

## Prophets: “Ephraim” meaning “Israel”, and related issues – Notes, 2021, PS

The volumes of the UBS Handbook series deal well with the issue at hand when it comes up in individual verses. But in order to get the bigger picture, it seemed necessary to me to bring together several related points. This might help in reflecting the overall approach to translating these names.

### Israel

- Israel can denote the whole country/nation of Israel.
- Israel can refer to the **northern kingdom**, as opposed to Judah as the southern kingdom.
- Israel can be used **exceptionally of Judah**. *See separate paper: “Where does “Israel” mean “Judah” in 2 Chronicles?”*

### Jacob

- Jacob is the name of the third patriarch, from whose sons the twelve tribes come.
- Jacob can be used for the **whole nation, instead of Israel**, e.g. Micah 3:1.
- This includes cases that refer to the **northern kingdom** only, e.g. Micah 1:5.

### Ephraim

- Ephraim is the name of Joseph’s younger son.
- Ephraim is also the name of **the tribe** that descends from him.
- Ephraim can stand for **the whole northern kingdom Israel**, e.g. Hos 5:12 (in parallelism with Judah). This is due to Ephraim’s prominent role among the northern tribes. (For a modern analogy, compare the imprecise usage of “England” for the United Kingdom.) Although Manasseh was the firstborn, Ephraim received the special blessing from his grandfather Jacob, see Gen 48:8ff.

According to Gesenius<sup>18</sup>, this usage of Ephraim for the northern kingdom applies mostly in the following occurrences:

**all occurrences in Isaiah; Jeremiah 7:15, 31:9,18,20; Ezekiel 37:16,19; some occurrences in Hosea; all occurrences in Zechariah.**

According to Gisin (Das Buch Hosea, Edition C, 2014, pp. 26, 46), in Isaiah, this usage occurs in the context of the Syro-Ephraimitic war, or afterwards.

**In Hosea, “Ephraim” occurs 37 times. See further notes below.**

### Samaria

Samaria is the name of the capital of the northern kingdom Israel (in its later period).

Samaria can be used representatively of the whole land of Israel (and Jerusalem for Judah), see Micah 1:1.

Samaria itself belongs to the tribal territory of Manasseh, not Ephraim, though.

### Translation

As to rendering “Ephraim”, one can choose between different approaches (and one might vary between them):

*Handbook* on Isa 7:2:

Ephraim is another name for the northern kingdom of Israel. It is given this name because the tribe of Ephraim was the largest or most important tribe within the ten tribes forming the northern kingdom. If translators believe that Ephraim will not be correctly understood, they may follow GNB with “Israel,” as in verse 1.

*Handbook* on Hos 4:17:

It may be better to follow GECL (1982), which keeps Ephraim but adds this footnote: “Ephraim here stands for the northern kingdom of Israel, as it does in the entire book of Hosea.”

What speaks for this latter solution is that sometimes “Israel” and “Ephraim” occur together as variations in parallelism, e.g. Hos 5:3. In such verses, it does not work well to replace “Ephraim” with “Israel” – unless one combines the lines.

Another reason for retaining the name “Ephraim” is this: Gisin (p. 46) observes that Tiglat-Pileser, after the Syro-Ephraimitic war, conquered a large part of the northern kingdom, thus not much more than Ephraim was left! So that could be one reason why Hosea speaks of Ephraim. On the other hand, he does not stop using Israel either. – In any event, the reader should not think of two different entities.

In the **book introductions**, especially in the case of Hosea, translators will do well in priming their readers by telling them the following two points:

- Ephraim is the dominant tribe of the northern kingdom Israel, and can stand for all of it.
- Samaria is the capital of Israel.

#### **Further sundry notes**

- Hosea prophesies mostly against the northern kingdom Israel. However, Judah is talked about several times as well. In Hos 6:4/11 it is even addressed directly.
- In the beginning, Hosea talks about Judah more positively (1:7; 4:15). That changes from 5:5 on, and whether 12:1 [English 11:12] is a positive statement about Judah is much debated.
- Hosea can use the name Israel in contrast to other nations, e.g. 9:1; 11:1.
- **Hosea frequently uses Ephraim instead of Israel (37 times).**  
(The idolatrous sanctuary at Bethel (or Beth-Aven) is on Ephraim’s border to Benjamin, cf. Hos 5:8-9.)
- In Hosea, Israel/Ephraim and Judah can occur in parallelism (e.g. Hos 5:12), and with similar statements, but at other times they are distinct, or even contrasted, e.g. Hos 2:2 [English 1:11].
- A few times, Hosea uses both variants, “Israel” *and* “Ephraim”, to speak of the northern kingdom, and then adds a statement about “Judah”, the southern kingdom, e.g. Hos 5:5; 12:1.
- (As far as I can see, Ephraim is not used for all-Israel, i.e. the northern and southern kingdom together.)
- (As far as I know, “Daughter of Zion” is not used of the northern kingdom Israel, cf. e.g. Micah 1:13.)
- In a place like Micah 5:2 [English 5:3], which seems to speak of a distant future after the exile, it is questionable whether “Israel” can still include a remnant of the northern kingdom. That is to say, although Israel refers to all-Israel theoretically, in fact this might just be Judah/Judeans[?].
- On the other hand again, a verse like Hos 2:2 [English 1:11], where Judah and Israel are said to gather together one day, does sound like there is a future even for part of the northern kingdom.