

The prophecy of Micah

2. Sheep without a shepherd

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The message of Micah is blunt. Judgement is to come on Judah and Israel, and the towns of the Shephelah would suffer. The reason for God's judgement was the failure of the leaders of Judah and Israel to act as good shepherds.

Micah, because in 1:10-16 he mentions each of the major towns of the Shephelah, and laments over the destruction that was about to come upon them at the hands of the Assyrians.

THE PROPHET is introduced to us as “Micah the Morasthite” (Mic. 1:1). His home town was Moresheth-gath, which is singled out for special mention in verse 14: “Therefore shalt thou give presents to Moresheth-gath: the houses of Achzib shall be a lie to the kings of Israel”. Moresheth-gath was a small town situated out in the country. It was in the lowland area of the land of Israel, known as the Shephelah.

Micah's lamentation for the Shephelah

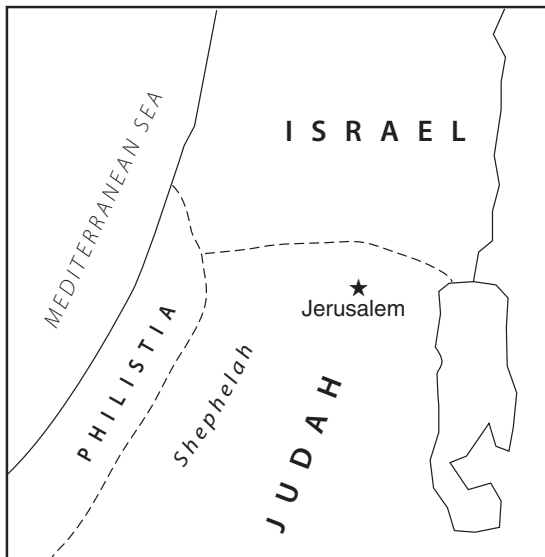
These verses make a very interesting study, because Micah uses the name of each city of the Shephelah to construct an elaborate play upon words, to emphasise to his own countrymen the imminence of coming judgement unless they repented. It is not easy to see this in the English, but the suggested analysis may be helpful (see box [Micah's lamentation for the Shephelah](#)).

Historical significance of the Shephelah

The real significance of the Shephelah related to what had happened there in times past. The Shephelah was sandwiched between the high central range of Judea on the east and the plain of the Philistines on the west, and consequently it became the battleground between Israel and the Philistines. It was here, in the Shephelah, that David slew his ten thousands, and where he gained the victory over Goliath.

Although we do not find David's name mentioned by Micah, it is clear that David is in Micah's mind throughout his prophecy, because the great theme of the prophecy of Micah is the coming of David's greater son, who would be both shepherd and king: “But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting . . . And he shall stand and feed [Heb. *raah*, to tend a flock] in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth” (5:2,4).

This is the climax of Micah's message—the coming of the one who, like David of old, would be both king and shepherd, and who would de-



The Shephelah

This was a beautiful part of the country. It was full of sycomore trees (1 Kgs. 10:27) and olive trees. It had an abundance of pastureland for sheep and cattle (2 Chron. 26:10). It was a land of perennial streams—truly a pleasant part of the country to live in. It was clearly very dear to the heart of

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liver the people of Israel out of the hands of their enemies: “Feed Thy people with Thy rod, the flock of Thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old” (7:14). This was Micah’s hope. He looked forward to the time when Israel would once again dwell in the land in safety. He longed for the return of the good old days, when David their king had fed Jacob God’s people and Israel His inheritance; he “fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands” (Ps. 78:70-72).

Sheep having no shepherd

The tragedy of Micah’s times was that the people of God were like sheep having no shepherd. Ahaz in particular had singularly failed in his duties of providing sound spiritual leadership, and much of the trouble that Judah faced in the days of Micah was directly attributable to him: “For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the LORD” (2 Chron. 28:19). As a result of the failure of Ahaz to shepherd his people, God brought Judah low. How appropriate it was that the means whereby this subjugation was accomplished was by a resurrection of the old rivalry with the Philistines! The Shephelah, the home country of Micah, was delivered once again

into the hands of the Philistines: “The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the low country [Heb. *shephelah*], and of the south of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, and Ajalon, and Gederoth, and Shocho with the villages thereof, and Timnah with the villages thereof, Gimzo also and the villages thereof: and they dwelt there” (v. 18).

Hear, My people

It was this singular absence of spiritual shepherds in Israel and Judah that led Micah to begin his prophecy in the very interesting way that he did: “Hear, ye peoples, all of you; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord GOD be witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple” (Mic. 1:2, RV). There was clearly no point in addressing the shepherds, so instead Micah appealed directly to the people, all of them.

