

# A Hero Will Rise

The Book of Judges

Text

Judges 9:22-57

Topic

Abimelech comes to a dishonorable but fitting end as a woman drops a millstone on his head that crushes his skull

Title

*"The Woman with the Man Crush"*

## Introduction

A twitter poll asked Christians to list reasons for church splits they had been through, or had first-hand knowledge about. The following are a few of them.

These are factual, not made up.

First a few random ones:

- An argument over the appropriate length of the worship pastor's beard.
- An argument and vote to decide if a clock in the sanctuary should be removed.
- A major conflict when the youth borrowed a crockpot that had not been used for years.
- A fight over which picture of Jesus to put in the foyer.

There were these two about food:

- An argument on whether the church should allow deviled eggs at the church meal.
- A disagreement over using the term “potluck” instead of “pot blessing.”

There were these two about the Lord’s Supper:

- An argument over whether to have gluten-free communion bread or not.
- A dispute in the church because the Lord’s Supper had cran-grape juice instead of grape juice.

There was only one I thought had any real merit: Two different churches reported fights over the type of coffee to serve. In one of the churches, they moved from Folgers to a stronger Starbucks variety. In the other church, they simply moved to a stronger blend.

Factions and divisions in churches are nothing new. In the New Testament church in Corinth there were divisions over the following things:

- Which apostle was superior.
- Sexual morality.
- Lawsuits.
- Marriage.
- Eating meat that had been first sacrificed to an idol.
- Headcoverings for women.
- The Lord’s Supper.
- Spiritual gifts.
- The resurrection of Jesus; and
- The resurrection of believers.

By the way... In my research I found one source that claimed the church at Corinth may have been significantly under 200 members. That's a lot of fighting for such a small group.

The apostle Paul made a surprising statement to the Corinthians regarding their factions and divisions:

1Co 11:19 For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.

Factions and divisions can have a positive effect in that they reveal who, if anyone, is acting like a genuine believer.

I got to thinking about factions because our verses in the Book of Judges chronicle a time of factions in Israel.

Sadly, no one in these factions are "approved"; they are all wrong. We don't want to identify with any of them.

But from their failures we can understand two things: #1 You Can't Avoid There Being Factions In Your Church, but #2 You Can Bring To An End The Factions In Your Church.

#1 You Can't Avoid There Being Factions In Your Church

(v22-49)

We tend to have a romantic notion of what the first century church was like. For sure, it was vibrant with the life and ministry of God the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless all of the letters written to churches were corrective of problems in them.

Five of the seven letters Jesus dictated to John in the Revelation were likewise critical and corrective.

There are no perfect churches because there are no perfect people. Sooner or later there will be factions in any church.

We've had a few over the years. I'm not aware of any now; but it's likely we will have others up until the rapture of the church.

Looking to our verses, it was a time of factions that escalated to civil war.

Jdg 9:22 After Abimelech had reigned over Israel three years,

Abimelech was the son of Gideon by a Gentile concubine. When Gideon died, Abimelech rallied his mother's kin in the city of Shechem to support him against the 70 sons of Gideon who stood to rule over them. They hired worthless and reckless men to kill the 70 half-brothers of Abimelech for one shekel each.

They killed 69, but Jotham, the youngest, escaped. Before he went into self-imposed exile, he rebuked both Abimelech and the men of Shechem, predicting they would destroy one another.

Israel was a theocracy. They were ruled by God; they had no king. They always wanted a king, in order to be like the other nations.

Abimelech set himself up as king, by his own authority. It couldn't last, since it was totally a work of the flesh.

Jdg 9:23 God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech,

Your Bible might say, “God sent an evil spirit.” One scholar I consulted says, “the word *evil* in this passage (ra’) can simply mean *troubling* or *disastrous*. It does not have to be interpreted as referring to a morally evil spirit. Hence this passage may simply mean that as an act of judgment God sent a spirit whose job it was to trouble or bring disaster to Abimelech.”

We assume that the spirit is a demon. But the word used could identify an angel’s task.

