

**SALT & LIGHT: ADDITIONAL COMMENTARY**

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**GENESIS 41:1-16, 25-32**

After Pharaoh could not get an interpretation of his dreams from his advisors and spiritual leaders, his wine taster recalled the man in prison who had correctly interpreted both his dream as well as the dream of the baker. Feeling guilty, the wine taster revealed to Pharaoh that he knew a man in prison who could interpret dreams; he recounted what had happened to him and the baker; he acknowledged things had turned out just as Joseph had interpreted. Pharaoh summoned Joseph and within a few hours, Joseph stood before him, dressed in new clothing, shaved, appearing as though he had never been cast into the prison of Potiphar's house.

Before interpreting Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph acknowledged he was unable to interpret dreams, but that God would give Pharaoh an interpretation that would please the king.

Upon hearing Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph made one point three times: God was informing Pharaoh what God was about to do. In addition, Joseph informed Pharaoh that the meaning of the dreams was one and the same.

Here, before Pharaoh stood a man who'd been given a recurring dream years before, while he was growing up with his father, sister, brothers, and their mothers. His dream had shown him exercising rule and authority that would benefit even his family. Yet, Joseph's life had followed a course of descent into obscurity, not a course of ascent into authority! The descent into obscurity both had replaced his infatuation with the meaning of the dream; Joseph still had to experience how the dream would be fulfilled. Like Pharaoh, Joseph would not be the one to fulfill the dreams; rather, God would bring the dreams to pass.

Likewise, today, the majority of the earth's people dwell in obscurity. They were plunged into despair through the campaigns of *white settlement colonialism*, which was inaugurated by the Crusades in the eleventh century and crossed the Atlantic under the authority of the Christian Doctrine of Discovery in the 15th century.<sup>1</sup> By 1500, the five nations in Europe that bordered the Atlantic had established large empires outside of Europe. Just as Joseph felt forgotten, generations of Indigenous peoples feel obscure.

God is more than able to care for each life, before conception, in conception, birth, throughout incarnation, into death, and *after death*. God knows where each miniscule body lies dead, just as God knows where every massive creature and every woman and man lies in death, and God will bring each to appear before God. The great I AM knows

each life intimately beyond having a ledger book of knowledge of who they are and where they abide. God is with life where life exists, and this is too wonderful for us to contemplate without being overwhelmed!

Even so, recall that the cupbearer had forgotten Joseph. As Joseph listened to the dreams Pharaoh received, Joseph was given information to inform Pharaoh three times of what God was about to do. Joseph did not give Pharaoh any information that Pharaoh could leverage either for temporal glory or for eternal reward. The dreams he had been given were focused on the well-being of Egypt and the surrounding nations. The dreams were not about the power that Pharaoh would exercise to glorify himself. As Joseph listened, did he also realize that his dreams of ascendancy were not about glorifying him above his family?

The theme of Pharaoh's dreams functioned as a mirror to Joseph as he received the interpretations of his dreams and of Pharaoh's dreams. The dreams were not about each man being exalted or exalting himself. Joseph's interpretation of the dream may have comforted Pharaoh but did not give Pharaoh a starring role, neither in this life nor in the next. Pharaoh, *along with Joseph*, was given the opportunity to learn submission to God from the God of life.

Joseph's experience in jail and Pharaoh's dream of disaster have special significance for our countries. Joseph's story of false accusation and the resultant imprisonment connects with our ongoing story of trauma, violence, terror, injustice, and unrighteousness. Our life today is intimately connected to the histories of white settlement, conquest of foreign lands, the doctrine of discovery, extermination and genocide, colonialism, slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and the ongoing oppression of people of color, the poor, and women.

Pharaoh's story of how his pride had to be humbled in the face of God's intervention in the affairs of his government predates and speaks to us as nations and to our governments. The path our current governments have walked into disreputability is strewn with inaction, injustice, and the blatant neglect of the pursuit of justice and righteousness.

Even so, many Christians are confused and say they do not know what to do or say about the injustices and specific, white supremacist ideology that have been used to shape our governments and societies. Christians feel unsure whether they should participate in wholesale restructuring of our criminal justice system, and some see no problem with the priorities of our governments and agencies.

1. Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2019).

### **ADDITIONAL GROUP ACTIVITIES**

1. Explore the Doctrine of Discovery and the histories behind the formation of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Research the timeline of slavery and indentured servitude in the Americas with a group of people from your group or congregation. Begin by visiting the website, <https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/>

- How can we respond to this history as we learn about it?
- What was the impact of your country's history on your families and other people?
- Was your family involved in profiting from the extermination or removal of Indigenous Peoples?
- Was your family involved in enslaving people?
- Was your family victimized through genocide, removal, or enslavement in the Americas?

One resource for people who are the offspring of enslavers and people who are the offspring of people who were enslaved is *Coming to the Table* ([www.comingtothetable.org](http://www.comingtothetable.org))

2. Organize a group from your congregation to visit the National Peace and Justice Memorial, in Montgomery, Alabama (see <https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/>) During the visit, photograph and record what you see. Upon return, organize times to share the material, photos, and videos with your congregation.

3. Explore the history of policing in your country. If you live in the US, read the report, "Enough is Enough: 150 Year Performance Review of the Minneapolis Police Department"<sup>2</sup> ([https://www.mpd150.com/wp-content/themes/mpd150/assets/mpd150\\_report.pdf](https://www.mpd150.com/wp-content/themes/mpd150/assets/mpd150_report.pdf)). Read the report aloud to one another. This report was written by MPD150; some of their researchers are trained in the Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience (STAR) approach for restorative justice. STAR is a training model developed by staff of the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

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2. MPD150, 2017.