In doing so he used the very same phraseology that his namesake, Micaiah the son of Imlah, had used on a previous occasion in the presence of wicked King Ahab. Ahab had invited Jehoshaphat king of Judah to go to battle with him against Syria. The false prophets had given the venture their blessing, but Jehoshaphat had expressed reservations, and so Micaiah the son of Imlah, a true prophet of God, was called for. He spelled

Micah’s lamentation for the Shephelah (Micah 1:10-16)

- **Aphrah** = ‘Dust’ (v. 10)
“In the house of *dust* roll thyself in the dust”
- **Saphir** = ‘Beauty’ (v. 11)
“In the city of *beauty* the shame of nakedness shall be seen”
- **Zaanan** = ‘March’ (v. 11)
“In the city of *marchers* men shall not march forth”
- **Beth-ezel** = ‘Near house’ (v. 11)
“In the city of the *neighbourly* they will be unneighbourly”
- **Maroth** = ‘Bitter’ (v. 12)
“In the city of the *bitter* there shall be evil bitterness”
- **Lachish** = ‘Swift beast’ (v. 13)
“In the city of the *swift beast* there shall be chariots bound in vain”
- **Moresheth-gath** = ‘Possession of Gath’ (v. 14)
“In the *possession of Gath* their goods will be given as presents”
- **Achzib** = ‘A lie’ (v. 14)
“In the city of a *lie* shall be a lie to the king”
- **Mareshah** = ‘Possessor’ (v. 15)
“In the city of *possession* he shall take his possession”

the situation out very clearly to Ahab, and informed him that the proposed battle would be his downfall: "And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me. And he said, *Hearken, O people, every one of you*" (1 Kgs. 22:28). Micaiah's ministry at this point was brought to an abrupt end, because he was dragged out of the court and cast into prison.

Thus it was that Micaiah ended his ministry with an appeal to the people; and a hundred or so years later Micah the Morasthite began his ministry in exactly the same way, as if to say that he was continuing where Micaiah had left off. The comparison is strengthened by the fact that this phrase, "*Hearken, O people, every one of you*", occurs on only these two occasions in the whole of the Scriptures.

Following the works of Ahab

Why does Micah the prophet draw this comparison with the days of Ahab in such a striking way? Because the defining characteristic of both periods was that Israel had been left as sheep without a shepherd. Micaiah the son of Imlah had said as much to King Ahab before he was dragged away to prison: "And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the LORD? And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, *as sheep that have not a shepherd*: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace" (vv. 16,17).

Micah the prophet leaves us in no doubt that he is deliberately drawing a parallel between his days and the days of Ahab. Describing the spiritual barrenness of the kingdom, he warns of coming judgement: "*For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels; that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof an hissing: therefore ye shall bear the reproach of My people*" (Mic. 6:16). What a dreadful situation! Not only were the people like sheep having no shepherd, but they were following the wicked ways of Ahab and keeping the statutes of Omri.

The statutes of Omri

Concerning Omri we are told, "*Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all that were before him*. For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities" (1 Kgs. 16:25,26). Omri was worse than all

the kings that had gone before him, only to be surpassed by his son Ahab: "And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him" (vv. 30-33). These were the sort of men that made a lasting impression on the people of Israel, to such an extent that in the days of Micah, a hundred or so years after the time of Ahab, the commandments of God had been forgotten but the statutes of Omri were kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab.

Working evil upon their beds

At the beginning of chapter 2 Micah gives a practical example of how they were walking in the ways of Ahab: "Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage" (vv. 1,2). The rich men of the land, who were in positions of power and authority, were coveting fields and taking them by force. By so doing they were taking away the inheritance of those in the land who were powerless to do anything about it.

This is very reminiscent of what Ahab did in the matter of Naboth's vineyard: "And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee. And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. *And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread*" (1 Kgs. 21:2-4). With the assistance of Jezebel his wife, Ahab had Naboth killed, and he seized his inheritance.

Judgement was ultimately pronounced against Ahab by Elijah the prophet: "And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel" (vv. 20,21). Ahab had sold himself to do evil before God, therefore God was going to bring evil upon his house—a prophecy that was ultimately fulfilled at the hands of Jehu the son of Nimshi.

This was precisely the message that Micah delivered to those in his days who were walking in the ways of Ahab: "Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, against this family do I devise an evil, from which ye shall not remove your necks; neither shall ye go haughtily: for this time is evil" (Mic. 2:3). One of the messages of Micah the prophet was thus that judgement was going to come upon a corrupt and disobedient people. It was a judgement that was to fall upon both the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel and the two-tribe kingdom of Judah at the hands of the mighty Assyrians.

[\(To be continued\)](#)



**King Jehu (or possibly his ambassador) paying homage to King Shalmaneser III of Assyria.
Detail from the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III.**

Picture: Tony Benson. Courtesy of the British Museum.

But not all of Micah's prophecy is about coming judgement. In future studies we shall see that he has some wonderful things to say about the glories of the age to come, when the flock of God will be regathered by the greater Son of David, and will lie down in peace and safety upon the mountains of Israel.