

THE BABY IN THE BULRUSHES

A Bible Story Pantomime for Children
by
Jewell Ellen Smith

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"And when she (Joch-e-bed) could no longer hide him (baby Moses), she made for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with tar and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink. And his sister stood afar off ..." Exodus 2:3,4.

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TIME: About 1570 BC.

PLACE: A city on the River Nile, in the land of Egypt.

THEME: God loves little children, and He will help their parents to care for them.

CHARACTERS:

Grandmother Bible-Story-Teller, the narrator.

Hebrew Baby, a boy three months old.

Jochebed, mother of Hebrew Baby.

Miriam, older sister of Hebrew Baby.

The Inspector, the sharp-eyed Egyptian woman whom Pharaoh, the king, sends from house to house to enforce the new decree that all Hebrew male infants are to be thrown into the river.

Pharaoh's Daughter, a sad princess who lives in luxury at her father's palace.

Attendants of Pharaoh's Daughter:

First and Second Fanners, Ring and Toenail Polishers, Hairdresser, Pillow Fluffer, Servant who brings a kitten, Servant who brings a bird in a cage

MANNER OF PRESENTATION:

Grandmother Bible-Story-Teller, costumed in modern long dress and sunbonnet, remains on stage throughout the performance. Much of the time she sits in a rocking chair on far left stage, holding an enormous copy of the Holy Bible in her lap.

As Grandmother reads and tells the story of Baby Moses, the other players--all mimes--act out the chief episodes she relates, using the following three scenes:

Scene 1. Jochebed's home. Jochebed, Miriam and Baby are in the kitchen. Jochebed holds the baby. Miriam is kneading bread dough in a large wooden bowl. Furnishings include a table covered with a dark cloth that reaches the floor, a low bench, and a stool. On the table are a water pitcher and a bowl or two. A large wicker basket hangs

on the wall.

Scene 2. Pharaoh's Daughter's sitting room, where she reclines on a couch draped with a golden cloth. The princess is propped up on pillows, surrounded by servants. One servant brushes her hair, another buffs the dust from the many dazzling rings on her fingers; and two others slowly wave large fans. Waiting in the wings is an attendant with a kitten and another servant holding a caged quail.

Scene 3. The edge of the River Nile. Here there are many reeds, rushes and bushes, and enough other greenery to partially hide Baby Moses and his miniature boat. There are taller shrubs to conceal Miriam.

SCRIPT

Enter Grandmother, carrying large Bible. Before she sits down, she shows the Bible to the audience.

GRANDMOTHER: Children, this is a copy of the Holy Bible. The Holy Bible is God's book. And, it is our book, to read when we want to find out more about God.

The Bible has in it many wonderful stories! Fascinating stories. Stories so great that they will be told over and over, forever.

The Bible Story I want to read for you is about a baby! A little baby. He was just three months old. But pretty!

Oh, my goodness, he was just about the most beautiful baby his mother had ever seen! *opens Bible* It says here that he was "a goodly child" and "fair."

And what happened to this fine, little baby shows that God loved him, just as he loves you, and all other children.

Grandmother sits down in rocker. Curtain opens on Scene 1, revealing Jochebed, the baby, and Miriam. Grandmother reads on, without interruption.

The baby's mother's name was Jochebed. And he had an older sister named Miriam and a brother named Aaron.

His father was called Amram. At first, the baby did not have a name.

This family lived many, many, many years ago—about 3,000 years ago--down in the land of Egypt. However, the pretty little baby and his family were not Egyptian people. They were people God had chosen and named Israelites, or Hebrews.

God had told the Hebrews that the Land of Canaan was to be their homeland, forever. It was a pleasant, rich land "flowing with milk and honey", the Bible says.

Then, a dreadful drought and famine came to Canaan. There was no bread for the people to eat, no grass for their sheep--just no food of any kind in all the land. So the poor, hungry Hebrew people had to take their scraggly, starving sheep and go down to the land of Egypt. There they could buy bread and find green pastures for their flocks.

The Hebrews and all their descendants stayed down in Egypt, about 300 years. Three hundred years is a long, long time.

At the time Jochebed's pretty baby was born down there in Egypt, the wicked king--who was called Pharaoh--had just announced a dreadful decree, or law. And Jochebed and the whole family were so worried that they couldn't decide on a name for the baby. They just called him "Baby."

One day the old cruel Pharaoh called all his advisers together and he said to them: "Gentlemen, we have a problem here in Egypt. There are too many of these Hebrew people!

"When they first came down here from Canaan 300 years ago to buy bread, there were only 70 of them. Now, there must be at least 600,000! We've got to do something about these Hebrews. They may try to take over all of Egypt!"

