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Understanding Micah's Lament for Judah (Micah 1:10–16) through Text, Archaeology, and Geography

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Martin Luther once stated that the prophets "have a queer way of talking, like people who, instead of proceeding in an orderly manner, ramble off from one thing to the next, so that you cannot make head or tail of them or see what they are getting at."[1] This is especially true for Micah 1:10–16, in which Micah's prophetic lament employs several forms of Hebrew wordplay, termed *paronomasia*, a literary device found throughout the Old Testament that employs the phonology and meaning of words to give added emphasis to a persuasive argument.[2] The prophets have the highest occurrences of this rhetorical device when compared to other genres in the Hebrew Bible, such as law, history, or wisdom literature, and in this passage, the wordplay of the prophet's lament draws on the names of towns or villages in the rural Judean countryside to illustrate impending judgment and destruction. This chapter seeks to explicate the wordplay Micah used in lamenting the cities around him by surveying the

geographical and historical settings behind Micah's oracle as related within biblical and Assyrian texts, by considering archaeological and geographic information, and by examining the mechanics of the text. Thus text, archaeology, and geography should not only give perspective to Micah's lament but also inform the potential application of the text in addition to the larger theological message of Micah for the modern reader. By understanding Micah's world, we may understand Micah's words much better.

Overview of Micah and His Ministry

To determine the themes and purposes within this record of prophecy, the questions of author, audience, subject, context, and relevance should be applied. To answer the first two, the main speaker within this book is Micah the Moreshite, the mouthpiece of Jehovah who addressed the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah in the second half of the eighth century BC, during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (Micah 1:1). Little is known about Micah, except for his origin in Moresheth-gath, a settlement in the low hill country of Judah, a region known as the Shephelah. As a contemporary of Isaiah, he identified with the poor, which is evident in his proclamations against the prophets, priests, and judges.[3] Hans Wolff has suggested that Micah may have been an elder of Moresheth-gath, an opinion reached by examining Micah's focus on judges and elders rendering appropriate mercy and justice, but there is little internal evidence from the biblical text to support this claim.[4] It is also unknown if Micah was ever associated officially with the Jerusalem temple and the prophets there or with any prophetic guild, although scholars suggest that Micah spent much of his life in Jerusalem and may have delivered his oracles there.[5] While Micah the person may have disappeared from history, the message of Micah was remembered despite its unpopular

laments and foretelling of judgments upon Israel and Judah. When Jeremiah was sentenced to death for prophesying against Jerusalem (Jeremiah 26:11–19), certain elders saved Jeremiah by recalling the prophecy of Micah of Moresheth against Jerusalem and Zion (Micah 3:12).

Considerations of subject and relevance for these oracles can be addressed by a brief overview of Micah's prophecy as a whole.[6] Micah proclaimed the impending downfall of Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, as well as the destruction awaiting Judah. Samaria's fall mainly resulted from the idolatry and apostasy of the northern Israelites (1:5–7), but Micah also made other indictments against the house of Jacob while addressing Judah. Judah's judgment came because of its prophets and elders, or judges, who practiced injustice and profited from their service to their God and nation (3:11). Micah's oracles are rife with war and exile,[7] yet God's condemnation was not without hope. The book of Micah contains a prophecy focused on a later time when the mountain of the Lord's house would be exalted, the nations would again worship him, and the people would learn from him in a time of peace (4:2–4).[8] In contrast to what the Judahites considered as safety, such as fortified cities on Judah's borders or chariot teams, the Lord's presence and justice would provide the ultimate security so that every man would be able to sit "under his vine and under his fig tree and no one shall make them afraid" (4:4). After proclaiming the Babylonian exile, Jehovah's redemption was again stated, and the promise of a ruler being born in Bethlehem-Ephrathah was issued (5:2; Matthew 2:6).

Micah's critiques of the Judahite elite centered on justice, employing legal terms, and initiating a prophetic lawsuit by Jehovah against Israel. Words with legal connotation are used throughout the book, such as justice (3:1, 8–9; 6:8), judgment (3:11, 7:9), judge (4:3, 5:1, 7:3), witness (1:2), and indictment (6:1–2). The climax of Micah's prophecy

is the legal indictment by God against all of Israel, ending with what the Lord required, namely, to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God (6:8).

Exposition of Micah 1:10–16

Although the preceding overview of the book of Micah may satisfy straightforward inquiries about author, audience, and subject, the context of Micah's prophecies—specifically his initial lament in the second half of Micah 1—requires an understanding of the section's linguistic features, especially form and wordplay within the passage under consideration. Subsequently, the historical and geographic settings of Micah's ministry also facilitate a textual and archaeological exposition of Micah 1:10–16 that may further our understanding of this enigmatic passage and its modern relevance and application.

