

5 UNDERSTANDING ISAIAH

It is important to realize the general situation in Jerusalem during the reigns of these three kings. When Ahaz became king, Judah was in much the same situation as during the previous two centuries. Israel, its neighbor to the north, was made up of ten of the tribes, and was perhaps three times as large as Judah. North and east of Israel was the kingdom of Syria, with its capital at Damascus. Syria was stronger than Israel and had often defeated it in military engagements.

Near the time of the beginning of the book of Isaiah a new situation arises. Israel and Syria unite together to attack Judah. Judah is thus endangered by a nation much larger than itself, united with another nation which is still larger, and these two, acting together, are threatening to conquer Judah and put a puppet king on the throne. In this situation, the people of Judah are naturally terrified. Isaiah feels that they should turn to God for help in this great emergency, but King Ahaz is not interested in God. Instead he tries to play off the great powers of the day against each other. He has his own ideas as to how to lead Judah safely through the troubled waters that are ahead.

Secretly he sends a message to the king of Assyria, the great aggressive power which is far across the desert beyond Syria, asking him to come and protect him from Syria and Israel, and promising that, if he will do so, he will pay him heavy tribute and will become his subject. This is the situation near the beginning of the book of Isaiah. Isaiah warns against these plans of Ahaz. He says that depending on Assyria will bring nothing but trouble and sorrow for the land. He also warns against the thought of dependence on Egypt. Only in God is safety to be found. He points out that though the Assyrians will deliver the land from Israel and Syria, the result will be that in the end the nation will be right next to the great Assyrian power and that the Assyrian forces will even come into the land of Judah itself.

He declares that they will overrun most of the land of Judah, but he says that God will protect Jerusalem "like birds hovering" (Isa. 31:5). God will do this without any help from human sources. During the reign of Hezekiah, the situation predicted in the reign of Ahaz actually comes to pass. Judah is now face