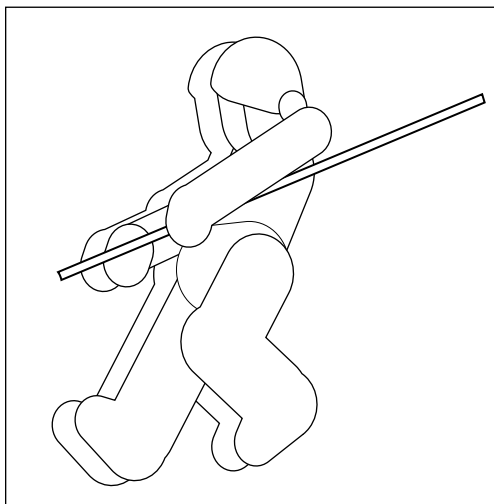
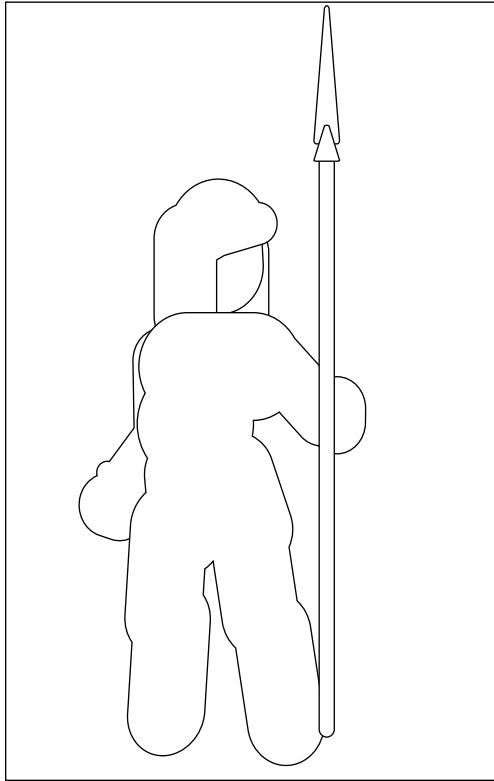


Slaves in Egypt



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Exodus 1:14-16; 2:1-10

Joseph became Prime Minister of Egypt. He brought his entire family over and for years, his descendants (known as the Hebrews) were well respected in the country and their numbers increased substantially. However, after many many years, one of the new kings of Egypt began despising the Hebrews and decided to make them slaves.

Their lives were miserable. The Egyptians were cruel to the people of Israel and forced them to make bricks and to mix mortar and to work in the fields. Finally, the king called in Shiphrah and Puah, the two women who helped the Hebrew mothers when they gave birth. He told them, "If a Hebrew woman gives birth to a girl, let the child live. If the baby is a boy, kill him!"

A man from the Levi tribe married a woman from the same tribe, and she later had a baby boy. He was a beautiful child, and she kept him inside for three months. But when she could no longer keep him hidden, she made a basket out of reeds and covered it with tar. She put him in the basket and placed it in the tall grass along the edge of the Nile River. The baby's older sister stood off at a distance to see what would happen to him.

About that time one of the king's daughters came down to take a bath in the river, while her servant women walked along the river bank. She saw the basket in the tall grass and sent one of the young women to pull it out of the water. When the king's daughter opened the basket, she saw the baby and felt sorry for him because he was crying. She said, "This must be one of the Hebrew babies."

At once the baby's older sister came up and asked, "Do you want me to get a Hebrew woman to take care of the baby for you?" "Yes," the king's daughter answered. So the girl brought the baby's mother, and the king's daughter told her, "Take care of this child, and I will pay you." The baby's mother carried him home and took care of him. And when he was old enough, she took him to the king's daughter, who adopted him. She named him Moses because she said, "I pulled him out of the water."

Commentary

How times change! While Joseph was alive, he was the famous Hebrew who had saved Egypt with his plan to store supplies of corn. But now, hundreds of years later, Joseph's descendants have become slaves, building cities and storehouses for the new king. Egypt's fear of this foreign nation has grown into hatred and, eventually, a terrible plan to wipe them out altogether.

However, although God appears silent and distant, he hasn't abandoned his people. The miraculous way in which baby Moses is saved from the king's death sentence is the first sign that God is still in control. It takes the bravery of two Hebrew midwives (look up Exodus 1:17–22), the patience and skill of Moses' mother to hide a baby for three months, the courage of Moses' sister (Miriam) to speak up in front of enemy royalty, and the unexpected compassion of the king's daughter: all this is God at work and it means that Moses is saved from drowning. Now his mother will even receive payment for looking after her own son and, although he will end up receiving an Egyptian education as the king's adopted grandson, this too will be used as part of God's great plan to rescue his people from slavery.

Questions

- ▶ Why do you think the Egyptians forgot all the good that Joseph had done?
- ▶ Why couldn't the Egyptians learn to live at peace with their Hebrew neighbours?
- ▶ What must it have been like for the Hebrews, who were shepherds by trade, to end up working on the king's building sites?
- ▶ Whose idea was it, do you think, to risk putting Moses in a floating basket—his mom's or his sister's?
- ▶ Who do you think was the bravest in this story—the midwives, the mother or Miriam?



Visual aid

Collect a few long grasses or reeds from a garden. Use them to remind yourself of the straw that the slaves had to use to make the bricks out of mud, the reeds that Moses' mother used to make the basket, and the grasses that his sister Miriam hid behind, down by the Nile.



Activity idea

Together, make a small Moses basket that can float. Use some pipe cleaners to create the frame and then tape over it with black duct tape (to look like tar) to make it waterproof. Can it carry a small weight on the water?



Prayer idea

Moses' family must have prayed hard about how to rescue their beautiful baby boy. Give everyone a small piece of paper or sticky note to hold in their cupped hands. Now invite them to whisper a big prayer of faith secretly into their hands. Fold up the paper 'carrying' this prayer and, each in turn, place it in the floating Moses basket you have made. In a moment of silence, ask God to pull out (this is what Moses' name sounds like in Hebrew) an unexpected answer for each of you in God's time.

Key verse

At once the baby's older sister came up and asked, "Do you want me to get a Hebrew woman to take care of the baby for you?" (Exodus 2:7).

New Testament story link

Hebrews 11:23-26: This New Testament writer reminds us how faith was at work in this part of the story of Moses.



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