Flames of Freedom Podcast Episode 11

"Precarious Times"

Written by Richard Stone. Produced and directed by Mark Simon at Cue Tone Productions. Audio Engineering, Original Music, and Sound Design by David Wilson. Executive Producer Lance Toland.

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EPISODE 11: PRECARIOUS TIMES

FADE IN UNDER OPENING MUSIC:

SFX: OPENING MUSIC

ANNOUNCER

Welcome to Flames of Freedom, Episode 11: Precarious Times, a docudrama based on actual historical events brought to you by Lance Toland Entertainment. In the previous episode, we witnessed the burial of Abagail's baby daughter as the travelers on the William & Sarah gathered on deck to pay their last respects and say the Kaddish, the holy Hebrew prayer said at every funeral and once a year thereafter, to commemorate the life of the dearly departed...

FADE IN: [Pick up from the conclusion of Episode Ten]

ZIPPORAH

Isaac reached in and gently pried the baby from her arms. The other women moved in to support her. Abraham took a small knife, cut the collar of Isaac's shirt, and carefully reached in and cut the top of Abagail's blouse to denote they were mourning. Isaac then took Sarah and gently placed her in the small, open casket. The carpenter bound two ropes over the opening. Captain Hanson lifted the tiny casket, placed it in a net, and lowered it to the water's edge.

BENJAMIN SHEFTALL (his voice breaking also with grief)

God, full of mercy, who dwells in the heights, we pray that you provide a safe resting place for the soul of Sarah, daughter of Isaac and Abagail. Master of Mercy, protect her forever and tie her soul with the rope of life. The everlasting is her heritage; (MORE) BENJAMIN SHEFTALL (CONT'D) may she reside peacefully upon her resting place, and let us say: Amen.

SFX: All those gathered echo his "Amen."

ZIPPORAH

When the prayer concluded, he nodded at the captain, who released one end of the rope.

SFX: splash of casket

ZIPPORAH (CONT'D) The casket slipped from the net into the choppy seas, quickly disappearing beneath a huge swell.

SFX: seas breaking

Audio: crossfades in the middle of the prayer into the sound of the falling rain and Zipporah's words fade in over.

ABAGAIL (wail of grief)

BENJAMIN SHEFTALL If all the men could please circle around for the Kaddish.

BENJAMIN SHEFTALL (CONT'D) (barely audible) Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba b'alma di v'ra chir'utei; v'yamlich malchutei b'hayeichon uv'yomeichon, uv'hayei d'chol beit yisrael, ba-agala u-vi-z'man kariv, v'imru amen. Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varach l'alam u-l'almei almaya. Yitbarach v'yishtabah, v'yitpa'ar v'yitromam, v'yitnasei v'yit-hadar, v'yit'aleh v'yit'halal sh'mei d'kudsha, b'rich hu, l'ela min kol birchata v'shirata, tushb'hata v'nehemata, da-amiran b'alma, v'imru amen.Y'hei sh'lama raba min sh'maya, v'hayim, aleinu v'al koi yisrael, v'imru amen. Oseh shalom bi-m'romav, hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu v'al kol yisrael, v'imru amen.

SFX: falling rain

Audio: crossfades in the middle of the prayer into the sound of the falling rain and Zipporah's words fade in over the rain.

SFX: Musical transition

BENJAMIN (holding back tears)

ZIPPORAH Here's a handkerchief, dear.

BENJAMIN (blowing his nose) Sorry, Nonna.

ZIPPORAH

There is nothing to be sorry for. It was the saddest moment of the journey. Ironically, it was the moment when we were most...together.

BENJAMIN What do you mean?

ZIPPORAH

Well, even though we were all Jews, we had our differences. Some significant. My father worked hard to minimize the conflicts, but soon after Baby Sarah's funeral, they burst into the open with a fury that scarred our relationships for years to come. It all started with a conversation between my father and Benjamin Sheftall on the ship's bow as we sailed westward...

SFX: Musical transition; ship cutting through ocean waves

BENJAMIN SHEFTALL Samuel, may we have a word?

SAMUEL Certainly, what is it, Benjamin?

BENJAMIN SHEFTALL It's about your sons.

SAMUEL My sons? Have they done something to harm you?

