

From Punishment to Pardon
(for the week of November 15, 2020)

Note to Group Leaders: More than anyone else, you are aware of the size of your group, time constraints, the needs of your group, etc. Please read through the Scripture and material below and use whatever you believe will be most helpful to your group.

This Week's Scripture: Zephaniah 1:1-6 and 3:9-17

Key Idea from Sermon

“God disciplines so as to bring purification. This involves justice and love that leads to restoration.”

Discussing the Scripture

1. Zephaniah was a prophet during the reign of King Josiah. “King Josiah instituted a sweeping reformation of worship in Judah (2 Kings 22:3–23:25), which officially abolished the worship of Baal and the stars mentioned in Zeph. 1:4–6. [However, it] might be the case that such worship continued secretly between 621 and 609.” (Holman Bible Dictionary)

How does Zephaniah start of his prophecy in verses 2-3?

2. Read Zephaniah 1:4-6. What sins are listed by Zephaniah for which Judah (indeed, the whole world) was going to be punished?
3. Read Exodus 20:1-7 and Deuteronomy 5:6-11. Write down the first three commandments.

How were the people in Zephaniah's day violating these commands of God?

4. The name, "Baal," literally means "lord" or "master," but was commonly used to refer to the Canaanite storm god. What do the following texts say about worshipping Baal?
- Judges 6:25
 - 1 Kings 16:31-32
 - 1 Kings 18:20-21
 - Hosea 2:13
5. Nelson's Bible Dictionary says idolatry is "the worship of something created as opposed to the worship of the Creator Himself. Scores of references to idolatry appear in the Old Testament. This shows that idolatry probably was the greatest temptation our spiritual forefathers faced. While we find bowing down to a statue no temptation, they apparently slipped into idolatry constantly. So serious was this sin that the prohibition against the making and worshipping of images was included near the beginning of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:4-6)."

What are ways Christians practice idolatry in our day?

If most Christians know that idolatry is wrong (sinful), how do you explain why they (we) can slip into it so easily, even if unintentionally?

6. In what ways do unbelieving "secularists" practice idolatry in our day?
7. Based on the Scripture you have read in this lesson, as well as Romans 1:18-25, why is idolatry wrong? Explain your answer.

8. We find another form of idolatry called syncretism, in verse 5. Syncretism is a blending together of opposing beliefs and practices. How does verse 5 describe God's people doing that?

9. As in Zephaniah's day, syncretism seems to be common in our day as well. How have you observed syncretism being practiced today by Christians?

Have you ever unintentionally blended your Christian beliefs with other beliefs and practices? Explain

10. In the first century, the Roman empire was very pluralistic. They allowed for the belief and worship of many gods. What got Christians into trouble with Rome was *not* that they believed in and worshiped Jesus. It was that they worshiped him *only* and would not bow down to the Emperor as a god.

How does our larger culture influence the church to adopt beliefs and practices which are not consistent with the Christian faith?

11. Even though God judges idolatry, he is merciful and calls his people to repent and blesses them when they do. Read Zephaniah 3:9-17. What is God's promise of hope for the faithful remnant of God's people who remain faithful to him?

How is that promise fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ?

Applying the Scripture

12. How can you learn to spot idolatry in your own life? What will you do once you spot it?

13. What unchristian (inconsistent and contradictory) beliefs and practices have you adopted in your life? What steps will you take to turn away from them and embrace biblical truth only?

14. What steps can you begin taking today to help you stand firm for Christ, even when it is hard and unpopular?