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SOME PRINCIPLES IN THE INTERPRETATION OF ISAIAH AS

ILLUSTRATED BY CHAPTER 24

by Allan A. MacRae, Faith Theological Seminary

To many Christians the greater part of the prophetic books consists of material that is rarely studied. Although occasionally read through as part of a complete reading of the whole Bible, usually little impression is left. A few outstanding sections and an occasional verse are memorized and frequently quoted. The rest remains a dark and seldom noticed area. The verses that are singled out for special attention consist of descriptions beforehand of the coming of Christ or of His return in glory. It is easy to receive the impression that much of the material in the prophetic books consists of isolated pictures of events that would occur long after the time when the prophets lived, with little if any relation to the period of their activity.

In contrast to this rather common attitude among Bible believers, critical scholars of the past century often described the prophets as social reformers interested merely in the developments of their own day. It was assumed that everything in the prophetic writings must be interpreted as a message for contemporaries or as part of a controversy with priestly or other forces representing elements of Israelite society holding views and objectives differing widely from their own. More recently some of the critical writers have interpreted the prophets as conservative forces rather than radical reformers, but they have also generally considered references to the distant future as something to be explained away if possible. Thus we have two groups of interpreters putting their emphasis on different sections of the prophetic books and presenting entirely different impressions of the books as a whole.