BENJAMIN SHEFTALL

In a way, yes. Are you aware they have been taking meals with the ship's crew?

SAMUEL

(deep breath) Yes.

BENJAMIN SHEFTALL Then you are also aware that they are eating pork with the crew?

SAMUEL

Yes, I am. It's disappointing, but what am I to do?

BENJAMIN SHEFTALL They're your sons. Prohibit it. It's against our laws.

SAMUEL

I am aware of that. I am also aware that they are no longer children. They are grown men. It's way past the time I can order them around. They are their own men.

BENJAMIN SHEFTALL

Do you not see what message this sends? That you're openly tolerating grave sins like this in public for all to witness?

SAMUEL

Before we came to England and lived as Conversos in Portugal, we often had to eat pork. We knew it was not right, but we did it to save our lives. And God did not smite us for doing so. Certainly, God can understand how young men need more nourishment than you and I. Besides, who are we to stand in judgment?

BENJAMIN SHEFTALL But you are the leader of our community. You're setting a terrible example.

Benjamin, perhaps it would be best to pay attention to your own house and not concern yourself with what goes on in mine.

BENJAMIN SHEFTALL

Samuel, I understand that you Sephardic Jews don't have a respectful appreciation for our dietary laws, having not grown up with them. But we Ashkenazi Jews take the commandment of Kashrut seriously. I am telling you, this is not acceptable.

SAMUEL

And I am telling you, it is none of your business what my sons choose to eat or not eat. Now, good day, Benjamin.

BENJAMIN SHEFTALL Samuel! I'm not finished...

SFX: musical transition

ZIPPORAH

My father turned, waved him off, and walked toward the midship, leaving Benjamin alone with his hands clenched.

BENJAMIN

Nonna, that sounds awful...Do you mind me asking what happened to Oglethorpe and the other settlers?

ZIPPORAH

No, that's a much happier topic. Do you know the story of Moses sending out scouts to the Promised Land?

BENJAMIN

Yes, they returned with stories of giants who could not be beaten and tales of milk and honey.

ZIPPORAH

Well, young Oglethorpe was kind of like Moses, but he decided to see for himself.

(MORE)

ZIPPORAH (CONT'D)

That was the kind of man he was as he prepared to set out with his new friend, Colonel Bull...

SFX: Musical transition; gulls on dock

ZIPPORAH (CONT'D) ...from the Port Royal docks in South Carolina, with two scout boats with rangers and two Creek Indians.

OGLETHORPE

Colonel Bull, welcome. I see you have Indians with you. Can we trust them?

COLONEL BULL

I can assure you, in a fight, you'll want them on our side. We're prepared to depart at your discretion.

OGLETHORPE That's reassuring. I will give my final orders to the settlers. Give me one hour.

SFX: water lapping on hulls of small wooden boats

ZIPPORAH

When they departed for the Savannah River, Colonel Bull spread a roughly drawn map on a small table...

COLONEL BULL

Here, at Yamacraw Bluff, there is a small Indian trading post run by John Musgrove and his wife, Mary. Militarily, it would be a strong defense against an attack from the river by the Spanish, the French, pirates, or any other adversary. The bluff is nearly forty feet high. You could also place cannons here and here to defend against incursions from ships. While we should scout further up the river for a better option, my money is on this bluff. Strategically, it will put you at great advantage.

ZIPPORAH

When they arrived at Yamacraw Bluff early morning the next day, rangers jumped out of the ships to secure them at the river's bank. All the men disembarked and made their way up a well-worn trail.

OGLETHORPE It would appear that we're not the first to use this trail.

COLONEL BULL The Creek Indians have been using it for centuries. Musgrove can...

ZIPPORAH Suddenly, Colonel Bull stopped.

COLONEL BULL James, don't move.

ZIPPORAH Oglethorpe froze.

OGLETHORPE

What?

COLONEL BULL Two feet to your right is a copperhead snake, ready to strike.

ZIPPORAH

Deliberately, Colonel Bull pulled a small pistol from his waist, pointed, and fired.