Linguistic Considerations

While prophetic utterances can be divided into many subgenres, Micah's words here form a prophetic dirge, or funeral lament, performed "barefoot and naked" (1:8), symbolizing the shame that would be felt by Judah's inhabitants when conquered and treated as captives.[9] This lament is an early component of a so-called "Book of Doom" (1:2–3:12), which focused on judgment against both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah.[10] Micah's dirge foresaw the results of a campaign by the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 BC to quell a rebellion by the confederate Judahite and Philistine kings.[11] The list of towns in the lament has been interpreted as the Assyrian line of march for Sennacherib's campaign, with emphasis on the extensive destruction in the Judean countryside, although Nadav Na'aman cogently argues against this interpretation and asserts that the names were chosen on their suitability for paronomasia.[12]

Dirges usually follow a form that includes a call to hear, the dirge itself, a messenger formula, and a prediction. James L. Mays proposed that the beginning of the lament and the call to hear are found in Micah 1:8, with "For this, I will lament . . ." looking forward in the text rather than the opposite.[13] However, using this identification of the announcement, we can identify that Micah 1:10–15 would form the lament and the prediction would follow in verse 16, with the command to shave their heads because of their children's exile. The expected messenger formula ("Thus says the Lord") between the lament and prediction is absent in the passage, unless it is associated with "The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth" (1:1). Smith suggests that Micah is actually performing a mourning ritual to accompany this verbal expression of grief.[14]

Within the dirge format, Micah employs paronomasia based on the names of towns that he is lamenting.[15] In addition to allusions to biblical history, four techniques are employed to create the desired effect, including direct wordplay, antithetical wordplay, alliteration, and rhyme.[16] Exploring the wordplay communicated in Micah's message in conjunction with the historical and geographical contexts of the prophet's activity leads to an appreciation of some of the cognitive effects Micah's lament would have had on its original audience as he used puns based on place names to prophesy of each site's doom.

Historical and Geographical Contexts

Israel and Judah's history is uniquely tied to the concept of it being a land bridge or the "Land Between."[17] The "Land Between" refers to the land's position as a crossroads between the kingdoms of Aram and Assyria to the north and Egypt to the south, as well as the merchants and traders of Arabia in the east and the Mediterranean world lying to the west. Interregional dynamics within this land and specific regional characteristics shaped history and affected its inhabitants'
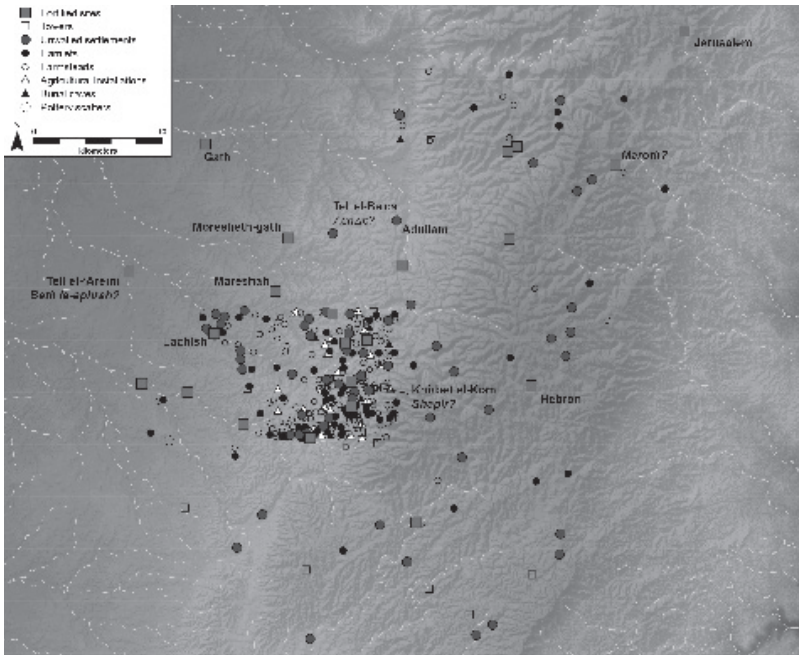
Figure 1. Settlement types and distribution in Judah at the time of Micah during the eighth century BC. (Areas of denser settlement reflect published intensive archaeological surveys; areas with less dense distribution await further study.)

lives as much as the external forces of warfare, politics, or trade with neighboring kingdoms and larger empires affected its inhabitants.

Micah's region, the Judean Shephelah, is situated between the coastal plain to the west and the hill country of Judah to the east and is composed of low hills and many valleys, allowing for more extensive agriculture than the higher hills eastward. Archaeological surveys and excavations reveal that in addition to the main fortified Judahite cities, the Shephelah during the eighth century BC was dotted with villages, farmsteads, and agricultural installations like wine and oil presses, threshing floors, and kilns (Figure 1). The Shephelah formed a valuable part of the Judahite kingdom since this area was a gateway to the Judean hills.[18] Conflict with the Philistines occurred in this area as Israel gained strength during the United Monarchy (1 Samuel 17).

