

# THE CONSEQUENCES OF NEGLECT

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## *Nahum 1-3*

### **Introduction:**

⇒ Illustration:

In Saint Louis in 1984, an unemployed cleaning woman noticed a few bees buzzing around the attic of her home. Since there were only a few, she made no effort to deal with them. Over the summer the bees continued to fly in and out the attic vent while the woman remained unconcerned, unaware of the growing city of bees. The whole attic became a hive, and the ceiling of the second-floor bedroom finally caved in under the weight of hundreds of pounds of honey and thousands of angry bees. While the woman escaped serious injury, she was unable to repair the damage of her accumulated neglect.

⇒ Illustration – “I am neglect”

I never was guilty of wrong actions but on my account lives have been lost, trains have been wrecked, ships have gone down at sea, cities have burned, battles have been lost, and governments have failed. I never stuck a blow nor spoke an unkind word, but because of me homes have been broken up, friends have grown cold, the laughter of children ceased, wives have shed bitter tears, brothers and sisters have been forgotten, and fathers and mothers have gone broken-hearted to their graves.

Who am I? I am neglect.

We have all seen the results of neglect in the physical realm. As we have travelled over the years we have seen abandoned barns or houses that gradually lean and eventually collapse because they are neglected and uncared for.

Well, the consequences of neglect are even more severe in the spiritual realm. Ignoring our relationship with God can lead to serious downfall. Charles Swindoll says:

“Anything, if it happens slowly enough, if tolerated long enough, can lead to our ruin. It happened to King Solomon. It happened to King Saul. It happened to Judas—one of Jesus’ disciples. And it happens to men and women today. The seriousness of such an erosion is often not realized until death has come knocking on the door...and by then it may very well be too late to do anything.”

The book of Nahum is another one of those “Minor Prophets.” It is a small book—just over two pages in my Bible. But in this book we see the

death of a city. As Swindoll says, “...the city had sinned itself to death.” The real tragedy is that this city was living so well just a hundred years earlier. What city are we talking about? Nineveh, that great city of Assyria.

Last week, if you remember, we were looking at the message of Jonah. Jonah was sent to the city of Nineveh to deliver the message that God was about to destroy the city. “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” The people of Nineveh responded to the message, repented of their sin, and God spared them. There was a mass conversion of that great city of the Assyrians. So what happened?

Well, apparently the generation that turned to God under the preaching of Jonah failed to pass on the truth and the faith to the following generation. Those who had discovered the living God and had embraced and experienced His grace failed to share the story with the generations that followed. It’s not really a surprise that the city died.

So, who was Nahum? As is the case with most of these OT prophets, we don’t know much about him. His hometown is given as Elkosh, but we don’t really have any idea where it is located. He is not mentioned elsewhere in the Scriptures. His message was very similar to the message delivered a hundred years earlier by Jonah. His simple message was, “Nineveh is going to be destroyed.” That was really the extent of his message, but it took him three chapters to say it. He must have been a preacher.

Nahum wrote his message in a poetic style, very passionate. Note the style of the text in your Bibles – it is poetry. If I can again quote Chuck Swindoll:

“Nahum, writing in passionate and vivid poetic style, blazed a trail through Nineveh with words that were sure to come back to haunt them when the Babylonians, the Medes and the Scythians came to conquer Nineveh in 612 B.C.”

Well, getting to the prophecy itself, there are two basic parts to this book. In chapter 1 Nahum points his hearers to the character of God. He points out God’s majestic attributes contrasted with man’s puny abilities. In chapters 2-3 he points to the judgment of God—what God intends to do to the city of Nineveh because of their sin and wickedness.

I would like to spend most of our time in this book on chapter one. In this chapter the emphasis is on God's majestic character which qualifies Him to be the sovereign Judge over all things and all people and nations. Chapters 2 & 3 emphasize the fact that Nineveh's willful and pathetic decline justifies the judgment of Almighty God.

## I. The Character of God ch. 1

Nahum introduced the Almighty God by describing four attributes or character traits.

