

for "the other side;" yet actually it can be used for either side. This is done in Numbers 32:19 where our English Bible renders it "yonder side" in the first half of the verse, and "this side" in the last half of the verse. The same phenomenon may be observed in Judges 12. In the first verse of that chapter this word is translated "the other side;" in verse 7 the identical word is translated "this side." In these particular cases the writer makes clear which side he means by adding "to the east," "to the west," or "forward" (when the people were in Transjordan and thinking of going forward into Palestine proper). Thus we see that the word does not actually mean "beyond" or "on the opposite side." It would be better if our verse were translated "the land which is at the side of the rivers of Ethiopia." Surely this is a picturesque phrase to describe the Sudan, where life is dependent on the Nile river and its tributaries.

In order to understand these chapters it is necessary that we keep the historical background in mind. This is related to that of the previous chapter.

In chapter 17 we dealt with a situation which is vital to the understanding of a great portion of the book of Isaiah. We noticed the wicked alliance of Syria and Israel against Judah. In the background was the wicked plan of Ahaz to secure protection from these enemies by making an unholy alliance with distant Assyria. In the latter part of the chapter we saw the natural result of Ahaz's plan in the eventual sweeping on of the Assyrian forces into Judah, and its unexpected end through God's miraculous intervention to protect His people from this mighty power. A similar historical situation lies behind chapter 29ff., and there it is followed by the same considerations as here in chapters 18-20. In Isaiah 30:1-7 and in 31:1-3 we find that the people are seeking an escape from the Assyrian menace. They think they will find safety by sending to Egypt for help since Egypt is the great enemy of Assyria. In choosing one of the two great powers and standing with it against the other, they think that they can maintain a balance of power and thus secure their own peace and freedom.

In chapters 30 and 31, God points out the folly of such an attitude. One cannot fight fire with fire. One wicked force will not protect God's people from another wicked force,