Recognizing the threat to Judah's safety, Rehoboam fortified the cities of the Shephelah against attack (2 Chronicles 11:5–11). The importance of the Shephelah lay not only in its agricultural capabilities but also in the roads that allowed Judah to access the coastal plain and take part in the international commerce that traveled the coastal highway. The Assyrian king Sennacherib, to whom Micah is probably referring in his lament (1:9, 12), realized the strategic importance of the region and laid siege to its villages and fortified cities as a punishment for Hezekiah's rebellion against Assyrian domination. The most notable and well-documented battle of this campaign mentioned in 2 Kings 18:13 is that of Lachish, chronicled by Sennacherib's scribes on a hexagonal clay pillar, known as Sennacherib's Prism, and his artists in the reliefs from his throne room, which are now on display at the British Museum.[19] With the seizure of Lachish and the Shephelah, Hezekiah's routes to potential allies like Egypt were closed. Sennacherib boasted that he had made Hezekiah "a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage."[20]

The accounts and renderings of Sennacherib's siege of Lachish provide not only a needful lesson in regional geography but also a lesson in politics of the eighth century BC and historical setting in which Micah ministered. The opening verse of Micah states that the Lord spoke to Micah "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (1:1). Philip J. King lists the dates for these rulers collectively between 750–687 BC, starting with Jotham's regency (2 Kings 15:5) and ending with the death of Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:21; 2 Chronicles 32:33).[21] No mention is made of the Syro-Ephraimite war or the deportation of the Galilean tribes such as Zebulun or Naphtali, leading some scholars to suggest that Micah prophesied after 734 BC.[22] Wolff dates Micah's prophecy somewhere between 734–728 BC based on the foretelling of Samaria's fall, dated to 722 or 721 BC.[23] Micah's activity as a prophet during the reign of Hezekiah, which commenced circa 727 BC, is confirmed by the account in

Jeremiah 26:18, and scholars generally agree that the lament in Micah 1 predates Sennacherib's campaign of 701 BC.

During the eighth and seventh centuries BC, Judah and Israel were linked with the dominant powers of Aram and Assyria—sometimes as vassal states, other times as enemies allied to Egypt. When these two powers weakened, Israel and Judah were able to prosper, though they would not reach the former glory or prosperity of Solomon. Instability within the northern kingdom, coupled with God's judgment against Samaria for her idolatry, led to Israel's fall and deportation at the hands of Shalmaneser V and Sargon II of Assyria (2 Kings 18:9–12). To the south, Hezekiah was successful in organizing a rebellion against Assyrian rule (2 Kings 18:7), but this was checked by Sennacherib's campaign in 701 BC. Micah lamented this campaign and concomitant destruction probably a few years before it occurred. When Micah began his ministry, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were teetering on a precipice above the gaping maw of the Assyrian empire, ready to seize their land, deport their families, and execute the judgment the Lord had rendered upon these idolatrous peoples. Geopolitical intrigue and religious syncretism fill the world of Micah and the kingdom of Judah, a world in which the righteous Judge of the universe would make a ruling against his people.

Textual and Archaeological Exposition

The lament over the destruction foretold for the Judean Shephelah incorporates the names of eleven sites, some confidently identified, some with tentative identifications, and the rest remaining unidentified.[24] This does not account for the possibility that some sites are fictive or that the site names are symbolic and merely devices for wordplay. While it would seem unlikely that Micah would deliver a lament for a nonexistent site in Judah, Na'aman has suggested that Micah chose the place names based on their suitability for paronomasia.[25]

Exploring the site names, the wordplay associated with them, and the archaeology of the sites, together with suggested identifications for the unknown sites, will facilitate an understanding of the historical geography of the region. Only "after the reader is made to understand the relationship between the various places mentioned can he begin to comprehend the true meaning of the text, both on a literal-historical and on an allegorical-exegetical level."[26]

Micah 1:10 bĕgat ʾal-taggîdû bākô ʾal-tibkû bĕbêt lĕʿaprâ ʿāpār ḥitpallāštî

Tell it not in Gath, weep not at all; in Beth-leaphrah, roll yourselves in the dust.

The dirge that Micah performs for the impending destruction of Judah's countryside, as a result of transgressions similar to Samaria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel, starts with the proclamation of a lament in Micah 1:8–9. In 1:10, Micah begins the geographic portion of his lament with a plea to "Tell it not in Gath." Gath means a "press" for oil or wine, and while presses are common features of agricultural sites in the biblical period, the site referred to as Gath is commonly known as one of the major Philistine cities and the home of the Philistine champion Goliath (1 Samuel 17:4). The site of Tell es-Safi has been identified as biblical Gath since 1887, although this identification was still subject to debate until excavations from the late twentieth century to the present unearthed strong evidence of a Canaanite and Philistine center that was eventually destroyed by the Aramean king Hazael in the ninth century BC.[27] The period of Micah, the second half of the eighth century BC, is represented at Safi by architecture resembling a four-room house, a type of house characteristic of Israelite and Judahite dwellings in the Iron Age, which points to a "strong Judahite presence" at Tell es-Safi during the ministry of Micah.[28] Archaeological finds from this period include

a pillar figurine, an Assyrian stele, shekel weights, and jar handles stamped with the Hebrew word *lmlk*, meaning "(belonging) to the king" dating to the time of Hezekiah.[29]