### 1. God is infinitely holy and just

Read v. 2. Notice that God is jealous for the people's faithfulness. He takes sin personally, and He reveals Himself in vengeance and wrath, because He is holy and just. God sees sin as a direct attack against Himself, as opposition deliberately undertaken by those He calls "his foes." Jealousy is an attribute that is often used of God's burning zeal for his wife, Israel, and it emphasizes his passionate reaction against anyone guilty of spiritual adultery.

This is something that is sadly ignored for the most part today. People would rather talk about the love of God, the compassion of God, and the forgiveness of God than to think or talk about the holiness and justice of God. We would rather see God as a big loving unconcerned grandfather than to see that He is also an infinitely holy and just God, jealous for his people and taking vengeance on those who commit spiritual adultery.

### 2. God is awesomely all-powerful.

One of most powerful verses in all the writings of the Minor Prophets is Nahum 1:3. This is an amazing verse. Listen: read v. 3.

Swindoll says of this verse: "Isn't that beautiful? Written as only a poet could describe it. But it isn't just good poetry—it's truth! God is unparalleled in power and undeniably revealed in the phenomena of the natural world."

Listen as the prophet goes on to emphasize the power of God – read vv. 4-6. God is a powerful God. Nothing can stand before Him.

There is a story told about Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse. At his church in Philadelphia, he would regularly hold an open forum, where he would stand before a microphone with his Bible in his

hands and answer questions from the congregation. The place would be filled. On one occasion a young student spoke from the balcony and asked, "Dr. Barnhouse, how could it be that the children of Israel could walk through the desert 40 years and never wear out their shoes and never wear out their garments?" Barnhouse responded, profoundly, with one word, "God." The student in the balcony immediately smiled and said, "Oh, now I understand." With great wisdom Barnhouse responded, "No, you don't, son. Nobody understands."

I think that is a powerful reminder that we need today. Don't think you can ever understand Almighty God. Don't think you can put Him in a box. He is the living God. The Psalmist says, He is "the great King above all gods" (Psalm 95:3). And when He speaks, everybody stays quiet. When He acts, everybody gets out of His way – refer again to v. 6.

### 3. God is not only great, He is also good.

Praise His name! He is omnipotent. He is so far above us. And yet He relates to us in a personal way. He loves us. Nahum testifies that "the Lord is good," (1:7). In fact, He is a refuge to those who are in trouble. He knows everyone who will take refuge in Him. God opens His arms to those running for refuge. He stands ready to take in those who are afraid of life and don't know quite how to make sense of it.

There is an old chorus we used to sing that states it so simply and so profoundly, "God is so good, He's so good to me."

Look for a moment at vv. 8-11 – read them. Even though God is good that does not mean that He will overlook evil. He will still destroy those who oppose Him—those who plot against the Lord.

But in the midst of all the evil, and the trouble of this world, and the struggles of life, we can rest in the truth that God is good. He is a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him.

### 4. God is truth.

His word can be trusted. What He says He'll do, He will do. Therefore, He must be taken seriously. What He promises He fulfills. The Ninevites certainly found it out. Look at what God says to his people about Nineveh – vv. 12-13. Look at his message to Nineveh – v. 14.

I would like to quote again from Chuck Swindoll. He says, regarding that verse: "That's what we would call a direct confrontation! Because God is truth, He always tells the truth—even though others may not want to hear it. In effect, He told the wicked nation of Nineveh, 'Nineveh, you are contemptible. You are wrong. You follow images that were made by humans, and I will take action against you. Your doom is sure. You cannot escape my judgment.' God is truth, and he will not hold back declaring the truth, even when it hurts."

Review: The character of God revealed.

1. God is infinitely holy and just
2. God is awesomely all-powerful
3. God is not only great, He is also good
4. God is truth

But that leads us to the second part of this book...

## II. The Judgment of God ch. 2-3

Because God is holy and just, all-powerful, and his word is ultimately truth, what he proclaimed against this city of Nineveh was determined to happen. One hundred years earlier, God's message of destruction had come to Nineveh through Jonah. At that time the people repented and turned to God, and God responded by sparing them. But this time there was no turning back. They had long since forgotten God and had returned to their evil ways and God was determined to destroy them.

