emphasis upon the ungodly portion of the nation, while at other times he speaks directly to the hearts of the true believers. In many parts of the book, as in various writings by other prophets, there is a regular order of presentation beginning with words of rebuke and judgment against the nation as a whole for the wickedness and apostasy of great numbers of its people, and then turning his attention to the godly among the nation, who might be