

## Where does “Israel” mean “Judah” in 2 Chronicles?

*A checklist. 2018. Peter Schmidt. – Quotes by NASB.*

The commentators agree that the Chronicler sometimes uses יִשְׂרָאֵל *Yisrā'el* “Israel” where he has Judah in view.<sup>1</sup> However, they do not fully agree where this is the case. The *Handbook* comments on this issue in the relevant places, but it does not give a full list. I find it helpful to look at the whole picture. In order to make it easier for translation teams to address this issue, I offer the list below. It gives all references where *Yisrā'el* refers either clearly or arguably to Judah (or to both Israel and Judah), and includes brief remarks regarding the interpretation. A detailed argumentation is not aimed at.

The issue arises only in chapters 11–33. In the cases that are not listed below, *Yisrā'el* has its usual meaning, i.e. it refers to the northern kingdom Israel (or to the earlier undivided kingdom).

### Translation

On the exemplary case of 2Chr 21:2, the *Handbook* helpfully comments as follows:

Instead of **king of Judah**, the MT has “king of Israel” (also GW, NASB, NJB, Mft, NVSR, SEM, TOB). At first glance this seems to be a mistake, since **Jehoshaphat** was clearly a king of Judah. But CTAT correctly notes that the author of 2 Chronicles frequently uses the name “Israel” in reference to the southern kingdom (see, for example, 20.29, 34; 24.16; 28.27). CTAT gives a {B} rating to the text containing “Israel.” So what should translators do? Some modern versions follow the ancient Greek and Syriac translations by reading “Judah” (so RSV/NRSV, REB, NAB). But CTAT is correct in supporting the MT here. Other versions avoid this textual problem by saying simply “King Jehoshaphat” or “Jehoshaphat,” without stating specifically what country he ruled (so CEV, NLT [1996], FRCL). GNT apparently says “King Jehoshaphat of Judah” to avoid confusing the reader. But such a translation also eliminates an element of the writer’s theology, that is, that the southern kingdom is Israel. NIV has “Israel” in the text, but adds a footnote saying “That is, Judah, as frequently in 2 Chronicles.” This is probably the most satisfactory solution to the problem.

To summarize, there are four approaches:

- Rendering the text literally (and perhaps explaining it in the book introduction)
- Omitting *Yisrā'el* in the translation
- Explicating what is meant by saying “Judah” instead of “Israel”
- Providing a footnote.

As we can tell from the textual variants in some of the places listed below, copyists felt a need early on to clarify for the reader which entity was really in view – Israel or Judah. Avoiding both Israel and Judah in translation might often be the simplest solution. In some places, one other possibility is to simply say “the people” – or perhaps “God’s people”?! Whatever approach the translator takes, the table below should help to apply it consistently.

In a few passages where the writer uses *Yisrā'el*, he might have in view neither the northern kingdom Israel, nor the southern kingdom Judah in its entirety, but those Israelites who had migrated from the northern to the southern kingdom, where they became part of the population. 2Chr 11:3; 23:2; 24:5 could be such places.

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<sup>1</sup> So e.g. Williamson (NCBC, 1982) on 2Chr 11:3; Japhet (OTL, 1993) and Selman (TOTC, 1994) on 2Chr 12:6.

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**Table: Places to consider for *Yiśrā'el* meaning Judah**

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Reference	Relevant text passage	Identity of <i>Yiśrā'el</i>
11:3	Speak to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all <u>Israel</u> in Judah and Benjamin	Judah & Benjamin (or the Israelites among them?)
12:1	Rehoboam ... and all <u>Israel</u> with him forsook the law of the LORD.	Judah
12:6	The princes of <u>Israel</u> and the king humbled themselves	Judah
17:1	Jehoshaphat ... made his position over <u>Israel</u> firm.	Difficult to decide (see <i>Handbook</i> and commentaries)
21:2	All these <i>were</i> the sons of Jehoshaphat king of <u>Israel</u> .	Judah
21:4	Jehoram ... killed all his brothers ..., and some of the rulers of <u>Israel</u> also.	Judah
23:2	They went throughout Judah and gathered the Levites from all the cities of Judah, and the heads of the fathers' <i>households</i> of <u>Israel</u> , and they came to Jerusalem.	Judah (or the Israelites in Judah?)
24:5	Go out to the cities of Judah and collect money from all <u>Israel</u> .	Judah (or the Israelites in Judah?)
24:16	They buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done well in <u>Israel</u> and to God and His house.	Judah (or perhaps all of Israel, including North and South)
28:19	For the LORD humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of <u>Israel</u> , for he had brought about a lack of restraint in Judah.	Judah
28:23	But they became the downfall of him [Ahaz] and all <u>Israel</u> .	Judah
28:27	They did not bring him [Ahaz] into the tombs of the kings of <u>Israel</u> .	Judah
29:24	The priests ... purged the altar ... to atone for all <u>Israel</u> , for the king ordered the burnt offering and the sin offering for all <u>Israel</u> .	<i>Handbook</i> : "It is not clear whether <b>all Israel</b> refers only to the people remaining in the land or whether it also includes those in exile. But this phrase does include the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel. It is repeated in this verse to emphasize that the sacrifices were for all the Israelites." NCBC, TOTC agree.
33:18	Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh ... and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel, behold, they are among the records of the kings of <u>Israel</u> .	Judah
34:21	Inquire of the LORD for me and for those who are left in <u>Israel</u> and in Judah.	<i>Handbook</i> : " <b>Israel</b> here refers to the people of the northern kingdom."
34:33	Josiah removed all the abominations from <u>all the lands belonging to the sons of Israel</u> , and made all who were present in <u>Israel</u> to serve the LORD their God.	<i>Handbook</i> : "... probably refers to the whole land of Israel and not just to the northern kingdom here."

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**Additional note on אֶפְרַיִם *Eprayim* “Ephraim” referring to the whole northern kingdom Israel**

In the prophets, *Eprayim* can stand for the northern kingdom Israel. But this is less of an issue in 2 Chronicles. 2Chr 17:2 also does not belong here (see 15:8).

According to my screening, there is only one place where this issue is crucial, namely in chapter 25: There, in v. 7, we read of “the army of Israel ... Israel – all these Ephraimites”, and then in v. 10 “the army that had come to him from Ephraim”. (Neither Gesenius / Donner nor HALAT list 25:7, although they list 25:10.) In these two verses, translators should think about how to bring across the idea that all these references are to the Northerners. The *Handbook* addresses this.

One other debatable case is 28:7/12. The *Handbook* explains:

The name **Ephraim** is used in many prophetic passages to refer to the entire northern kingdom of Israel (see, for example, Isa 7.2-17; Jer 31.9-20; Ezek 37.16-19). Since nothing more is known of this **Zichri**, there is no way to know whether **Ephraim** here refers to the tribe of Ephraim or whether it refers to the northern kingdom. The renderings “Israelite” (GNT) and “from the kingdom of Israel” (ITCL) are based on the latter interpretation. Verse 12 refers to “Certain chiefs also of the men of Ephraim,” where it is reasonable to suppose that the reference is to chiefs from the entire northern kingdom.

One may also keep the name Ephraim, because it is not so very clear that more than the tribe is intended, and we do not risk a problematic misunderstanding when we say Ephraim.

From 30:1 onward the usage of *Eprayim* is special, because Ephraim is mentioned as a tribe, but together with other tribes. Whether the various tribes are mentioned representatively for the whole northern kingdom, or just for themselves, is difficult to say. In translation, we probably have to use Ephraim, when other tribes are named as well.