In chapter 2 we have the destruction of Nineveh described in great detail. The nation of Assyria fell in 612 BC at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. Even though this was still future in Nahum's day, it is described vividly in present tense terms. AS you read through vv. 1-9 you see visions of marching armies, valiant soldiers, chariots and great destruction, ultimately leading to the exclamation of desolation in v. 10 – read it.

Read vv. 11-13 – MacArthur says: "Archeologists have found a carving from a palace showing an Assyrian king on a lion hunt. Nahum rhe-

torically asks where Nineveh has gone. No longer describing Nineveh's fall, the prophet taunted her, ridiculing her fall from power and glory. Like a pride of lions, with plenty to eat and in fear of no enemy, Nineveh ruthlessly "tore" her prey. She herself will become prey for another nation, under the sovereign direction of God. "I am against you" should be the most feared words a nation could receive from God."

But that is exactly what God said to Nineveh in v. 13. The message is loud and clear. God will not be mocked. He utterly destroyed Nineveh, that great city of the Assyrians. So complete and effective was the judgment of God that all existence of the city completely disappeared. In fact, some critics have argued that there may never have even been such a city as Nineveh. God's destruction was that thorough and complete.

Now, ch. 3. – in this chapter we have a succession of accusations or charges against Nineveh. By doing so, the prophet is asserting that the destruction of the city was justly deserved, that God was just and right in casting them into oblivion.

1. Read v. 1 - The first accusation was a charge well documented in history. Assyria proved to be an unusually cruel, bloodthirsty nation. lies. Assyria employed falsehood and treachery to subdue her enemies (cf. 2 Kings 18:28–32). plunder. See 2:11–12. Preying upon her victims, she filled her cities with the goods of other nations. vv. 2-3 give us the consequence - Assyria was so overrun that she is filled with corpses, causing the defenders to stumble over them.
2. Read v. 4 - The second charge against Nineveh was spiritual and moral harlotry. The nation was likened to a beautiful prostitute who seduced the nations with her illicit enticements. vv. 5–6 – Nineveh would be publicly exposed, resulting in shame and humiliation.
3. Read vv. 8-9 - Nahum sets forth the third and final charge against Nineveh: they hadn't learned from Thebes. Also known as No-amon, Thebes was the great capital of southern Egypt, 400 miles south of Cairo. One of the most magnificent ancient civilizations of the world, it was renowned for its 100 gates, a temple measuring 330 feet long and 170 feet wide, and its network of canals. It fell to Ash-

urbanipal of Assyria in 663 BC. Like Thebes by the Nile, Nineveh was situated by the Tigris River, enjoying the security of conquered nations around her. However, her end would be like that of Thebes.

## Conclusion

So what are the lessons we can learn from Nahum and the destruction of Nineveh?

1. Neglecting the truth of God leads to erosion of life and morals. Nineveh had turned to God under Jonah's preaching, yet somehow had failed to pass on that truth to the next generation. As families, as a church, as a nation we are only one generation away from paganism and judgment.
2. We cannot be careless about the character of God and the judgment of God.

I would like to close by quoting from Chuck Swindoll's notes on Nahum:

"We can glean at least one powerful and lasting lesson from Nahum. *We must take God seriously because of His awesome character.* Nineveh didn't do that. At one time Nineveh's citizens listened to God speak through Jonah and responded in repentance and reverence. But time passed, and the people forgot. They reverted to their evil, vicious patterns of living and got back to business as usual—with not one solitary thought about the God who is King above all other gods. And they would pay the ultimate price. God's patience would run out, and destruction would come.

An awareness of God's almighty power demands that we respond with the highest respect and reverence. He is King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14; 19:16). There is no other like our God—infinately great beyond our ability to comprehend, and yet One who comes near in love to care for those who trust in Him (1:7)! Will we hear Nahum's call to us to take God seriously in our day, and will we respond with the commitment of our lives?"