

Leaders Needed
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Micah 3:1-12

This first lesson in the little prophecy of Micah is about lousy leaders. What is more important in a leader, competence or godliness? Why should leaders be held to a higher standard?

Author and leadership guru John C. Maxwell likes to say, "*Leadership is influence.*" Because of their influence, lousy leaders don't just hurt themselves; they hurt all those whom they influence. Israel had some lousy leaders!

The point: Ungodly leadership displeases God. At the very least He will not bless it. In the case of His people Israel, ungodly leadership led to their destruction as a nation. This affects us all because we are all both followers and leaders.

Let's turn to Micah chapter three, and learn about Israel's lousy leaders:

1 I said, "Listen, you leaders of Israel! You are supposed to know right from wrong, **2** but you are the very ones who hate good and love evil. You skin my people alive and tear the flesh from their bones. **3** Yes, you eat my people's flesh, strip off their skin, and break their bones. You chop them up like meat for the cooking pot. **4** Then you beg the Lord for help in times of trouble! Do you really expect him to answer? After all the evil you have done, he won't even look at you!" **5** This is what the Lord says: "You false prophets are leading my people astray! You promise peace for those who give you food, but you declare war on those who refuse to feed you. **6** Now the night will close around you, cutting off all your visions. Darkness will cover you, putting an end to your predictions. The sun will set for you prophets, and your day will come to an end. **7** Then you seers will be put to shame, and you fortune-tellers will be disgraced. And you will cover your faces because there is no answer from God." **8** But as for me, I am filled with power— with the Spirit of the Lord. I am filled with justice and strength to boldly declare Israel's sin and rebellion. **9** Listen to me, you leaders of Israel! You hate justice and twist all that is right. **10** You are building Jerusalem on a foundation of murder and corruption. **11** You rulers make decisions based on bribes; you priests teach God's laws only for a price; you prophets won't prophesy unless you are paid. Yet all of you claim to depend on the Lord. "No harm can come to us," you say, "for the Lord is here among us." **12** Because of you, Mount Zion will be plowed like an open field; Jerusalem will be reduced to ruins! A thicket will grow on the heights where the Temple now stands.

- God was calling out lousy leaders in government and in the church.
- In what ways does it say they were lousy? (VV 1&2, 5 & 11)
- They did the opposite of doing right, they hated good and loved evil.

- They led the people astray and accepted bribes for favorable decisions.
- Before we unpack just how lousy they were, let me suggest that we avoid running some “rabbits” in this lesson. On the heels of recent events in our world, we could spend our time on a couple of things and miss the point:
- We might be tempted to say elected leaders in general are only in it for themselves (power, money, fame) so we don't trust any of them.
- Some might also say: *“Church leaders have disappointed me so much, I've decided all religious leaders are selfish and hypocritical.”*
- In both cases that is taking a partial truth about some “bad apples” and making a broad generalization about the whole bunch.
- Example: I had a bad meal in a restaurant so all restaurants are bad. Maybe you just got a bad meal. I owned a Ford once that gave me trouble so all Fords are bad. Maybe you just got a bad Ford.
- We might cynically assume most leaders are corrupt. The fact is there are more good leaders than bad, we just hear more about the lousy ones.
- Instead of spending time venting about our disappointment with politicians or denominations, let's learn from the mistakes of Israel's leaders.
- First, look at the governmental leaders. Their job was to provide justice for the people yet they “hated what was good and loved what was evil.”
- What would motivate a leader to deny justice to the weak and oppressed?
- The cannibalistic imagery of verses two and three is jarring. We're reminded of the idiom: Cruel, selfish leaders “will eat you alive!” Instead of caring for those they led, they consumed them for their own desires.
- A leader who puts his/her own desires above what's best for those they lead they is a lousy leader. Instead of providing justice, that kind of leader is tuned into WIII-FM: “What's In It For Me.”
- Call it greed, corruption, selfishness, it all amounts to sin.