Micah makes the admonition to not tell the news of Judah's impending defeat in Gath, clearly referencing David's lament over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan: "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph" (2 Samuel 1:20). This is a direct play on the name *Gath* against the Hebrew imperative verb *taggîdû*, "you (pl.) do not tell/exult."[30] Yet just as the lament contrasts Gath with a reversed initial syllable, *tag*, a comparison to David's statement may also be adduced. While David did not want the news of Saul and Jonathan's defeat to reach Philistia, he encouraged the women of Israel to weep and mourn for the fallen leaders. In stark contrast, Micah proscribed weeping. As Anderson and Freedman noted, this passage, where silence and weeping are both encouraged as signs of lament, is parallel to Isaiah 23:1–2, where the imperative for the ships of Tarshish to wail is followed by an injunction for the merchants of Sidon to be silent.[31]

In the second half of the verse, Micah also uses another direct approach with some rhyming with the name of the second town, Beth-leaphrah (*bêt leʿaprâ*), the "House of Dust." Here, the wordplay results in the "House of Dust" being commanded to roll in dust (*ʿapar*), a symbol of mourning (Job 16:15, Jeremiah 6:26).[32] Beth le-aphrah was previously identified tentatively with et-Taiyibeh, although no archaeological material confirms this identification. Recently, Matthew Suriano posits that Beth le-aphrah should be located at Tell el-ʿAreini, using historical place names and the presence of eighth century BC archaeological remains.[33] Tell el-ʿAreini is located on the border of the Shephelah and the coastal plain between ancient Judah and Philistia, so the wordplay involved with the verbal root of rolling one's self in the dust (*plš*) and its similarity to Philistia and the Philistines seem apt.

Micah 1:11 ʿibrî lākem yôšebet šapîr ʿeryâ-bōšet lōʾ yāṣěʾâ yôšebet ṣaʾǎnān mispad bêt hāʾēṣel yiqqaḥ mikkem ʿemdātô

Pass on your way, inhabitants of Shaphir, in nakedness and shame; the inhabitants of Zaanan do not come forth; Beth-ezel is wailing and shall remove its support from you.

In this verse, Micah first applied an antithetical wordplay and then rhyme to enforce his lament over Judah's towns whose identification and even existence are debated. Saphir, also rendered as Shapir, has been identified as Khirbet el-Qôm, southwest of Hebron, based on the toponymic work of F. M. Abel who related it to the Arabic site name Wadi es-Saffar.[34] Archaeological finds from the eighth and seventh centuries BC, such as pottery sherds, *lmlk* jar handles, and part of a city wall, help to corroborate this recognition. Inscriptions discovered at the site refer to Asherah, a Canaanite fertility goddess, sometimes depicted as a consort of Yahweh. The religious syncretism of the Judahites and their neighbors, which included veneration of Asherah and the use of fertility objects like pillared figurines found at Tell es-Safi, Khirbet el-Qôm, Lachish, and other sites discussed here, engendered God's judgment and resulted in a declaration of destruction (see Micah 5:13–14). The name Shaphir has been translated as "beautiful" and stands in direct contrast to the "nakedness and shame" that lies ahead for exiled people.[35] The rhyming pun in this verse involves the town of Zaanan (*ṣaʾǎnān*), an unidentified site, with the verb "come forth" (*yāṣěʾâ*). According to Anderson and Freedman, there is no wordplay associated with Beth-ezel (*bêt hāʾēṣel*) and they doubt its historicity, although Beth-ezel is tentatively identified as Deir al-Asal.[36] Naʾaman also regards Beth-ezel, which he translates as "House of No Shade," not as an actual town but as "a mocking designation" for the Assyrian empire, contrasting the concept of the protective "shadow of the king" seen in Assyrian literature against the destruction prophesied by Micah.[37] As Allen

notes, regardless of the accuracy of archaeology or historical geography to identify the sites, the fact remains that the lament illustrates the destruction of the Shephelah's cities and villages that would be conquered in the Assyrian campaign.[38]

Micah 1:12 kî-ḥālâ lĕṭôb yôšebet mārôt kî-yārad rāʿ mēʾēt yhwh lĕšaʿar yĕrûšālēm

For the inhabitants of Maroth wait anxiously for good, yet disaster has come down from the Lord to the gate of Jerusalem.