The first adviser said: "Yes, yes, Great Pharaoh, we've got to get rid of them! Why, just think, if Egypt had to go to war against our enemies, these Hebrews would probably join up with the enemy and try to kill all of us Egyptians!"

The second adviser said: "We must get rid of them. They are dangerous!"

The third adviser said: "They are foreigners! Besides that, they worship somebody they call 'God.' And we Egyptians don't even know their god. Great Pharaoh, let's drive out these wretched Hebrews! Make them leave Egypt!"

"Oh, no, no!" said Pharaoh, "I don't want them to leave! they are good workers. I need them to work for me!"

Then the old king leaned back on his throne and said to his advisers: "I'll tell you what I'm going to do! I'll make these Hebrew people into slaves. I've been wanting to build two big cities. So, I'll force the Hebrews to do all the building--make the bricks, and do everything else."

"That will be great!" murmured the advisers.

"Further," Pharaoh said, "I'll appoint taskmasters over them. And the taskmasters will carry big whips. And they'll have my special permission to beat these Hebrew slaves morning, noon, and night, if necessary. We'll make them work so hard they'll wish they were dead."

"You are a genius, Great Pharaoh!" the advisers cried.

"In the meantime, I'll issue a new decree. And the decree is this: 'All Hebrew baby boys are to be thrown into the River Nile.' These people can save their baby girls, but the little boys are to be thrown into the river!"

The advisers clapped their hands and shouted: "Live forever, Great Pharaoh!"

So, this terrible decree was published throughout the land. And the Hebrew people were very sad, sad about the babies and sad about being slaves. They prayed to God to help them.

The mothers prayed. The fathers prayed. The children prayed. God heard their prayers, and that was when God decided that He would not let Jochebed's fine baby boy be drowned in the River Nile. God made a plan that this baby should grow up to lead his people out of Egypt and back to the promised land of Canaan.

Soon, God spoke to Jochebed in a dream, or somehow, and told her to hide her baby each time she saw the king's cruel inspector coming down the street.

There is a loud knock on the kitchen door. Miriam quickly puts down her bread bowl, runs to her mother. Jochebed jumps to her feet, hands the baby to Miriam and motions for her to run out the back door with him. She does.

Jochebed goes to the other door, opens it. In storms the dreaded Egyptian Inspector with her black sack. She shakes her finger at Jochebed and shakes her sack, indicating how she is going to put any baby she finds into it.

She looks in all corners, peeps under the table cloth, grabs the basket down from the wall. She is furious when she sees the basket is empty. Meanwhile, Grandmother keeps talking.

GRANDMOTHER: The inspector was a tall, mean looking old Egyptian woman who seemed to enjoy going from house to house, looking for Hebrew baby boys. But she didn't find Jochebed's baby!

Inspector throws empty basket on floor and slams the door as she exits.

The minute old Pharaoh's heartless inspector stormed out, Jochebed picked up the basket and examined it very carefully. She still had it in her hands when Miriam slipped back in with the baby.

"Miriam," she whispered to her daughter, "our God has just revealed to me how and where we can hide your little brother, for a long time!"

"What does God want us to do?" Miriam asked. "It's very simple. We'll take this basket and make it into a little boat. A boat that will float on the water. We'll put the baby in the little boat. Then, we'll take it down to the edge of the River Nile and hide it among the bulrushes.

"The baby will be safe. And you can stay down there, close by, and watch over him!

Run get some leaves and vines to go on the outside and I'll fix the inside!"

Miriam, delighted, nods her head, claps her hands silently, and runs out. Jochebed tries the baby in the basket for size. She is happy and smiles at the baby as she hugs him. Miriam dashes back in, carrying much greenery. Curtain is drawn.

GRANDMOTHER: And so Jochebed and Miriam made the little boat for the baby. The Bible tells here turns a page exactly how Jochebed "daubed it with tar and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink."

Next, the Bible begins telling about the sad princess who was the daughter of the heartless Egyptian king.

SCENE 2

Open curtain on Scene 2: Daughter's sitting room. Daughter reclines on her couch, looking wan, listless, sad, interested in nothing despite the coaxing of her many attendants.

GRANDMOTHER: Pharaoh's Daughter and her husband lived in luxury at the king's palace. But she was very unhappy, even sad, because she did not have any children.

The sad, beautiful princess had maids and more maids--to comb her hair and to put rings on her fingers and to paint her toenails. One maid put so many rings on her fingers that the princess could scarcely lift her hands.

Princess lifts her hands, stretches out her ring-laden fingers.

