

THE SAD STORY OF ABIMELECH

A reader's theater version of Judges chapter 9

CAST:

NARRATOR (16 lines)	OLIVE TREE (1 line)
GIDEON (1 line)	FIG TREE (1 line)
ABIMELECH (10 lines)	VINES (1 line)
CITIZEN OF SHECHEM (5 lines)	THORNBUSH (1 line)
ANOTHER CITIZEN (3 lines)	GA'AL (say "Guh-ahl") (3 lines)
JOTHAM (4 lines)	ZEBUL (3 lines)
	MESSENGER (3 lines)

NARRATOR: After Gideon's great victory over the Midianites, the Israelites asked him to be their king.

GIDEON: No, I will not be your king. Not me, and not any of my sons. God shall rule over you.

NARRATOR: As long as Gideon was alive, the land had peace. Gideon lived to be a very old man and had many children during his lifetime. His wives bore him 71 sons and certainly many daughters, as well. 70 of these sons were treated like princes. But one son was different. His mother was from the town of Shechem, situated in the valley between Mount Gerazim and Mount Ebal. She was not considered to be a proper wife, and therefore her son, Abimelech, was not considered worthy of any inheritance from his father. Abimelech's name meant "my father is the king," a concept he took to heart after his father, Gideon, died. He went to his mother's relatives in Shechem and asked them a question.

ABIMELECH: Go out and ask the citizens of Shechem this question: which is better for you—to have all 70 of Gideon's sons rule over you, or just one man? Remember, my mother is from Shechem. I am your flesh and blood.

NARRATOR: And thus they did. The citizens of Shechem discussed the possibility of making Abimelech their leader.

CITIZEN OF SHECHEM: Well, he is related to us, after all. None of Gideon's other sons are from Shechem. Maybe we should let Abimelech be our leader.

ANOTHER CITIZEN: He'll need soldiers and supplies. It might be expensive.

CITIZEN OF SHECHEM: I know where to get money. Our local temple of Ba'al has lots of money.

NARRATOR: So the citizens of Shechem gave Abimelech 70 shekels of silver from the temple of Ba'al and with this money he went and hired a bunch of reckless adventurers who agreed to be his little army.

ABIMELECH: The first item of business is to get rid of my competition. And by that, I mean my 70 brothers. Come and help me dispose of them.

NARRATOR: So they did. They killed all of Gideon's other sons. Except one. The youngest one, named Jotham, managed to escape.

ABIMELECH: And now, it's time for my coronation! Tell all the citizens of Shechem to meet me at the sacred pillar.

NARRATOR: When Jotham, the son who escaped, heard about the coronation ceremony, he went and stood on the top of Mt. Gerazim, which overlooked the town of Shechem. He shouted from the top of the mountain and no doubt they were a bit surprised at what he said. He told them a story.

JOTHAM: Listen to me, citizens of Shechem, so that God may listen you. One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, "Be our king!" But the olive tree said...

OLIVE TREE: Why should I give up making oil? My oil is used to honor both gods and men. Why should I give up this important job just to be your king?

JOTHAM: So then the trees went to the fig tree and said, "Be our king!" But the fig tree said...

FIG TREE: Why should I give up making my delicious fruit just to boss around a bunch of trees?

JOTHAM: Then the trees went to the grape vines. They said to the vines, "Please, be our king." But the vines answered...

VINES: Why should we give up making our sweet juice? We bring cheer to so many people. Why should we give this up in order to tell the trees what to do?

JOTHAM: Finally, the trees went and asked the thornbush. They said to the thornbush, "Will you be our king?" The thorn bush answered...

THORNBUSH: If you really want me to be your king, then come and take refuge in my shade. But if not, then let fire come out of the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon! Citizens of Shechem, have you forgotten what my father did for you? He risked his life to save you from the Midianite armies! Did he deserve to have all his sons killed? And now you have made this reckless man your leader only because he is related to you. If you have acted honorably towards Gideon's family, then may God bless you and your new king. But if not, then let fire come out from Abimelech and consume you! And may fire from Shechem come out and consume Abimelech!

NARRATOR: Then Jotham ran away and went and lived far away from Abimelech, for fear of him. After Abimelech had ruled over Israel for three years, God sent an evil spirit to make trouble between Abimelech and the people of Shechem. First, some trouble makers began hiding in the hills and ambushing and robbing passersby. Since Abimelech was in charge, this made him look bad. Abimelech was not happy when he heard the report of what they were doing. Then God brought a big-time trouble maker into town: a man named Ga'al. Ga'al his brothers moved into Shechem and convinced the citizens that he was a better leader than Abimelech was.