Angels *are* sometimes dispatched to cause trouble, and lots of it:

- An angel of death was sent on the eve of the Exodus to kill all the firstborn of Egypt.
- In Numbers chapter twenty-two, an angel was sent to kill Balaam.
- One angel killed 185,000 Assyrians encamped against Jerusalem (Second Kings 19:35).
- Angels figure prominently in the Book of the Revelation in carrying-out destructive judgments upon the Christ-rejecting population of the Tribulation earth.

At the same time, there are examples of individuals in the New Testament being turned over to Satan or his agents for punishment:

- A man in the Corinthian church was committing incest and adultery, and God commanded the leaders to “hand him over to Satan” to save his soul (First Corinthians 5:1-5).
- God allowed a messenger of Satan to torment the apostle Paul in order to teach him to rely on God’s grace and power and not become conceited because of the tremendous abundance of spiritual truth he was given (Second Corinthians 12:7).

If it was an evil spirit, then as an act of judgment God allowed it to do what it wanted to do to Abimelech. God was not the author of its evil.

For his part, Abimelech was not forced to act one way or another. He wasn't possessed. He simply had the freedom to act according to his sinful nature without restraint.

It provides an example for us of God’s providence. God gets the outcome that He requires, but without violating anyone’s free-will. Whether by angel or demon, the Lord gives these nonbelievers a nudge, but they act according to their own natures.

Jdg 9:24 that the crime *done* to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might be settled and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who aided him in the killing of his brothers.

Having them turn on each other was God’s divine judgment for their heinous crime. His sentence would be carried-out by this troublesome spirit.

Jdg 9:25 And the men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who passed by them along that way; and it was told Abimelech.

The “ambush” was against Abimelech in this sense: They robbed the merchants before they could pay the toll and tribute that was being collected by Abimelech. He was therefore suffering economically.

More than that, it was an affront to Abimelech’s authority.

These were men of Shechem, who had previously supported Abimelech. Apparently his policies were no longer prospering them so they rebelled.

Jdg 9:26 Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brothers and went over to Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him.

The Gaal Group swoops in for a hostile take-over. They seem to be a band of brothers who go from place-to-place taking advantage of local strife to line their own pockets.

They’re like a traveling street gang.

Jdg 9:27 So they went out into the fields, and gathered *grapes* from their vineyards and trod *them*, and made merry. And they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank, and cursed Abimelech.

They must have had mad winemaking skills. I tried to find out how long it takes to go from grape-to-glass in fermentation. One site for do-it-yourselfers said six months.

Then I came across an article titled, *Turning Welchs into Wine in 48 Hours*. There is a product called *Spike Your Juice*.

It's a yeast-based kit, a powder you add, that ferments any 100% fruit juice, so long as it has 20gr of sugar or more per serving, into an alcoholic brew with anywhere from 4-14% alcohol by volume. That puts the resulting potency somewhere between beer and wine.

One reviewer commented, "You know what's infinitely better than a carton of Tropicana? *A carton of boozy Tropicana.*"

The Gaal Group knew something we don't know, and in a wine-induced moment of bravado, "cursed Abimelech."

Jdg 9:28 Then Gaal the son of Ebed said, "Who *is* Abimelech, and who *is* Shechem, that we should serve him? *Is he* not the son of Jerubbaal, and *is not* Zebul his officer? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him?  
Jdg 9:29 If only this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech." So he said to Abimelech, "Increase your army and come out!"

Gaal played the race card. Abimelech identified with the men of Shechem, as their kin, because of his mom. But his dad was Israeli.

Jdg 9:30 When Zebul, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was aroused.

Abimelech was living elsewhere, and had left Shechem in the very capable hands of a ruler loyal to him, Zebul.

Jdg 9:31 And he sent messengers to Abimelech secretly, saying, "Take note! Gaal the son of Ebed and his brothers have come to Shechem; and here they are, fortifying the city against you.



Jdg 9:32 Now therefore, get up by night, you and the people who *are* with you, and lie in wait in the field.