In Isaiah 1:16–17 (ESV) — Isaiah said to the leaders and all of Israel, **16** Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, **17** learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

- The only solution for sin is confession (1 John 1:9) and repentance.
- Israel's lousy leaders weren't just politicians but also the prophets.
- Verse five: The prophets were leading people astray. That made them false prophets. *“You promise peace for those who give you food, but you declare war on those who refuse to feed you? You prophets won't prophesy unless you are paid.”* What does that mean?
- This doesn't mean you shouldn't pay the preacher a salary. Providing support for ministers of God is biblical and right. These were prophets for a price that would tell you what you wanted to hear if the price was right.
- Verse six: God punished the false prophets by removing their influence over the people. Their “visions” would no longer come true.

- We see that both the governmental and religious leaders in Israel had “sold out.” They exchanged what was good for what was evil to get what they wanted from the people.
- To make matters worse, they thought they were “bulletproof” because of who they were and the position they held. *“No harm can come to us...for the Lord is among us.”* (Verse 11)
- Some call this “temple theology” in Old Testament Israel. *“As long as we have the temple we can do what we want and no harm can come to us.”*
- How might that happen with leaders in the church today? How might their position and influence cause them to feel “bulletproof?”
- Here is a concept for both leaders and followers to embrace: Being right about some things doesn't make a leader right about everything.
 - A politician may subscribe to good government and still be corrupt.
 - A church leader may have “right” doctrine and still be sinful.
 - For every Christ-follower, saved doesn't mean sinless. Even if my eternity is secure, I have to be on guard for sin in my life.
- We need to beware of the danger of thinking: *“If a leader is right on the BIG things I can look the other way on some of their shortcomings.”* Let's not confuse shortcomings with sin in either our leaders or in ourselves.
- You might say, *“There are no perfect leaders or perfect people!”* True, but the standard isn't sinless perfection but sincere confession. None of us will be perfect but we CAN be blameless if we stay on top of unconfessed sin.
- **Psalm 15:1–5 (NLT)** — **1** Who may worship in your sanctuary, LORD? Who may enter your presence on your holy hill? **2** Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right, speaking the truth from sincere hearts. **3** Those who refuse to gossip or harm their neighbors or speak evil of their friends. **4** Those who despise flagrant sinners, and honor the faithful followers of the LORD, and keep their promises even when it hurts. **5** Those who lend money without charging interest, and who cannot be bribed to lie about the innocent. Such people will stand firm forever.
- So what happened to these lousy leaders in Israel in Micah's day?
- Time was up and God was pronouncing judgment on the leaders:
 - *“You are supposed to know right from wrong!”* (Verse one)
 - *“You beg the Lord for help in times of trouble! Do you really expect him to answer? After all the evil you have done, he won't even look at you!”* (Verse four)
 - *“You false prophets are leading my people astray!”*
 - *“You rulers make decisions based on bribes; you priests teach God's law only for a price.”*
 - *“You claim to depend on the Lord.”*
 - *“Because of you, Mount Zion (Israel) will be plowed like...a field...Jerusalem will be reduced to ruins.”* (Verse 12) They were; God's wrath came on the whole nation thanks to the sin of the people and especially the sin of their lousy leaders.
- Other thoughts?

So, What's the Takeaway?

- The lesson for governmental and business leaders, to quote Isaiah, is: *"...learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause."*
 - The lesson for church leaders: Don't "lead my people astray" and don't do ministry based on what's in it for you. 1 Timothy 3 describes who a church leader should be. The qualifications include: *"above reproach," "not violent," not a lover of money."*⁴ Maybe Paul wrote that because of what he knew about Israel's Old Testament church leaders.
 - What's the lesson for all of us? These same rules apply whether we are leaders or followers because we all, in some way, are both.
 - Micah wrote one of my favorite verses in scripture, Micah 6:8. Listen to how this simple little verse summarizes what we just learned: *"...[W]hat does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"*
 - We will only be able to do justice and love mercy/kindness if we place others above our ourselves. We can only walk humbly with God by being blameless and clean through confession and repentance of our sin.
 - If we will do that, we can avoid being either lousy leaders or followers.
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