The idea of antithetical wordplay is hinted with the name of another unidentified site, Maroth, meaning "bitter," which is contrasted with "good." It is again unclear if this is an actual village or if the places names are fictive and created solely for this lament to emphasize Micah's message, as suggested by Na'aman. A divinely sent catastrophe was at the gates of Jerusalem, and this passage forms "the most intelligible sentence in the entire piece," according to Anderson and Freedman.[39] Concerning the disaster at the gate of Jerusalem, the use of the term "gate" is likely symbolic for the entire city of Jerusalem and could be alluding to Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem detailed in 2 Kings 19 and 2 Chronicles 32.

Micah 1:13 rĕtom hammerkābâ lārekeš yôšebet lākiš rēʾšît ḥaṭṭāʾt hîʾ lĕbat-ṣiyyôn kî-bāk nimṣĕʾû pišʿê yiśrāʾēl

Harness the steeds to the chariots, inhabitants of Lachish; it was the beginning of sin to Daughter Zion, for in you were found the transgressions of Israel.

Lachish was a principal city of Judah, second only to Jerusalem, and a sign of stability and safety in the Shephelah.[40] Micah's wordplay here is a rhyme between Lachish and the term for a team of horses (*rekeš*),

which is probably a critique of the perceived might and power of Lachish and Judah. There is a curious phrase concerning "the beginning of sin to Daughter Zion" at Lachish. Is this a possible polemic against the horses and chariots at Lachish?[41] Was the beginning of sin connected to pride and a false sense of security offered by the city's fortifications? The prophets warn against trusting in military might for salvation rather than God.[42] Daniel Smith-Christopher has also interpreted this passage about the expenses of chariotry and fortifications in light of the social justices ignored in Judah, and by extension in the modern world.[43]

When this passage is considered in light of the sins of the kings of Israel and the sins of Judahite kings preceding Hezekiah, a diatribe against idolatry may be discerned.[44] In context with the sin of Samaria affecting Judah (1:5, 9), it may be that idolatry in connection with Asherah or another fertility cult had infiltrated Judah from Samaria via Lachish. A recent archaeological discovery at Lachish illustrates this facet of Micah's prophecy. Within the gate of the city dated to the eighth century BC, excavators discovered numerous stamped *lmlk* jar handles and a shrine consisting of a staircase leading to a room with a bench, presumably for votive offerings.[45] An opening in the corner of the room leads to what the excavators have deemed a "holy of holies" for the shrine in which they recovered ceramic lamps, bowls, vessel stands, and two four-horned altars, all of which were commonly used in cultic rituals in the biblical period. The excavators note that the horns on the altars were intentionally truncated and the shrine desecrated by the installation of a latrine, measures that are likely evidence of Hezekiah's religious reforms (see 2 Kings 18:4). Although the modern reader may be left perplexed concerning the "beginning of sin," Micah's audience could immediately recognize what the sin at Lachish was, and idolatry fits the context just as well as the Lord's

wrath at chariots, Judahite fortifications, or perceived security in the Shephelah as evinced in the later proclamation against all these elements in Micah 5:10–14:

> *In that day, says the Lord, I will cut off your horses from among you and will destroy your chariots;*
>
> *And I will cut off the cities of your land and throw down all your strongholds;*
>
> *And I will cut off sorceries from your hand, and you shall have no more soothsayers;*
>
> *And I will cut off your images and your pillars from among you, and you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands;*
>
> *And I will uproot your sacred poles from among you and destroy your towns.*

Micah 1:14 lākēn tittĕnî šillûḥîm ʿal môrešet gat bāttê ʾakzîb lĕʾakˇzāb lĕmalkê yiśrāʾēl

Therefore you shall give parting gifts to Moresheth-gath; the houses of Achzib shall be a deception to the kings of Israel.

Here Micah proclaims God's judgment against his own town of Moresheth-gath. According to Wolff, "genuine prophetic activity results from . . . accusations raised in the name of justice and wholehearted sharing in the judgment that is striking [others]."[46] Therefore, Micah is also indicting himself with Judah and sharing in their punishment. There seems to be a direct wordplay technique with the use of Moresheth (related to "betrothed") and the term "parting gifts" or what may be considered a "dowry."

Most scholars agree that Moresheth-gath is Tell ej-Judeideh, northeast of Lachish. The compound site name suggests that it was within the political sphere of Gath at some point.[47] Aharoni argued that Tell ej-Judeideh was probably fortified as part of Rehoboam's efforts due to its natural elevation and strategic position on a route between Lachish and Azekah.[48] Archaeological excavations during the early twentieth century revealed at least one complete house and the remains of other storage buildings with silos for grain storage associated with each building, but fortifications associated with this phase of occupation were not discovered.[49] The pottery assemblage, including *lmlk* stamped jar handles and ceramic pillar figurines, are contemporary with assemblages from other sites discussed here and date to Micah's time in the eighth century BC.[50] The site suffered conflagration as evinced by ash deposits and burnt debris associated with the architectural remains, and it is almost certain that this destruction was the result of the Assyrian campaign in 701 BC. Alternatively, scholars argue that Moresheth-Gath should be identified with Tel Ḥarasim instead.[51] Situated to the northwest of Tell es-Safi/Gath, the site would fall within the territory controlled by Gath during the Philistine period, and it exhibits tenth–ninth century BC fortifications, possible evidence of the fortifications commissioned by Rehoboam. However, eighth century BC remains were not found according to the excavator.[52]

