

Psalms 78:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows,
turned back in the day of battle.

Analysis

The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows (בְּנֵי־אֶפְרַיִם נושְׂקִי וְרוֹמֵי־קֶשֶׁת)—Ephraim, Joseph's dominant tribe and representative of the Northern Kingdom, possessed military capability yet **turned back in the day of battle** (הִפְכוּ בַּיּוֹם קָרָב). The verb הִפְכוּ (hafkhu, "turned back") suggests covenant reversal, not merely tactical retreat. This echoes Israel's repeated pattern: divinely equipped yet spiritually faithless.

Ephraim's failure despite armament illustrates Psalm 20:7's principle—"Some trust in chariots... but we will remember the name of the LORD." Military resources without covenant fidelity equal spiritual impotence. Asaph uses this historical example to warn the current generation: inherited privilege (Jacob's blessing made Ephraim preeminent, Gen 48:19) cannot substitute for personal faithfulness.

Historical Context

Psalm 78 is a maskil (instructional psalm) by Asaph, recounting Israel's history from the Exodus through David. Ephraim's prominence dates to Jacob's blessing (Genesis 48) and Joshua's leadership. By Asaph's time (David's era), tribal rivalry was evident—this verse may reference specific military failures or symbolize Northern Israel's spiritual decline that culminated in 722 BC.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What spiritual "weapons" has God given you that remain unused due to lack of faith or obedience?
2. How does Ephraim's failure challenge any presumption on inherited faith or denominational identity rather than personal covenant loyalty?

Interlinear Text

בְּנֵי	אֶפְרַיִם	נֹשְׂקִים	רוֹמִים	קִשְׁתִּים	וּפָּנּוּ
The children	of Ephraim	being armed	and carrying	bows	turned back
H1121	H669	H5401	H7411	H7198	H2015
בְּיּוֹם	קִרְבּוֹ:				
in the day	of battle				
H3117	H7128				