CITIZEN OF SHECHEM: I'm really impressed with Ga'al. He's strong and brave.

ANOTHER CITIZEN: Yeah, I think I'll vote for him next time we get to choose a king.

NARRATOR: During the grape harvesting season, the citizens held a feast in the temple of their god.

While they were eating and drinking, they cursed Abimelech.

CITIZEN OF SHECHEM: Abimelech's not the man we thought he was.

ANOTHER CITIZEN: Yeah, he's pretty wimpy. In fact, I hate him, don't you?

CITIZEN OF SHECHEM: Come to think of it, we all hate him, don't we?

NARRATOR: Then Ga'al stood up and addressed the citizens.

GA'AL: Citizens of Shechem, who is Abimelech that you should follow him? Why do you even care that he is Gideon's son? Phooey on Gideon, he's not from Shechem! His only tie to Shechem is through his mother. A mere woman! Why don't you choose a leader whose father and grandfather are Shechemites? Curse Abimelech and get someone else! Oh, if only I could get rid of Abimelech for you. I'm not afraid of him. I'd say to Abimelech, "Call out your whole army against me! I dare you!"

NARRATOR: When Zebul, the governor of the city heard about what Ga'al had said, he was very angry. He sent a messenger to Abimelech to warn him.

MESSENGER: Abimelech, I have a message from Zebul, the governor. There is trouble in the city. Ga'al and his brothers are stirring up the people to revolt. During the night, you and your men should come and lie wait in the fields. In the morning, advance against the city.

ABIMELECH: Thank you for your report. I will consider Zebul's advice.

NARRATOR: Abimelech decided to take Zebul's advice and he and his men set out my night and hid in secret locations outside of the city. In the morning, Ga'al and Zebul went out and stood at the entrance to the city gate. Ga'al looked at the hills and thought he saw people moving around.

GA'AL: Zebul, look! Do you see what I see? It looks like there are men moving about on the hills.

ZEBUL: No, you must be mistaken. It's just the shadows of trees in the early morning light.

GA'AL: No, really, I'm sure I see men coming from over there! And over there, too!

ZEBUL: Well, well, well. Where is your big talk now? Didn't you just recently brag that you would be glad to take on Abimelech's whole army? So go out and fight them!

NARRATOR: So Ga'al rallied the citizens of Shechem and they went out to fight Abimelech. Ga'al lost the battle and was chased out of town. But now what would Abimelech do about the citizens of Shechem? They had betrayed Abimelech.

ABIMELECH: I'll get my revenge on the Shechemites!

NARRATOR: The next day, the people of Shechem went out into the fields. Abimelech decided this was the time to attack.

ABIMELECH: Men, arrange yourselves into three companies and lie in ambush. Wait for my signal.

NARRATOR: At the signal, one of the companies ran to the city gate to block it. The other two at-

tacked all the people in the fields. Then Abimelech turned to attack the people inside the city. He not only killed all the people, but also destroyed the city and scattered salt all over it so nothing would grow there for a long time.

MESSENGER: Abimelech, a group of citizens has escaped. They are hiding in the large fortress inside the temple of their god.

ABIMELECH: They think they can escape, eh? I'll get them, too. Men, go out and cut down lots of tree branches and follow me to the fortress.

NARRATOR: So they all cut branches and carried them to the fortress.

ABIMELECH: Pile the branches against the building and set them on fire!

NARRATOR: About a thousand people were trapped inside the temple. They all burned to death. But Abimelech was still angry. He went on to another town close by. The people of the town ran to a strong tower in the middle of the city and locked themselves inside to try to keep Abimelech out. Many of them climbed the stairs to the top of the tower and some went up on the roof.

MESSENGER: Why don't we burn down the tower?

ABIMELECH: Good idea. Start piling the wood!

NARRATOR: Just as Abimelech was about to set fire to the wood, a woman who was standing at the very top of the tower pushed a big, heavy millstone off the roof. The stone landed right on Abimelech.

ABIMELECH: Ahhh! I've been mortally wounded by a woman! I don't want to let a woman kill me! Quick, one of you men stab me with your sword so no one can say I was killed by a woman!

NARRATOR: And that was the end of Abimelech. When the Israelites saw that Abimelech was dead, they all went home. And thus, everyone got what they deserved. The curse pronounced by Jotham, son of Gideon, came true. Both Abimelech and the people of Shechem were repaid for the wickedness they had done.