SFX: gunshot

COLONEL BULL

He's dead. Sorry, old chap. You've got to keep your eye out for these nasty fellows. They're everywhere. And quite deadly with their bite. Not too many of those in England, I suppose? [chuckling]

ZIPPORAH

Colonel Bull replaced the pistol in his waistband and continued walking up the trail. Oglethorpe hadn't yet moved. Sound of footsteps on the trail, and brush being pushed back

COLONEL BULL (CONT'D) As I was saying, John and Mary Musgrove know Tomochichi well. He's the chief of the local Indian tribe. Tomochichi trusts them.

OGLETHORPE How many Indians live in this area?

COLONEL BULL A few hundred by my count. You'll need to make peace with them.

OGLETHORPE And just how easy will that be?

COLONEL BULL

I have found them most friendly and accommodating. They also know the lands south of here, like the back of your hand. Nearly everything my rangers learned about this territory and the Spaniards, they learned from the Indians.

OGLETHORPE

What if the Spanish choose not to stay in St. Augustine and decide to attack us?

COLONEL BULL

Then Tomochichi would be an invaluable ally. But if the Spanish bring everything they have to bear, you'll need more than the chief and his followers.

ZIPPORAH

When they made it to the top of the bluff, a forest of pine trees reached out in every direction.

OGLETHORPE

My God, this is enough timber to rebuild the City of London!

COLONEL BULL Things are plentiful here, beyond anything you can imagine. (MORE) COLONEL BULL (CONT'D) And it stretches beyond where the eye can see.

ZIPPORAH Colonel Bull turned and surveyed the river below, as did Oglethorpe.

COLONEL BULL

See what I meant by an ideal place to defend the colony? This way, please.

ZIPPORAH A few minutes later they reached a clearing with a large wooden structure, the Indian Trading Post.

COLONEL BULL Anyone here?

SFX: door swinging open

COLONEL BULL (CONT'D) Ah, Mary. You have some guests.

ZIPPORAH

MARY MUSGROVE was a striking, beautiful woman in her early 30s. The daughter of an English trader and a Native American woman, Mary knew how to traverse the divide between the English and the Creek Indians, and her language skills would prove invaluable to Oglethorpe in the years ahead as he forged ties with the Creek.

MARY MUSGROVE Colonel Bull. Good to see you!

COLONEL BULL

Let me introduce you to James Oglethorpe. He's leading the effort to establish a colony here in these territories.

OGLETHORPE Madame, I have heard much about you. It is a pleasure.

MARY MUSGROVE

Why, thank you. I just put on the kettle. Would you men care for a cup of tea?

OGLETHORPE Why yes. Thank you for your hospitality.

SFX: kettle whistling

OGLETHORPE (CONT'D) Mrs. Musgrove...

MARY MUSGROVE Please, call me Mary.

OGLETHORPE Mary, then, by all means, call me James.

MARY MUSGROVE

James...

OGLETHORPE

Colonel Bull tells me this would be an excellent location for our first settlement. If we were to choose it, would it threaten the Indians living in the vicinity? And how would you and your husband feel about that?

MARY MUSGROVE

John and I are traders, James. The more people in the vicinity, the better it is for our business. As far as the Indians go, you must understand. Not all of their encounters with Englishmen have been positive. Over and over they have been lied to, and treaties and many promises have been regularly broken through the years. Keeping your word is everything to them. If you break it once, you can never regain their trust.

OGLETHORPE

Understood.

MARY MUSGROVE

Then, you will have no trouble with Chief Tomochichi. Contrary to what some of your countrymen believe, these people are not savages. They are my people, too. They wish to learn from the white man, but they have much to teach you as well.

OGLETHORPE

And I have much to learn. When might I meet the Chief?

MARY MUSGROVE

No doubt, he already knows you are here. Their encampment is less than a mile away. After tea, I will take you to him.

SFX: Musical Transition

ZIPPORAH

Mary led Oglethorpe, Bull, the soldiers, and rangers through the woods into the Creek Indian village. Children at play stopped and stared, curious about these strangers. Younger children hid behind their mothers' skirts. The men stopped their work, and one went into one of the mud-covered wood structures. CHIEF TOMOCHICHI emerged and approached. He was a wiry, middle-aged man wearing a robe draped across his shoulders. His chest was tattooed with a pattern resembling vertical feathers hanging from his neck. Metal rings that look like knots dangled from his ears. A bright red bandana was tied around his neck.

