



underthefigtree

# WILD PLACES CARTOUCHE

A Discussion Guide for Individuals and Groups

# CARTOUCHE

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It had been a full day. Now with a satisfied tummy, fresh out of the bath, in warm “jammies” curled up in Grandma’s lap, she picks her favorite book and with big eyes looks up: “Can we read this one Grammy?” “Of course we can”! There, in the warm light of the lamp and to the words of an all too familiar story, read soothingly, nestled in the security of Grandma’s lap, she drifts off to sleep. A picture of sanctuary, safety, and love... the way things ought to be; a safe place.

The world appears to be becoming more chaotic and “safe places” are becoming increasingly rare. It wasn’t so for the ancient Egyptians, they had a strong sense of safe places; indeed, they regarded Egypt itself as the safest of “safe places”. Where things were as they were supposed to be. Interestingly, God brought his people to Egypt in order to rescue them from famine. However, what began as a safe place became a place of destruction and death for the Hebrews. How is it possible that what began as a “safe place” became anything but safe for our ancestors of the faith? What is God’s idea of a “safe place”? What is yours?

“SEE WITH YOUR EYES, HEAR WITH YOUR EARS, AND SET YOUR HEARTS ON EVERYTHING I AM GOING TO SHOW YOU, FOR THAT IS WHY YOU HAVE BEEN BROUGHT HERE. THEN TELL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL EVERYTHING YOU SEE.” EZEKIEL 40:4

## THE TEXT

Before you watch this session take a moment and read the following passages:

Psalm 4:7-8

Psalm 37:39-40

Psalm 146:5-10

## THE TEACHING

Watch the video, “Cartouche.” Review the background details below before continuing with the talking points.

## THE VOCABULARY

Cartouche - is an oval with a horizontal line at one end, indicating that the text enclosed is a royal name. The cartouche was meant to protect from evil spirits in life and after death.

Ma’at or Maat - the ancient Egyptian concept of truth, balance, order, harmony, law, morality, and justice. Maat was also personified as a goddess regulating the stars, seasons, and the actions of both mortals and the deities, who set the order of the universe from chaos at the moment of creation.

Shalom - wholeness, completeness, soundness, safety, security, peace, contentment



## THE BACKGROUND

Ancient Egypt's immense power, wealth, and influence spanned thousands of years. Even today crowds stand in line for hours just to catch a glimpse of the opulent wealth of one of Egypt's lesser Pharaoh's: Tutankhumun. The source of such wealth and the influence was Egypt's rich farmland which was refreshed and renewed each year by the replenishing Nile floods. Ancient Egypt, that ribbon of abundant fertility - an oasis, stood in sharp contrast to the intense, harsh, aggressive wasteland that threatened to engulf it. But Egypt endured and proved to be a safe place. To celebrate and declare this enduring reality the ancient Egyptians built their Temples of worship, (and they built more than any other culture in the Ancient Near East), precisely in the flood plain of the Nile!

Each year, at its time, the Nile would flood its banks and these temples would fill with water and rich silt that came with deluge. Then, in a few weeks – at its time, the mighty Nile would miraculously recede; the priests would return with joy and lovingly remove the life giving soil the Nile had deposited out of the Temple. This was a high act of worship for they understood well that it was from this rich earth, delivered by the gods, that their sanctuary was assured. Not just the Temple sanctuary they were cleaning, but the sanctuary that was Egypt!

The flooding and receding waters of the Nile were understood by the Egyptians as: ma'at, order; "the way things were supposed to be". The ancient Egyptians had a unique picture to communicate the haven that they believed their land to be and the ma'at it enjoyed; that picture was the cartouche. To teach this lesson George brings us to the great mortuary Temple of Pharaoh Rameses II, also known as Rameses the Great (perhaps the Pharaoh of the Exodus?). It was in mortuary temples that the body of Pharaoh would be prepared for his final journey. Even here, and perhaps was most importantly here, the picture of cartouche was present. The cartouche represented protection, an important source of hope and security; critical for someone who is about to take their final journey into the chaos of death.





# THE TALKING POINTS



- 1 The ancient Egyptian view of comfort and security was: ma'at/order. Are we much different? Investors seem to cherish a predictable stock market, planners the consistency of routines and probability of variables etc. How much do the uncertainty of external conditions contribute to our sense of wellbeing and attitude about God?
- 2 Knowing that God was more than capable to miraculously produce food, He would later provide His people with manna in the wilderness, why do you suppose God brought his people to a place which at first protected them (Genesis 47:27) and later threatened their very existence (Exodus 1:11-13, 22)?
- 3 Read Numbers 6:24-27. What actually is the “blessing” of Numbers 6:24-27? The name “on the” cartouche was the one who was responsible for the ma'at/order the people enjoyed. Note Numbers 6:27, what do you think of George's suggestion that “putting the ‘Lord’s’ name on the Israelites” was recognizing the Lord as responsible for shalom within the people of God? How would He ultimately accomplish this? Discuss.
- 4 Read Psalm 37:39-40, Psalm 146:5-10. Note that Psalm 37 reference speaks to God's guarding & defending His people, and the Psalm 146 reference describes God's provision and His eternal reign. Now read Colossians 3:1-17 noting especially Colossians 3:3; “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.” How do you picture your life “with Christ in God”? According to Colossians 3 is shalom something we receive or something we nurture? How “safe” a place are the relationships which are ours? According to Colossians 3 what are somethings we/I can do to cultivate and encourage shalom in my church, small group, friendships, family, and marriage?
- 5 Near the conclusion of the teaching George compares ma'at and shalom. He explains that ma'at was based on one's circumstances all going as planned, everything is fine as long as “everything is going my way.” I have my health, promotion, bank account, a swelling portfolio, I'm top of the class and/or top of the ladder. Shalom, on the other hand, is peace regardless of your circumstances. Even though I may be in a “wild place”, seemingly surrounded by uncertainty, I have shalom - not because of my circumstance, but because of my God. Have you ever met someone who was in a “wild place” and yet had and conveyed such shalom? Discuss.
- 6 Paul writes in Colossians 3:15-17; Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Discuss what it is to have the name of God placed on us, what it is to do “it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” How important is giving thanks to nurturing shalom/peace? How we might grow in shalom.

## THE TASK

Read and compare Matthew 8:23-27 and Matthew 14:25-31. Both stories involve Jesus, his disciples, a boat, and a storm. In one, Jesus calms the storm, in the other he walks on the waves of the storm. In both cases Jesus is the premier picture of shalom. Think about the storms of your life and the times Jesus calmed your storm and the times he called you “out of the boat” as it were. How important is shalom in our lives with God and each other? How intentional am I in cultivating shalom in myself, with my spouse, my family, my friends, and at the places I work and recreate?

It’s been said that crisis does not create character - crisis reveals character. Take a few moments and make a list as to what I can do to foster, encourage, and nurture shalom before the storm hits (and they inevitably do hit). Note, George has found that the nurture of shalom is not a solo effort so be sure that your list also has things “we” can do as well.