

Quiet And Likewise Many (Punishment)

Thus saith the Lord; Though they be quiet, and likewise many, yet thus shall they be cut down, when he shall pass through. Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more. Nahum 1:12

The Basic Bible Truth

God is indeed slow to anger. His patience is beyond understanding. We look at books like Nahum and tend to skim right by them thinking that is old news, what did I need to know from that time frame? The complete picture of God must include the judgment of the world and its sin. A fierce wrath will be poured out one day and we see glimpses of it in the Old Testament. But our discomfort with it must not overshadow our understanding that God is the Judge of this world, and we should fear Him greatly.

The Object

(None)

The Lesson

The Bible is an astonishing book. God has made His Word uniquely different than all other literature. When the early Bible translators would come upon a phrase that was impossible to understand, their first choice was to simply translate literally as well as they could and let the pieces fall where they may. Nahum 1:12 is one of those very difficult passages to translate. Until the last 50 years or so, we did not have a context with which to understand this verse. The translators faithfully did their job and now we can see how advantageous that actually was.

In Verse 12 we find the phrase “Quiet, and likewise many.” Recent archeology has uncovered stone tablets from this era and on those stones we have found these very words inscribed. When God talked to Nineveh, they understood Him perfectly. Allow me to set the stage here a bit from history and the Word.

There are times when God tells a story more than once. The second time through, we are watching closer because we realize the importance He must place upon the story. Very few times in the Old Testament is a story told a third time. That makes a story even more interesting. Why would God take the time and space in the Bible to tell a historical account three times? We have one of those rare instances recorded first in II Kings 18-19, second in II Chronicles 32, and a third time in Isaiah 36-37. The key players are Israel and a nation to their North, Assyria.

Assyria was noted for their extreme brutality. History tells us that they would raid neighboring countries and take whatever they desired. And that was usually everything. They cared little for human life and killed at will. Their raids were swift actions that took their army quickly through the countryside. Their attention to fast maneuvering gave them one problem, which they solved quite easily. When they conquered or took a city, it took time to collect all of the plunder. They were often in a rush to get on to the next one, so they came up with a marker of sorts that would keep other people out of their plunder. They would cut off the heads of everyone in the city and pile them up in a huge pile at the city gate. Anyone wandering by could see their “calling card” and would avoid the city for fear of irritating the Assyrians and bring that plundering army down upon themselves. With their markers in place, there was no rush to return and collect their loot. That process could be done at their leisure later.

We may find it difficult to believe, but God loved these heartless people and wanted to make sure they were aware of His offer of salvation. Enter, the prophet Jonah. It is no wonder Jonah did not want to travel 800 miles to go to Nineveh and tell them about the love of God. He was probably very much aware of their reputation and would have rather seen the wrath of God fall upon them in just judgment. But he reluctantly went, and the result was the largest revival recorded in the Bible. It seems that nearly the entire city, 120,000 people, repented of their ways, and came to know the Lord. We may see quite a number from Nineveh in Heaven some day. The revival was incredible, but it did not continue through the generations that followed.

Nineveh was eventually destroyed 150 years later in 612 B.C. But before that happened, God had another prophet by the name of Nahum remind them of their guilt. God is always a God of second chances. The entire book of Nahum is dedicated to Nineveh and their sin and impending judgment. In the first chapter we see God warning the people of Nineveh in very specific language. In verse 12 He uses the phrase, "Quiet and likewise many". We may struggle with the phrasing, but the people of Nineveh understood it perfectly. We have learned through archeology that their system of laws had certain concepts that were the basis for much of the legal system. Our system has that in common. In our legal realm, we see the phrase, "innocent until proven guilty" and understand the reference very well. "Quiet and likewise many" was a basic notion that guided their judicial system. It referred to the idea that there was a tremendous amount of corporate responsibility in their culture. The actions of few affect the lives of many, and so the many had the responsibility to bring the few trouble makers into line. Because, in their world, punishment was to be meted out to all, not just those guilty of a crime. Everyone associated with the crime would pay equally, The perpetrator, the bystander who might have been able stop it as well as the family who raised the individual to believe that he could do wrong and get away with it. Corporate responsibility was paramount in their legal system.

Regardless of how you may feel about the validity of the legal premise, understand that God was talking to them in language that they would understand very clearly. They as a nation would suffer for what they as a nation had allowed to happen. God would hold them corporately responsible.

God talks to us just as plainly, if we will only listen. Punishment is looming for those who disobey His commands. He may indeed be slow to anger, but eventually the line is crossed and judgment falls on the guilty.