MARY MUSGROVE

(in Muscogee, the language of the Creek Indians) Peteckukk, SethoHunecc cakko C Ei. atenhepsat. upTkvenHucakSat.>

CHIEF TOMOCHICHI mvsat. upTkvenHuVSeterNameEs_. likVSetMakmena Es yv.

MARY MUSGROVE

Chief Tomochichi wishes for me to tell you that he welcomes you to this land and wishes for peace and friendship. He also wishes you to know that he speaks some English and can understand most of what you say.

OGLETHORPE

Well then, Chief Tomochichi, I, too, wish to be friends for life. I come bearing greetings of peace, prosperity, and goodwill from our King George, who rules our land across the sea.

ZIPPORAH

Tomochichi smiled and nodded. Oglethorpe then reached into a satchel draped over his shoulder, pulled out a small box, and offered it with solemnity to Tomochichi.

OGLETHORPE

I wish to give you a gift from our land. It's a music box. Lift the lid.

SFX: music box, Baroque melody

ZIPPORAH

Tomochichi examined all sides of the box and then lifted the lid. It started playing a Baroque melody. The rest of the men moved closer and tried to look inside the box. Tomochichi then bowed to Oglethorpe and offered him the woven belt he was wearing.

OGLETHORPE

Chief Tomochichi, I will treasure this gift, and I thank you for your warm hospitality. Several people from my land and I wish to settle here. I want your blessing and approval to build on the land above Yamacraw Bluff.

ZIPPORAH

Mary interceded and translated. After a quick exchange between the two of them in the Creek language, Chief Tomochichi replied.

CHIEF TOMOCHICHI

You and your people are welcome to be guests here, but you must respect my people's ancestral rights to hunt and fish. The land and waters of the river belong to no man, but every man.

OGLETHORPE

I appreciate your generosity of spirit. I and my people will always respect your people and ensure their freedom to hunt on these lands and fish in their waters. As chief of my people, I will do everything in my power to ensure that each member of our community respects your ancestral rights.

ZIPPORAH

Oglethorpe extended his hand, and Chief Tomochichi took it. They shook, and Tomochichi then pointed to his longhouse.

MARY MUSGROVE

Chief Tomochichi invites you to join him in his home for a traditional meal to celebrate your friendship.

OGLETHORPE

I am honored.

SFX: musical transition

ZIPPORAH

As Oglethorpe was making peace with the Creek Indians, we were attempting to make peace with the turbulent seas. We gathered below deck to celebrate a Shabbat meal as the William & Sarah pitched back and forth violently. My father and Abraham Minis were huddled at one corner of the table, attempting to steady themselves while they ate.

ABRAHAM MINIS

(under his breath) This is the last of the chickens we brought on board. And these biscuits are not only hard as rocks, some have maggots maggots living in them. Samuel, the water has grown so putrid people can hardly stomach it. What will become of us if we run out of food and fresh water?

Abraham, the Captain, placed a barrel on deck to collect rainwater as it comes off the sails. He assures me we are just a few days out from shore.

ABRAHAM MINIS Samuel, some are saying again that God is punishing us...

SAMUEL

For what?

ABRAHAM MINIS For burying baby Sarah at sea...

SAMUEL

That is absurd. You and I know we had no choice.

ABRAHAM MINIS

Yes, but people's health is deteriorating. I don't know how much longer they can take these storms. I, for one, haven't been on deck for five days.

SAMUEL

Abraham, I am relying on you to keep their spirits up. I'll speak with the Captain about the food. But we've already been two weeks at sea longer than we anticipated. We can't afford to lose hope...

SFX: cracking sound of a wooden beam

SFX: storm in background

ZIPPORAH

At that moment, a piercing cracking sound jolted all of us out of our seats.

ABRAHAM MINIS What in God's name was that?

SAMUEL Stay here. I'll find out.

ZIPPORAH

My father went topside and found one of the masts had broken midway up and fallen back to the deck. A sailor had been injured. He returned to the stairwell and yelled down, then returned to minister to the man.

SAMUEL

Shem Noah! Bring my medical bag immediately.

SAMUEL (CONT'D) Where does it hurt son?

SAILOR

(screaming in pain) My shoulder...

