International Bible Lessons Commentary
Zephaniah 3:1-8
English Standard Version

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, June 12, 2016

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, June 12, 2016**, is from **Zephaniah 3:1-8**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Lessons Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the *International Bible Lesson Forum*.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Zephaniah 3:1-8

(Zephaniah 3:1) Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled, the oppressing city!

God described the capital of the kingdom of Judah, which describes the leadership of many in many nations around the world today. God judged Jerusalem in 587 BC, but God will also judge cities and nations that contain leaders who oppress others in a variety of ways, which includes enacting and enforcing unjust laws. God will judge those who oppress people who live outside of a nation's boundaries. God will judge the rebellious, including those who practice lawlessness and refuse to enforce just laws. The defiled are those who have turned from God to immoral practices.

(Zephaniah 3:2) She listens to no voice; she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the LORD; she does not draw near to her God.

God went on to describe Jerusalem, but we can easily think of government leaders in a variety of nations that obey no one and no laws; they only do what others tell them or what is of selfish advantage to them and other leaders or groups. No matter what God does or says, or what the just do and say, they ignore all efforts to influence them to rule justly and lawfully. They do not trust in the LORD, but worship creation instead of the Creator. They do not draw near to God, but try to exclude all references to God in public life and in the governing of the nation.

(Zephaniah 3:3) Her officials within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves that leave nothing till the morning.

The government in Jerusalem, as in many nations, was filled with people who threatened others and devoured the earnings of those they ruled over instead of shepherding the people as good leaders. Night and day they plotted with others like themselves to steal the lives and livelihoods of those they ruled over. To save the godly, these leaders needed to repent or be removed from Jerusalem, and because they would not repent God removed them and will remove others like them in His time.

(Zephaniah 3:4) Her prophets are fickle, treacherous men; her priests profane what is holy; they do violence to the law.

God not only condemned and threatened to punish (and did and does punish) secular political leaders; God also did and does the same to religious leaders, especially those who profane God's name and twist the meaning of God's laws. An unprincipled person does not follow sound judgment or obey God's laws or the moral law or natural law, but does what his fleshly nature dictates. They do things that harm others to fulfill their selfish desires. The true prophets of God tried to call the political and religious leaders and people to repent. Instead, false prophets supported lawless political and religious leaders and taught principles and laws contrary to the laws of God in the Scriptures. To do violence to the law is to so twist the law that it no longer means what the lawgiver meant or intended, whether that lawgiver is God in the Bible or a just government that made the law. Priests and religious

leaders profane the sanctuary when they practice rituals contrary to the Bible and other immoral practices inside or outside the sanctuary, even encouraging others to do likewise.

(Zephaniah 3:5) The LORD within her is righteous; he does no injustice; every morning he shows forth his justice; each dawn he does not fail; but the unjust knows no shame.

The horrible sins of the political and religious leaders in Jerusalem were not because God was not present among His people. Every day God was dispensing justice in the nation; every day God was doing what was right and wise; but the unrighteous continued to abuse His grace and mercy. God was against those who had turned from Him and refused correction, and all God did was righteous; God did no wrong in the city. No one could justly blame God for what evil and rebellious leaders did. God acted justly, but the unjust and immoral showed no sense of shame for their evil deeds and continued down their path to ultimate destruction.

(Zephaniah 3:6) "I have cut off nations; their battlements are in ruins; I have laid waste their streets so that no one walks in them; their cities have been made desolate, without a man, without an inhabitant.

Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire that destroyed the kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. The

Babylonians destroyed Assyria and Nineveh in 612 BC, and began the systematic destruction of the neighboring nations around the kingdom of Judah. God used the Assyrians and Babylonians to bring just judgment on His rebellious people and leaders as well as the evil kingdoms around them. Through Zephaniah, God reminded Jerusalem and Judah of previous punishments to lead the people to repent, but they refused to turn back to God and be saved. Therefore, God did what He promised and brought judgment upon them.

(Zephaniah 3:7) I said, 'Surely you will fear me; you will accept correction. Then your dwelling would not be cut off according to all that I have appointed against you.' But all the more they were eager to make all their deeds corrupt.

In spite of God's warnings and what they should have learned from Zephaniah's teaching from historical precedents, the kingdom's leaders were still eager to act corruptly in ways similar to the political and religious leaders of many nations today. There is no place of refuge for those who refuse correction and persist in acting contrary to God's laws in order to enjoy the benefits of their corruption. People today need to heed Zephaniah's warnings, because God is the same as He was in Zephaniah's day.

(Zephaniah 3:8) "Therefore wait for me," declares the LORD, "for the day when I rise up to seize the prey. For my decision is to gather

nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger; for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed."

Zephaniah not only pointed to a day when Judah and the nations that surrounded her would be judged and punished but also to a day yet to come when the whole world will be consumed by God's just judgment and God will save the faithful. A coming judgment by fire is often foretold in the Book of Revelation (for examples, see Revelation 18:8 and Revelation 20:9). Between now and the day of God's just judgment, God tells believers to remain faithful to Him and wait on the Lord to do what He has promised.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What do you think it would be like to live in a city today similar to Jerusalem as described by Zephaniah?

2. What do you think it would be like to live in a city today where almost all the ministers in most of the churches denied the Bible was true, ignored the teachings of Jesus, and were unprincipled, treacherous and similar to the prophets and priests as described by Zephaniah?

3. Why do you think the unrighteous in Jerusalem ignored God and the preaching of Zephaniah?

4. Consider the city or town where you live, can you believe

that God is righteous within the city or town where you live?

5. When you think about what you see on television or read in the news, do you see examples of some people who are “eager to act corruptly in all they do”? Without Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior in your life, how might you act?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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