The place name Achzib (*'akzîb*) is a clear, direct pun with the word (*'akzāb*), meaning "lie, falsehood, deceptive thing." Therefore, this site would be deceptive to kings of Israel, but it is not clear how that deception acts. Achzib is mentioned in the cities list for this region in Joshua 15:44 and an identification with Tell el-Beida has been proposed.[53]

*Micah 1:15 ʿōd hayyōrēš ʾābî lāk yôšebet mārēšâ
ʿad-ʿădullām yābôʾ kĕbôd yiśrāʾēl*

*I will again bring a conqueror upon you, inhabitants of
Mareshah; the glory of Israel shall come to Adullam.*

In this verse, Micah utilizes another case of direct and rhyming cor-
relation between the situation described and the site name. Not to
be confused with Micah's hometown, the site of Mareshah, identi-
fied with Tell Ṣandaḥanna, is known from Hellenistic and Roman
sources. Excavations have recovered seventeen *lmlk* stamped jar han-
dles from Micah's time.[54] While the verse is rendered in the KJV as
"Yet will I bring an heir unto thee, O inhabitant of Mareshah," the
word translated as "heir" (*yôrēš*) is better translated as "conqueror" or
"plunderer." Thus, Micah's lament is not providing a promise of hope
but a declaration of judgment as God would bring a conqueror (*yôrēš*)
to Mareshah (*mārēšâ*).

In the second half of this verse, the "glory of Israel" is proph-
esied to come to Adullam, and Micah again evokes the Davidic past.
A cave at the site afforded David protection in his flight from Saul
(1 Samuel 22:1) and featured in the narrative about David's mighty
men (2 Samuel 23:13). In both cases, Adullam has a sense of refuge
in the face of trouble. However, the meaning of "glory of Israel" is
unclear. Scholars have suggested that the term could refer to Jeho-
vah himself, the Israelite army,[55] a particular class of Judahites or a
group of David's descendants,[56] a conceptual idea about what makes
a nation glorious rather than material wealth,[57] or even Adullam itself
as a fortified city.[58] The voice of Micah lamenting Judah's fate seems
to get lost in the din of all these opinions, and the focus is no longer
on the destruction of Judah. Whatever the full meaning of "glory of
Israel," places of refuge like Adullam are reminiscent of David's life
on the run from an aggressor, and the Judahites will become refugees
like David in the face of their Assyrian invaders.

*Micah 1:16 qorḥî wāggōzî ʿal-bĕnê taʿănûgāyik
harḥîbî qorḥātēk kanneŝer kî gālû mimmēk*

*Make yourselves bald and cut off your hair for your
pampered children; make yourselves as bald as the
eagle, for they have gone from you into exile.*

Micah tells his audience to "enlarge thy baldness as the eagle"
because their children in whom they delight are going into exile.
Here the prophet draws upon the shared cultural context, evoking
a response in his audience with the implications within his utter-
ance. While the process of mussing one's hair and being disheveled
was a common expression of mourning in the ancient Near East,
intentional shaving of the head was also a treatment for captives of
military action sent into exile. Additionally, part of the expression
of grief, and a way to honor the dead, involved shaving one's head hair
(and beard if applicable), tearing one's clothes or wearing sackcloth,
sitting or wallowing in ashes, putting dirt on one's head, and wail-
ing.[59] Ezekiel 27:29–32 presents an excellent biblical example of this
practice, combining all the elements as the Tyrian mariners weep
for the loss of a ship by shaving their heads, wearing sackcloth, and
throwing dust on their heads. Manufactured baldness is proscribed
for Israel and its priests outside of the act of mourning for imme-
diate relatives (Leviticus 19:27; 21:1–5; see also Deuteronomy 14:1).
Appearing "barefoot and naked" (1:8) and uttering this dirge, Micah
by his actions urged the Judahites to carry out this shameful task in
earnest lamentation for the impending exile. This is not the false,
hired grief that Jeremiah 9:16–17 mentions; rather this is to be
actual, heart-felt sorrow at the prediction of their beloved children
being captured by the Assyrian invaders.

A brief note is also needed to clarify Micah's command or
prediction and eagle imagery at the close of this lament. For the
North American reader, the likeness of a bald eagle, with its

striking white head plumage, usually springs to mind. However, the Hebrew word translated as "eagle," *nešer*, would be better translated as "vulture," specifically, the Griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), whose modern range includes Israel.[60] The appearance of these vultures, which also have a white head contrasting with their brown bodies, would have produced a clear illustration of baldness within the minds of Micah's audience.

