Geographical Puns in Micah

Micah employs skillfully written wordplays on the names of Judah's cities, to prophesy the coming destruction that God was about to bring on Judah (1:3-16). He reversed the meaning of a number of town names in the vicinity of his own hometown as a way of describing the world being turned upside down by God's judgment.

1. Shaphir, meaning "Beautiful" is contrasted with the peoples' approaching shame (v. 11).
2. Zaanan, speaks of a verb referring to "sheep" who "go out to their shepherd," is contrasted with the people of Zaanan who fear "to go out" of their homes (v. 11).
3. Beth-ezel, a name sounding like a word meaning "foundation" is contrasted with their having "no foundation"; they had rejected God, their sure foundation, for idols (v. 11).
4. Maroth, meaning "to wait for good," mimics God's people, who in rejecting His goodness, were waiting for evil. (*marah*=God's people would experience "bitterness."
5. Jerusalem, a name suggesting "Peace," would be disrupted (1:12). The city of God's peace and presence was about to experience His fierce and bitter judgment.
6. Lachish is denounced for being one of the first cities in Judah to embrace Baal worship (v. 13).
7. Adullam, the nobility would flee from Jerusalem to hide in the caves of Adullam (v. 15).

All the agitation was caused by God's impending judgment on Judah for worshiping other gods on the high places. In fact, idolatry was so rampant that Micah describes Jerusalem and Samaria, the capital cities of Judah and Israel, as high places themselves (1:5).