

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 3 August 2014

No. T0844

Speaker: Mr. George Stevens

Cities of Refuge: Introduction and Kadesh

George: Welcome to *Truth for Today*. My name is George Stevens and our subject this morning is entitled, 'An Introduction to the Cities of Refuge'. The broadcast has a different format this morning, because Peter Luetchford is here in order to help me present the subject.

Peter: Hi everyone.

George: Did you recognise his voice? It's almost always the first voice you hear when you normally tune in to *Truth for Today*. Peter, perhaps you'd kick us off by reading Joshua 20.

Peter: My pleasure: "*The LORD also spake unto Joshua, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses: that the slayer that killeth any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither: and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood. And when he that doth flee unto one of those cities shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, and shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. And if the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver the slayer up into his hand; because he smote his neighbour unwittingly, and hated him not beforetime. And he shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the high priest that shall be in those days: then shall the slayer return, and come unto his own city, and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he fled. And they appointed **Kedesh** in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and **Shechem** in mount Ephraim, and **Kirjatharba, which is Hebron**, in the mountain of Judah. And on the other side Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned **Bezer** in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and **Ramoth** in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and **Golan** in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person at unawares might flee thither, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation.*"

George: Thanks Peter. I reckon that's a remarkable passage of scripture. It shows us that God is both loving, just and sovereign. What do you think?

Peter: I can see that He's loving because He provides a place of sanctuary for the fellow who has killed someone accidentally. I can also see that He's just, because the slayer will be kept safe until his case could be heard judicially. But I'm not sure about the sovereignty side.

George: The sovereignty of God comes into play when God acts in accordance to His own will. It is seen in that the person who is appointed by the slain one's family as an "*avenger of blood*" may pursue and kill the slayer before he reaches one of the cities. God, acting righteously, may have allowed that to happen.

Peter: I see; but what about the slayer's arrival at the city? I read that the elders of this city would listen to his version of the killing and they would give him protection until the trial. Is that right?

George: Yes.

Peter: So do we have an example of such an event in scripture?

George: Yes we do. In my studies I came across an example that the Lord Himself gives in Deuteronomy 19:4-6. There we find a man and his neighbour going to hew wood together. As they were chopping at the trees, the man's axe-head flew from his tool and struck his neighbour killing him. The slayer was to flee to a city of refuge because he had killed unintentionally.

Peter: That certainly makes it clear that the killing was accidental. I suppose we would call that "manslaughter" today.

George: Mmm. I don't know the legal definition of "manslaughter" but I presume it refers to the killing of a human being without involving malicious thinking beforehand. What we can say is that the death in the example was, indeed, accidental.

Peter: If my memory serves me right, Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 19 give us more information about these cities. For instance, they were established by God and they were easily accessible (often within a day or two's journey on foot). Their gates always stayed open and they were widely advertised.

George: I found the same, Peter; but did you notice what happened to the manslayer if he was found innocent of murder?

Peter: The Bible verses tell us that he would have to stay in the city until the death of the high priest (Joshua 20:6). I suppose that is another situation where the sovereignty of God applies because the time of the high priest's death was in God's hands entirely.

George: I would agree with that completely. So only when the high priest had died could the exonerated man leave the city and go home and reclaim his possession. Mmm. But what happened to him if he was found guilty of murder?

Peter: The answer to that is in Deuteronomy 19:12. It says that the elders of his city shall take him and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he might die.

George: Yes I remember that. In fact Numbers 35:25-28 tells us the whole congregation was to ensure this was done. There was also another warning. If the manslayer left the city of refuge at any other time, then the avenger of blood was at liberty to kill him.

Peter: Mmm. We know that these things in the Old Testament were written for our learning (see Romans 15:4), so how can these things be applied to us today?