Conclusion

Micah's oracle against Judah and Samaria involves assessment of what Jehovah was trying to teach the family of Israel about himself and the appropriate response to sin through the lens of language and material culture readily known to his audience. First, the main theme of this book is Jehovah's holiness and the need for justice. The prophets, especially Micah, portray Jehovah as a judge over Israel, executing his judgment by means of the Assyrian invader. Within the larger context of this passage, the Lord is seen coming down to touch the mountains and having them melt away as he judged both the northern and southern kingdoms in his righteousness because of their injustice to each other and their syncretism with fertility cults (1:3–7). Micah's lament countered Judah's response of trusting in the safety of their fortified cities by emphasizing their lack of safety in the face of impending doom. It is interesting to note that the elders in Jeremiah's time recognized that Hezekiah heeded Micah's prophecy and saved Jerusalem from destruction (Jeremiah 26:18–19).

This paper has examined Micah's lamentation for the towns of the Judean Shephelah recorded in Micah 1:10–16. As Daniel Smith-Christopher notes,

> There are many allusions to ideas, prejudices, or opinions about local political realities and regional struggles that we may never fully comprehend—some of which may even

> include made-up locations in the Shephelah simply to express the idea of local villages and their issues of concern . . . or even local nicknames lost to history.[61]

While the precise meaning of each component within this dirge cannot be fully clarified, textual considerations, geography, history, and archaeology have proven beneficial in the study of this passage. By grasping a small part of the larger concepts of judgment, hope, and mercy within the book of Micah, the prophets become more manageable, and Micah's world and words become clearer to the modern mind. Although we may not have Assyrians, Arameans, or Babylonians poised to invade our lands, we still have a responsibility to be just in our personal relationships and have the appropriate response to sin. The unchanging God still commands his elect to be just in their dealings with each other and exclusive in their relationship to him.

Notes

1. Quoted in Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 33n1.

2. See Anthony J. Petrotta, *Lexis Ludens: Wordplay and the Book of Micah* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 5–8 for a comprehensive discussion of the definitions of "wordplay," "pun," and "paronomasia," with the latter primarily concerned with phonology. Following Petrotta's introduction, wordplay and paronomasia are used interchangeably within this paper.

3. Philip J. King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah–An Archaeological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 27–28.

4. Hans Walter Wolff, *Micah the Prophet*, trans. R. Gehrke (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 4; but Francis I. Anderson and David Noel Freedman, *Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 24E (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 109–10 see no support from the biblical language or overall message of Micah to support Wolff's suggestion.

5. Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 407; see also Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary 32nd ed. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 14; and Anderson and Freedman, *Micah*, 109.

6. Although scholars debate Micah's authorship of the last four chapters, overall, the book of Micah is probably best viewed as an anthology of Micah's oracles; see R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 922–25 for a summary of the literary criticism of Micah since the nineteenth century that has attempted to distinguish "genuine" passages within the book.

7. See for example Micah 1:6–7, 15–16; 3:12; 4:10; 5:5–6, 10–15; and 6:16.

8. See Isaiah 2:2–4 for a contemporary parallel prophecy later quoted in 2 Nephi 12:2–4.

9. Hans Walter Wolff, *Micah: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsberg, 1990), 58; see also Mignon R. Jacobs, *The Conceptual Coherence of the Book of Micah* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 107. Isaiah (20:2–4) also delivered oracles concerning Egyptian and Nubian captives of Assyria in this state of undress.

10. Anderson and Freedman, *Micah*, 130–31.

11. Bernhard W. Anderson, *The Eighth Century Prophets: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 5. Nadav Na'aman, "'The House-of-No-Shade Shall Take Away Its Tax from You' (Micah I 11)," *Vetus Testamentum* 45 (1995): 525 construes this section as an invitation "to lament the imminent catastrophe" of Sennacherib's campaign, a position grammatically sustained by the use of perfect verbs "interpreted as indications of the prophetic future."

12. Anderson, *The Eighth Century Prophets*, 16; Na'aman, "Micah I 11," 523; see also John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 782, who interpret the list as an indicator of order of the Assyrian campaign.

13. James L. Mays, *Micah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 51.

14. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 20.

15. Petrotta, *Lexis Ludens*, 84–85.

16. Wolff, *Micah the Prophet*, 40–41.

17. Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible*, trans. A. Rainey (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 6; see also James Monson, *Regions on the Run: Introductory Map Studies in the Land of the Bible* (Rockford, IL: Biblical Backgrounds, 2009), 6–7.

18. Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, 23.

19. James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 287–88; see David Ussishkin, *The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib* (Tel Aviv: The Institute of Archaeology, 1982) for details of the reliefs depicting the Assyrian siege and capture of Lachish.

20. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 288.

21. King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah*, 30.

22. J. M. P. Smith, W. H. Ward, and J. A. Brewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah, and Joel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), 19.

23. Wolff, *Micah the Prophet*, 3.

24. Matthew J. Suriano, "A Place in the Dust: Text, Topography and a Toponymic Note on Micah 1:10–12a," *Vetus Testamentum* 60 (2010): 433–46.