Jdg 9:33 And it shall be, as soon as the sun is up in the morning, *that* you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and *when* he and the people who are with him come out against you, you may then do to them as you find opportunity."

Zebul believed an early morning surprise attack from the East, with the sunrise obscuring them, would overwhelm a sluggish, hung-over Gaal.

Jdg 9:34 So Abimelech and all the people who *were* with him rose by night, and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies.

Jdg 9:35 When Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance to the city gate, Abimelech and the people who *were* with him rose from lying in wait.

Jdg 9:36 And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains!" But Zebul said to him, "You see the shadows of the mountains as *if they were* men."

Blurry-eyed from the previous night's merry-making, Gaal couldn't easily make-out the advancing army. Zebul convinced him he was seeing pink elephants on parade.

Jdg 9:37 So Gaal spoke again and said, "See, people are coming down from the center of the land, and another company is coming from the Diviners' Terebinth Tree."

Maybe it's just me, but Gaal seems a little slow.

Jdg 9:38 Then Zebul said to him, "Where indeed *is* your mouth now, with which you said, 'Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?' *Are* not these the people whom you despised? Go out, if you will, and fight with them now."

Too late to make a run for it. Couldn't try to hide in the city, or the citizens would see them as cowards and withdraw their support. The only option was to fight.

Jdg 9:39 So Gaal went out, leading the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech.

Jdg 9:40 And Abimelech chased him, and he fled from him; and many fell wounded, to the *very* entrance of the gate.

It seemed all too easy. But that would prove Abimelech's downfall. He wouldn't see the days events as God's divine judgment on him until it was too late.

Jdg 9:41 Then Abimelech dwelt at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his brothers, so that they would not dwell in Shechem.

This seems to be a summary of what happened. Abimelech came from Arumah where he was dwelling to engage Gaal and his brothers, who were driven out of the city by Zebul's strategy.

Jdg 9:42 And it came about on the next day that the people went out into the field, and they told Abimelech.

The citizens of Shechem resumed their daily lives, thinking that their temporary defection would be overlooked.

Jdg 9:43 So he took his people, divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the field. And he looked, and there were the people, coming out of the city; and he rose against them and attacked them.

Jdg 9:44 Then Abimelech and the company that *was* with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city; and the *other* two companies rushed upon all who *were* in the fields and killed them.

Jdg 9:45 So Abimelech fought against the city all that day; he took the city and killed the people who *were* in it; and he demolished the city and sowed it with salt.

Abimelech and his men slaughtered unarmed farmers and their families. Yes, it was merciless; but so was the support of the citizens of Shechem for the murder of the sons of Gideon.

God is longsuffering, not wanting men to reap what they deserve. But His longsuffering has an end, and for these Shechemites, this was it.

Jdg 9:46 Now when all the men of the tower of Shechem had heard *that*, they entered the stronghold of the temple of the god Berith.

Jdg 9:47 And it was told Abimelech that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together.

Jdg 9:48 Then Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who *were* with him. And Abimelech took an ax in his hand and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it and laid *it* on his shoulder; then he said to the people who were with him, "What you have seen me do, make haste *and* do as I *have done*."

Jdg 9:49 So each of the people likewise cut down his own bough and followed Abimelech, put *them* against the stronghold, and set the stronghold on fire above them, so that all the people of the tower of Shechem died, about a thousand men and women.

Of interest here is that in his rebuke of Abimelech, Jotham had compared him to a bramble-bush ready to burst into flame, and he predicted that he would destroy the men of Shechem by fire.

No one in this story had *any* consideration of God; yet He was behind what could be seen, delivering justice.

Factions abound in this narrative. They clash in destructive ways.

Factions will abound in the church. They must occur, Paul said to the faction-filled Corinthians.

It doesn't mean we ignore them. It doesn't mean that we are influenced by them.

Instead of being influenced by them, or ignoring them...

## #2 You Can Bring To An End The Factions In Your Church

(v50-57)

The weakest, most unlikely person in a church can be used to end conflict. Let's see how things played-out in Judges to reinforce that idea.