George: We can find a couple of applications. The first relates to the people of Israel killing Christ. In Acts 3:17 we read that the Apostle Peter said the Jews killed Jesus in ignorance. So the people of Israel should run to a figurative city of refuge before the avenger of blood pursues and destroys them. Today, that place of refuge would be the church of the living God. It would require a Jew to repent of his sin and put his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our great high priest and lives after the power of an endless life. So the church is that figurative "city" in which he can stay in for ever in complete safety.

Peter: Aha, and what's the second application?

George: It's one that overlaps the other, but speaks of us today. In this particular picture the Avenger of Blood speaks of the devil wielding death (this was delegated to him by God).

Peter: Hebrews 2:14 would confirm that. It says: "*Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil...*"

George: Agreed. The manslayer pictures each one of us. We owed God a perfect life. When Adam sinned that life was destroyed, for the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Because we sin, we are as guilty as Adam. 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 states: "*For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*" The City of Refuge for us is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He offered a perfect life to God on our behalf. By trusting in Him we have a new life that is pleasing to God. As we are "in Christ" death cannot touch us. Because He lives, then we live safely for evermore.

Peter: If that's the case, then how do the six cities of refuge named in Joshua 20 speak of the Lord Jesus?

George: The key to that is found in the names of the cities and their meanings.

Peter: Let's remind ourselves of those names: "*And they appointed **Kedesh** in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and **Shechem** in mount Ephraim, and **Kirjatharba, which is Hebron**, in the mountain of Judah. And on the other side Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned **Bezer** in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and **Ramoth** in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and **Golan** in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh*" (Joshua 20:7-9).

George: I noted the meaning of those names earlier, Peter. The first one, Kadesh means “holiness” and speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ as the One who sanctifies. He sets us apart to God. The second is Shechem which means “shoulder” or “ridge”. This speaks of Christ as the Power of God. The third is Hebron.

Peter: I know what that means - “fellowship”.

George: Spot on. Fellowship it is. It shows Christ is the “Source of Fellowship”.

Peter: What about Bezer?

George: That means “Fortress”. It reminds us that “Christ is our Keeper”. The fifth is Ramoth which means “Heights”.

Peter: Surely that speaks of Christ in Glory.

George: I came to the same conclusion. It speaks of Christ as the “Exalted One”.

Peter: That leaves Golan.

George: I found the meaning of this name more difficult because it could mean a couple of things. It can mean “Exile”, but it can also mean “Rejoicing”.

Peter: So how can you apply those to Christ?

George: Well, the aspect of “Exile” speaks of “Christ Rejected”. The aspect of “Rejoicing” speaks of Him not only as a “Prince and Saviour” (Acts 5:31), in His victory, but as the “Bridegroom” who rejoices in His bride.

Peter: For the sake of our listeners, could you run through those names and meanings again, George.

George: Sure:

- **Kadesh** means “holiness” and speaks of Christ as the One who sanctifies;
- **Shechem** means “shoulder” or “ridge” and relates to Christ as the power of God;
- **Hebron** means “fellowship” and pinpoints Christ as the source of fellowship;
- **Bezer** means “fortress” and shows Christ as our keeper;
- **Ramoth** means “heights” and speaks of Christ exalted; and
- **Golan** may mean “exile” speaking of Christ rejected or it may mean “rejoicing” which reminds us of Him as Prince and Saviour in victory, and of his joy as the Bridegroom.

Peter: So the first is Kadesh meaning “holiness” - Christ who sanctifies?

George: Yes. That’s the one we’ll highlight in the rest of this talk. In John 17:19 Jesus Himself said: *“And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.”*

Peter: So how does sanctification fit in with holiness?

George: Broadly speaking, sanctification is the setting apart of a believer from sin and to God for His pleasure, possession, presence and purposes. And, because God is holy, the believer needs to be holy.

Peter: We read about that in 1 Peter 1:15-16. *“But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”*

George: That’s a brilliant verse! If that shows separation from sin then Revelation 1:6 shows how we’re separated to God: *“[He, Jesus,] has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father...”* Revelation 1:6.