25. Na'aman, "Micah I 11," 523.

26. Yigal Levin, "The Search for Moresheth-Gath: A New Proposal," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 134 (2002): 28.

27. Ephraim Stern, "Ẓafit, Tel," in *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, vol. 4, ed. E. Stern (Jerusalem: Carta, 1993), 1522; Aren Maeir, "Ẓafit, Tel," in *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, vol. 5, ed. E. Stern (Jerusalem and Washington, DC: Israel Exploration Society and Biblical Archaeological Society), 2079–81.

28. Alexander Zukerman and Aren Maeir, "The Stratigraphy and Architecture of Area A: Strata A1–A5," in *Tell es-Safi/Gath I: The 1996–2005
Seasons*, ed. A. Maeir, Agypten und Altes Testament 69 (Berlin: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 208.

29. Stern, "Ẓafit, Tel," 1524; storage jars with such stamped handles are widely
considered to be indicators of the administrative measures of Hezekiah
to collect and redistribute foodstuffs throughout Judah in preparation for
the rebellion against Assyrian control.

30. Some scholars do not see evidence of wordplay in the initial portion of
verse 10; see Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 453, and Anderson and Freedman, *Micah*, 213.

31. Anderson and Freedman, *Micah*, 216.

32. L. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (Grand Rapids, MI:
Eerdmans, 1976), 279.

33. Suriano, "A Place in the Dust," 441–43.

34. William G. Dever, "Qôm, Khirbet el-," in *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, vol. 4, ed. E. Stern (Jerusalem: Carta,
1993), 1233; see also King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah*, 59.

35. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 280.

36. Anderson and Freedman, *Micah*, 209, 213.

37. Na'aman, "Micah I 11," 520.

38. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 280.

39. Anderson and Freedman, *Micah*, 225.

40. Occupied for most of the Bronze and Iron Ages, Lachish has a history of
human habitation stretching back to the fourth millennium BC; see David
Ussishkin, ed., *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973–
1994)*, 5 vols. (Tel Aviv: Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology,
Tel Aviv University, 2004). During Sennacherib's campaign, the Assyrians built a large siege ramp that is still visible today. The fall of Lachish
in 701 BC was devastating, as it virtually spelled doom for Jerusalem, but
not insurmountable as Lachish was rebuilt and destroyed again during the
Babylonian assault on Judah in 586 BC.

41. For chariots as the sin of Lachish, see Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah,* 281; Mays, *Micah,* 58; and George Adam Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets,* vol. 1 (New York: George H. Doran, 1894), 383; see also B. Vawter, *Amos, Hosea, Micah with an Introduction to Classical Prophecy* (Wilmington, VA: Michael Glazier, 1981), 135.

42. See Hosea 10:13, 14:3; Isaiah 2:7, 30:16, and 31:1.

43. Daniel Smith-Christopher, *Micah: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015) 75.

44. Anderson and Freedman, *Micah,* 230.

45. "An Important Archaeological Discovery: A Gate-Shrine Dating to the First Temple Period was Exposed In Excavations of the Israel Antiquities Authority in the Tel Lachish National Park," http://www.antiquities.org.il/Article_eng.aspx?sec_id=25&subj_id=240&id=4221.

46. Wolff, *Micah the Prophet,* 8.

47. Aharoni, *Land of the Bible,* 109.

48. Aharoni, *Land of the Bible,* 330.

49. Frederick Jones Bliss and R. A. Stewart Macalister, *Excavations in Palestine During the Years 1898–1900* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1902), 50.

50. Shimon Gibson, "The Tell ej-Judeideh (Tel Goded) Excavations: A Re-Appraisal Based on Archival Records in the Palestine Exploration Fund," *Tel Aviv* 21 (1994): 230.

51. Levin, "The Search for Moresheth-Gath," 28–36.

52. Shmuel Givon, "Ḥarasim, Tel" in *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land,* vol. 5, ed. E. Stern (Jerusalem and Washington, DC: Israel Exploration Society and Biblical Archaeological Society), 1767.

53. King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah,* 60.

54. Michael Avi-Yonah, "Mareshah (Marisa)" in *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land,* vol. 3, ed. E. Stern (Jerusalem and New York, NY: Carta and Simon & Schuster, 1993), 948.

55. Anderson and Freedman, *Micah,* 213.

56. R. Chisholm, *Interpreting the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 137; see also Mays, *Micah,* 59.

57. Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 454.

58. W. McKane, *The Book of Micah: Introduction and Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 48

59. Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 373; Texts with these mourning elements also include 2 Samuel 1:11–12, 3:31; Jeremiah 6:26, 7:29, 9:16–17; Lamentations 2:10; and Isaiah 15:2.

60. Oded Borowski, *Every Living Thing: Daily Use of Animals in Ancient Israel* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1998), 150.

61. Smith-Christopher, *Micah*, 70.