ZIPPORAH

My father opened the man's jacket and saw that his shoulder had been dislocated.

SAMUEL

This will hurt like hell for a moment, but you'll thank me afterward.

ZIPPORAH

He then got behind the sailor and performed a maneuver that relocated the shoulder.

SAILOR (screaming in pain)

SAMUEL

There. Now, let's look at that gash on your head. Hmm... There's no need for stitches. It's just superficial. In a couple of days, you'll be back to work. I'll wrap a bandage around it.

SFX: cloth being ripped.

SAMUEL (CONT'D) Do you think you can stand and walk?

SAILOR

Yes sir.

All right. Give me your left hand, and I'll pull you up.

SAILOR (grunting in pain)

SAMUEL You men, give this man a hand down below.

SAMUEL (CONT'D) You're lucky to be alive, but you need to rest for a few days. Understand?

ZIPPORAH

The man nodded as the sailors supported him down the stairs. The Captain had come topside to assess the damage.

SAMUEL

Captain, we need to have a word in private.

CAPTAIN HANSON Very well. Come to my quarters in an hour.

SFX: musical transition

ZIPPORAH

When my father came to Captain Hanson's quarters, he was behind his desk smoking a pipe.

CAPTAIN HANSON

Have a seat, Dr. Nunes. Thank you for taking such excellent care of my sailor. Can I offer you a glass of rum?

SAMUEL

Yes, thank you.

SFX: bottled being uncorked; liquid being poured.

CAPTAIN HANSON

Cheers!

SFX: glasses clinking

Le chaim! To life. He's a lucky man to walk away from that disaster. But I'm not sure we're so lucky, Captain.

CAPTAIN HANSON

Lucky sir? You are on one of the best ships to sail these waters with a first-rate crew. What more luck would you seek, sir?

SAMUEL

I'm concerned about the food shortage, Captain. In our contract, you promised us fresh meat at least three times a week. We have just eaten the last chickens, the flour has gone rancid, and the water is putrid. People are suffering. How are we going to survive and make it to the new colony?

CAPTAIN HANSON

Dr. Nunes, I have sailed on ships since I was fourteen. Have eaten biscuits crawling with worms. Drunk water that's so filthy it would gag a horse. Suffered from scurvy so badly I wished I were dead. Believe me, things could be worse. Much worse. No one has died of starvation, and I can assure you none will.

SAMUEL

Starvation is the least of my concerns. I am more focused on the mutiny of those in my charge if we don't reach land soon.

CAPTAIN HANSON

I'm doing my best to get us to shore, Dr. Nunes. You must convey that to your fellow passengers. Sailing the seas requires patience and fortitude. Any one of the last three storms could have easily capsized our ship. Did the skills of my crew save us? I believe so. But if your God had a hand in protecting us, I will give credit where it is due.

My God is also your God, Captain. And yes, I pray to him daily for his protection. And from where I sit, he has been keeping a watchful eye on our journey.

CAPTAIN HANSON

Then pray to our God that we find land sooner than later. We'll need a safe harbor to anchor and make repairs. Rest assured, I'll do my best to find you fresh food and water, but please recognize that keeping this ship afloat and its crew and passengers alive are my top priorities.

SAMUEL

Understood. Captain, may I make a personal observation?

CAPTAIN HANSON Most certainly.

SAMUEL This is your first ship, correct?

CAPTAIN HANSON (with hesitation)

As you already know, I have been Chief Mate on more voyages than I can recollect. And yes, this is my virgin voyage as Captain.

SAMUEL

Well, Captain, there is always a first for everything. I remember my first surgery like it was yesterday. Hopefully, in my elder years, I'll recall fondly the first time I crossed the Atlantic. So, I'll continue to pray that this is not the last time you and your crew successfully make this journey. Thank you for the rum and your time, Captain.

CAPTAIN HANSON

Thank you, Dr. Nunes, for your wise counsel...and for your prayers.

SFX: Musical transition

BENJAMIN

Did they find land before anyone died of starvation?

ZIPPORAH

Patience, Benjamin. We'll get to the rest of the story of the William & Sarah in a moment. But first, let's return to Yamacraw Bluff...

