

7 UNDERSTANDING ISAIAH

the book into three sections: chapters 1 to 35, then the narrative section (36 to 39), and then the section of prophetic discourse in chapters 40-66. These divisions of the book have distinctive characteristics.

Most of the material in chapters 1 to 35 begins in the reign of Ahaz. It may be entirely made up of discourses given in the reign of Ahaz or before, though parts of some sections may have been added by Isaiah in the days of Hezekiah.

Chapters 36 to 39 describe events in the reign of Hezekiah and tell of the relationship between the prophet and the king during this reign. Chapters 40 to 66, which may be called "Isaiah's Book of Comfort," were probably written in the reign of Manasseh.

The first main portion of Isaiah, chapters 1 to 35, includes a section which is rather different from the rest, though not as different as chapters 36 to 39 are from the book as a whole. This section is made up of chapters 13 to 27. Even a brief examination of these chapters shows a marked difference.

Like most of the book they are prophecy rather than narrative. Yet the prophecy is not all directed toward the people of Israel; much of it deals with other nations. Thus chapter 13 begins with the words, "The burden of Babylon"; chapter 15 begins, "The burden of Moab"; chapter 17, "The burden of Damascus," etc. A large part of the material in these chapters consists of explanations of God's attitude toward various foreign nations instead of being primarily concerned with His relation to Israel.

The last four chapters of this section (chs. 24 to 27) do not deal with any one foreign nation, but with all collectively, or with some one great world power which is not specifically named. This group of chapters is often called "The Isaiah Apocalypse," since it lifts away the veil from God's future treatment of the great powers that oppose Him.

The Isaiah Apocalypse, which is sometimes quoted in the New Testament, is one of the most interesting parts of the book. It forms a fitting conclusion and climax to the section dealing with foreign nations.

Here it is fitting that we say a few words about the last 27 chapters of Isaiah, the portion after the narrative from the days of Hezekiah. These latter chapters, while very similar in general style and viewpoint to the earlier part of the book,