The princess had attendants to fan her, attendants to fluff up her pillows, attendants for everything. They tried to cheer her up and make her happy. But seldom could they even get her to smile. *Enter servant carrying kitten.*

GRANDMOTHER: One day, one of the servants brought the princess a pretty kitten. But Pharaoh's Daughter didn't want a kitten. She wanted a baby. She just shook her head and looked the other way. So the servant took the fuzzy little kitten away. *Exit servant with kitten.*

That same day, some of the other servants went far out into the desert and caught a bird, a fine brown quail. And they put him in a nice cage and brought him to Pharaoh's Daughter. *Enter servant with bird in a cage.*

The sad princess didn't want a bird in a cage. She wanted a little child, all her own. She just shook her head and looked the other way. So the servant took the pretty bird away. *Exit servant with bird.*

Then, one of the attendants who was fanning Pharaoh's Daughter said, "Princess, you like to go bathing in the River Nile! Let's go down to the river! It will be cool and pleasant there." So Pharaoh's Daughter and all her attendants walked down to the river.

All leave; servants carry pillows, fans, blankets, towels, etc.

SCENE 3

Open curtain on Scene 3, a spot at the edge of the river. The basket with the baby in it is in place, partially hidden in the tall cane and rushes. Miriam is bending over the basket, playing with the baby.

When Miriam sees the princess and her entourage approaching, she quickly steps back so that she can be seen only by the audience. At the same time the princess sees the miniature boat. She stops suddenly.

GRANDMOTHER: As Pharaoh's Daughter and her servants were strolling along down by the River Nile, she happened to see the little basket boat that Jochebed and Miriam had made for the baby. It was just at the edge of the water, floating along among some bulrushes.

"Oh, look!" the princess said to her hairdresser. "Look at that strange little boat! Go get it! I want to see what's in it!"

So the Hairdresser and the Pillow Fluffer ran and got the basket-boat and brought it to the princess. The minute the attendants picked up the little boat, the baby woke up and began to cry: "Waa-h! Waa-ah! Waa-ah!"

Attendants crowd around behind the princess, who waves her hands in excitement. She kneels down to look into the basket.

"Oh! It's a baby!" cried the princess! "Give him to me! Give him to me!" *Princess takes baby from boat.*

"Oh, my goodness! You precious little thing!" *Turns to group.* "This is a little Hebrew baby! Isn't he beautiful! I won't let my cruel father have him put to death! This child will be my baby! I will adopt him! As my own son! I'll raise him up in the palace, and one day he will be the king!" *Attendants clap hands, silently*

"Let me see, what shall I name him? He must have a name. I know! I'll call him MOSES. Moses means 'to draw up out of the water.' I drew him up out of the River Nile; so, his name will be MOSES!"

Miriam steps out of hiding, timidly approaches princess and bows.

GRANDMOTHER: Just then the baby's sister Miriam came out from her hiding place and bowed low to the princess.

"Your Highness," Miriam said, "would you like for me to go find a nurse for your baby? I know a very fine lady who would be a good nurse."

"Yes, yes, go find a nurse," the princess told her.

And the princess kept talking, half to herself, half to the baby.

"Of course this baby needs a nurse, one of the Hebrew people, to suckle him and take good care of him." *Pats baby, kisses him.*

"Oh, you precious Baby Moses! I will give you everything, Little Moses! One day you will be King of all Egypt. You will be wise! You will be wonderful! You are wonderful now!" *Enter Miriam and Jochebed*

In what seemed just a minute, Miriam came back with the nurse: The baby's own mother!

Pharaoh's Daughter gave little Moses to Jochebed, and told her to take him home with her and to take very good care of him.

Princess hands baby over to Jochebed. Jochebed bows before the princess, takes the baby.

Jochebed, Miriam and Baby Moses leave stage. Princess and her attendants leave, walking in opposite direction. Grandmother keeps talking and reading.

GRANDMOTHER: So Jochebed took baby Moses back home and kept him until he was quite a big boy. Jochebed taught Moses about God, and how God had saved him from drowning in the River Nile. She taught Moses that all people should worship God, that God loves all people, especially little children.

When Moses was old enough to go to school, he went to live at the king's palace. The Bible tells us that Moses became "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds."

When Moses became a grown-up man, God spoke to him and told him to lead all the Hebrew people up out of Egypt and back to the Promised Land, Canaan. And Moses did as God said.

Grandmother Bible-Story-Teller closes Bible, stands up, and steps to center stage.

Children, the thing for you to remember about this Bible story of the little baby down in the bulrushes in his boat made out of a basket is this: God will take care of you while you are little, and, after you get to be grown up like your mothers and fathers.

Parents, the thing for you to remember about this "Baby in the Bulrushes" story is that God will help you raise up your children just as he helped that Hebrew mother down in Egypt long ago.

You will never have to make a basket boat to hide your baby in, but in other ways--and hundreds of times--you will have to keep each child safe from harm and evil. God can show you how.

In turn, it is your part, your duty, to teach your children about God.

Grandmother closes Bible, remains on stage.

CURTAIN

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