Jdg 9:50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he encamped against Thebez and took it.

We can only guess that Thebez had somehow sided with, and supported, Gaal against Abimelech and now he wanted to punish them. Flushed with victory, he consulted only his own pride.

Notice how Abimelech seems to be prospering. He defeated Gaal. He overwhelmed the men of Shechem. He made it look easy.

Just because evil seems to be prospering is no reason to think God is not at work. He is always working all things together for His glory, and for our good.

At any moment along the way, Abimelech could have turned to the Lord. He was the man who would be king, however, when God wanted no king over His people.

It was time to deal with Abimelech.

Jdg 9:51 But there was a strong tower in the city, and all the men and women - all the people of the city - fled there and shut themselves in; then they went up to the top of the tower.

Jdg 9:52 So Abimelech came as far as the tower and fought against it; and he drew near the door of the tower to burn it with fire.

If something works, why not stick with it? Abimelech was almost nonchalant now. It was all in a day's work, burning towers with unarmed men, and with women and children.

No one had any thoughts of divine intervention - yet God's intervention had brought Abimelech, of his own free will, to this very spot.

Jdg 9:53 But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull.

I never took Ancient Architecture in college, but I'll go out on a limb and suggest that there wasn't a grinder way up in the top of that tower.

So how was it this gal had the smaller of the two millstones on her person? I don't know, but it seems she must have brought it with her when she fled to safety.

Have you ever had to evacuate, and do it quickly? It happened to us a few times in Southern California when destructive fires endangered our homes. You almost always take something that you later look at and wonder, "What was I thinking?"

In her case, the small but heavy upper millstone would change lives.

Abimelech was over confident and got too close to the door. Blamo. Skull crush.

I wonder what they'd use to make the sound of his skull being crushed if they made this into a movie? *Star Wars* sound designer Ben Burtt created the distinctive sound of a lightsaber by combining the hum of an idle film projector and the buzz from an old TV set.

The horrifying sound of the shower-stabbing in the original *Psycho* was achieved by Alfred Hitchcock listening to someone stab various melons. In the end, it was the Casaba.

I only mention this to reach out to any Foley artists listening.

Jdg 9:54 Then he called quickly to the young man, his armorbearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, 'A woman killed him.' " So his young man thrust him through, and he died.

Come on. Really? As if being killed by your own young armor bearer was more glorious. We all know he was killed by a woman.

Abimelech may have thought the story could be altered showing a more heroic death. But this is the Word of God, accurate and authoritative, inerrant. He would not be remembered as a hero.

Jdg 9:55 And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed, every man to his place.

There was no real cause here to inflame their patriotism. They were following a madman. With Abimelech dead, everyone returned to their normal lives.

Jdg 9:56 Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father by killing his seventy brothers.

Jdg 9:57 And all the evil of the men of Shechem God returned on their own heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

We should pause to marvel at the spiritual strategy at work. I mean, the men of Shechem and Abimelech must somehow be used against each other, as a judgment upon both, leaving both defeated and destroyed.

How would you have done it?

Turning again to ourselves... The apostle Paul didn't simply list the various factions and divisions in Corinth. Paul told them what to do, case-by-case, to overcome the factions.

Probably the best advice he gives is the famous love passage in First Corinthians chapter thirteen. If you will allow God's Spirit to have His way in you, and respond in love, you will overcome factions - at least for your part.

People who are divisive can only continue if you go along with them. Factions depend on numbers, so all you need to do is refuse to join.

It's funny how we get so interested in trying to figure out exactly what is meant by the evil spirit God sent, when all the while we have within us the Holy Spirit He sent to permanently indwell us, and to constantly infill us. He is the only Spirit I need concern myself with.

He will promote unity, not division. Division is a work of the flesh, no matter how I might try to justify it.

As I said, there isn't anything like that going on in our church. I'm not preaching a message against anyone.

But until we are raptured, there will always be a tendency to break into factions.

Just say "No," and work to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.



