

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, מָה־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה עָשִׂיתָ לָנוּ) 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, וַיַּיְרִיבוּן אִתּוֹ בְּחֹזֶקָה) uses the verb riv (רִיב, "to contend, quarrel") intensified by be-chozqah (בְּחֹזֶקָה, "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

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

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

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

וַיֹּאמֶר ו	אֶל יו	אֵל יִשׁ	אֶפְרַיִם	מָה	הַדָּבָר
said	H413	And the men	of Ephraim	unto him	Why hast thou
H559		H376	H669	H4100	H1697
הָיָה	עָשָׂה יָדְךָ	לָנוּ	לְבִלְתִּי	קָרָאתָ	לָנוּ
H2088	served	H0	H1115	that thou calledst	H0
	H6213			H7121	H3588
כִּי	לָכֵן	לְהִלָּחֵם	בְּמִדְיָן	וַיִּרִיבוּ	אֵת
us not	when thou wentest	to fight	with the Midianites	And they did chide	
	H1980	H3898	H4080	H7378	
וַיִּזְקֶה:	אֵת				
H854	with him sharply				
	H2394				

Additional Cross-References

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?