

# Judges 8:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply.

## Analysis

**And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply.**

Ephraim's confrontation with Gideon reveals tribal pride that threatened Israel's unity. The phrase **Why hast thou served us thus** (mah-hadavar hazzeh asita lanu, מַה־הָדָבֵר הַזֶּה עָשָׂתָּה לְנוּ) carries accusatory force—literally "What is this thing you have done to us?" Their complaint wasn't about being excluded from God's victory but about wounded tribal honor. Ephraim, descended from Joseph's younger son blessed above Manasseh (Genesis 48:17-20), held prominence among northern tribes and expected deference.

The phrase **they did chide with him sharply** (vayyerivun ito be-chozqah, יִרְיבּוּ אֹתוֹ בְּצֹקָה) uses the verb riv (רִיב, "to contend, quarrel") intensified by be-chozqah (בְּצֹקָה, "with strength, vehemently"). This wasn't mild disappointment but aggressive confrontation bordering on violence. Similarly, Ephraim later quarreled with Jephthah, actually leading to civil war (Judges 12:1-6). This pattern reveals how tribal jealousy undermined national unity, foreshadowing the eventual kingdom division along Ephraim-Judah lines (1 Kings 12).

Theologically, Ephraim's anger exposes how pride transforms God's victories into opportunities for self-exaltation. They cared more about tribal prestige than

delivering Israel from oppression. This mirrors the disciples arguing about greatness after Jesus predicted His death (Mark 9:33-34)—missing the mission's substance while fixating on status. Paul warned the Corinthians against such divisiveness: "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal?" (1 Corinthians 3:3).

## Historical Context

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Ephraim's territory occupied the central highlands north of Benjamin, including strategic cities like Shiloh (where the tabernacle stood) and Shechem. Their prominence stemmed from Joshua's Ephraimite lineage (Numbers 13:8, 1 Chronicles 7:27) and the patriarch Joseph's blessing through his sons Ephraim and Manasseh. By the judges period, "Ephraim" often designated the northern tribal confederation, paralleling "Judah" in the south.

Gideon's Manassite clan (Abiezer) had close kinship ties with Ephraim—both descended from Joseph. Yet Ephraim's demand for inclusion reveals the fragile nature of tribal alliances. Gideon had called Ephraim to pursue the fleeing Midianites (Judges 7:24-25), giving them the honor of capturing the princes Oreb and Zeeb. However, they resented exclusion from the initial battle, viewing it as diminishment of their status. This incident foreshadows recurring Ephraim-Manasseh tensions throughout Israel's history.

## Related Passages

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**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

**1 John 4:8** — God is love

## Study Questions

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1. How does Ephraim's focus on tribal honor rather than national deliverance mirror modern church conflicts over status and recognition?
2. What does Gideon's diplomatic response (verse 2-3) teach about responding to unjust criticism with humility rather than defensiveness?

3. In what ways do believers sometimes prioritize personal or denominational prestige over advancing God's kingdom?

## Interlinear Text

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רְבָבָר יְמִינָם וְיָמָר אֶל־יְהוָה אָמָר־יְהוָה אֶל־יְהוָה אָמָר־יְהוָה  
said H413 And the men of Ephraim unto him Why hast thou us thus  
H559 H376 H669 H4100 H1697

כִּי לֹא עָשָׂת יְהוָה בָּזָה  
served H0 that thou calledst H0 H3588  
H2088 H6213 H7121

וְיִרְאֵב אֵין בְּמִדְבָּר וְיִרְאֵב אֵין בְּמִדְבָּר  
us not when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites And they did chide  
H1980 H3898 H4080 H7378

אַתָּה בְּפָזַקְתָּה:  
with him sharply  
H854 H2394

## Additional Cross-References

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**2 Samuel 19:41** (Parallel theme): And, behold, all the men of Israel came to the king, and said unto the king, Why have our brethren the men of Judah stolen thee away, and have brought the king, and his household, and all David's men with him, over Jordan?