SFX: Musical Transition

ZIPPORAH (CONT'D)

In early May, the bluff was peppered with tents on an area cleared of pine trees. A table was set outside one of the tents, and Oglethorpe was talking with JOSEPH FITZWATER and NOBLE JONES, both in their early thirties. Fitzwater was a gardener by trade, and Jones was a surveyor. On the table was a rough drawing that Oglethorpe had created for the town's layout.

OGLETHORPE

What I want to see is a series of squares like these. We'll have to clear most of the trees on the bluff so we can begin construction of homes here, and here, and here. Fitzwater, I want to see gardens planted in the squares, filled with flowers and greenery that would be the envy of any Englishman.

FITZWATER

Sir, I'll make us all proud with the beauty of the place.

OGLETHORPE

Jones, I'm putting you in charge of the land clearing and overseeing the carpenters' work. I want to see everyone with a roof over their heads by Christmas.

JONES

By Christmas? That's a tall order, Mr. Oglethorpe. There could be unforeseen problems... OGLETHORPE ...all of life is unforeseen, Jones. I'm relying on you to get it done.

JONES Understood, Mr. Oglethorpe.

OGLETHORPE Don't just stand there, men. Get to work. We don't have a minute to waste.

SFX: musical transition; crickets

BENJAMIN Nonna, it's getting late, and you still haven't told me whether William and Sarah got to Georgia in one piece.

ZIPPORAH

No?

BENJAMIN

No.

ZIPPORAH We had one more storm to survive, and it nearly killed us all.

BENJAMIN

Where?

ZIPPORAH Just off the coast of the Carolinas. In what people now call the Outer Banks...

SFX: Brutal winds battering the William & Sarah, with monstrous waves crashing over the deck.

CAPTAIN HANSON Stephens, Chapman! Keep your eyes out for an inlet ahead. By my reckoning, there's a sound on the other side of those banks. If we can get there, we'll have a chance.

SFX: Masts crashing down.

ZIPPORAH The one remaining mast came crashing down. (MORE)

ZIPPORAH (CONT'D)

Two men barely escaped in time. All hands were on deck, doing everything possible to keep the ship afloat. Captain Hanson had his spyglass glued on the coastline. In the meantime, we were below deck, and Benjamin and Perla Sheftall crouched, holding onto a support beam as the ship was buffeted about. They were shaking with fear as she prayed from Psalms, and Benjamin clutched the Torah wrapped in a blanket.

PERLA SHEFTALL

The seas have lifted up, Lord, the seas have lifted up their voice; the seas have lifted up their pounding waves. Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the seas, the Lord on high is mighty.

ZIPPORAH Topside, I heard the captain yell...

CAPTAIN HANSON There's the inlet. Steer due west, Chapman.

END

ANNOUNCER

This is the conclusion of Episode eleven of Flames of Freedom. Written by Richard Stone. Produced and directed by Mark Simon at Cue Tone Productions. Audio Engineering, Original Music, and Sound Design by David Wilson. Executive Producer Lance Toland. Special thanks to our ensemble cast: Special thanks to our ensemble cast...Zipporah played by Angelines Santana. Benjamin played by Jamie Treselyan. Diogo Nunes played by Juan Pablo Gamboa. Gracia Nunes played by Gabriela Lopetegui. James Oglethorpe played by Ian Russell.

(MORE)

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D) Additional roles played by Brad Davidorf, Barry Stoltze, Francois Clemenceau, Jerry McDaniel, and Roxanne Rittman.

[pick up from previous recordings] Thanks to Rabbi Saul Rubin, whose assistance throughout the development of this series was invaluable. And for their guidance and support of this project from its early inception, special thanks to Rabbi Robert Haas of Congregation Mikve Israel in Savannah, GA, Rabbi Rachael Bregman of Temple Beth Tefilloh in Brunswick, GA, Rabbi Shalom Morris of Bevis Marks Synagogue in London England, and Lord Peter Levine of London City, England, and the Jewish Heritage Alliance for their support. This has been a production of Lance Toland Entertainment, copyright 2024. All rights reserved. Flames of Freedom is a docudrama based on actual historical events. To learn more about this story, the actors, and the production backstory, join in on the conversation on Facebook at Flames of Freedom or at flamesoffreedom.net.