Peter: It never ceases to amaze me that God the Father wants someone like me to serve Him.

George: When we consider that our salvation cost God the life of His only begotten Son, we realise how valuable we are to Him. We are now worshippers of the Father.

Peter: That's one way in which we please Him. Hebrews 13:16 tells us that once we are saved we can please Him by doing good and giving to others: *"But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."*

George: We have an Old Testament example of someone who pleased God. In Hebrews 11:5 we read: *"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God."*

Peter: In Genesis 5:22 we read that *"Enoch walked with God."* What an intimate relationship that must have been!

George: We're also called a *"peculiar people"* in 1 Peter 2:9.

Peter: That's an old fashioned word meaning "a people for a possession" isn't it?

George: Yes. God has bought us at great price and now we belong to Him. As such we are to live lives to His glory.

Peter: The Lord will make us holy in order to stand before His God and Father in a coming day.

George: We find that in very truth 1 Thessalonians 3:13. It follows an exhortation to abound in love for one another.

Peter: And if we live lives separated from evil then God will be pleased to use us in achieving His purposes.

George: That's clear from 2 Timothy 2:21: isn't it? *"If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."*

Peter: Who are the 'these' in that verse?

George: They are so-called Christians who hold wrong doctrine

Peter: Thank the Lord that we have the Holy Spirit to discern between good and error, but there are two kinds of sanctification, aren't there?

George: Yes. One is positional and the other is progressive.

Peter: Mmm. Can you explain those.

George: The positional sanctification is perfect because it doesn't depend on us; it depends on the work of Christ. For instance, Hebrews 10:10 states: *"...We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."*

Peter: 1 Corinthians 6:11 confirms that (for Christians) by saying: *"...But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."*

George: That verse makes it clear. Hebrews 2:11 specifies that it is Christ who sanctifies: *"For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren. Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee."*

Peter: So all believers in Christ have been set apart to God in the sense of having been made holy already!

George: Yes. That's why every true believer is called a "saint". They are classed by God as "holy ones".

Peter: Of course we can see that from 1 Corinthians 1:2: *"Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours..."* But what about progressive sanctification?

George: This is more practical and depends on our own attitudes and behaviour. In other words, since we have been made holy it's our responsibility to live lives that show that we are holy.

Peter: In His prayer to His Father in John 17, the Lord Jesus said: *"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth"* (John 17:17)

George: The Father is the sanctifier there; but the truth is the instrument of sanctification.

Peter: Doesn't the Lord Jesus use the truth to cleanse His church as well? It says in Ephesians 5:25-27: *"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."*

George: The cleansing of His church by the word is part of the present work of Christ. He is preparing the church for Glory.

Peter: If this is the way in which Christ sanctifies the church then it follows that we must read the word of God regularly if we wish to be guided into a life of holiness.

George: True. That kind of life is the one in which the nature we gained at new birth has dominance.

Peter: You mean that it wouldn't sin, but act righteously, because in Romans 6:19 it says: *"...for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness."*

George: That's right. Also it would be marked also by love and an overcoming of the world system that opposes God in its fads, fashions and opinions.

Peter: I suppose that a sanctified person would display the fruit of the Spirit in his life.

George: He would. Galatians 5:22-23 says: *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."* Notice that one aspect of that fruit is "temperance". That means a Christian is to exercise self-control at all times. God is not the author of confusion! (see 1 Corinthians 14:33).

Peter: That must mean the Christian has to abide in Christ because He Himself said: *"He who abides in Me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit"* (John 15:5).

George: That's a very practical point because to maintain communion with Christ a Christian must read the Bible, pray in its truth and live it out!

Peter: I have to confess that ongoing sanctification in my own life is a struggle. There seems to be a war between my old nature and my new Christian one.

George: It's the same for all Christians! That's why we read in 2 Corinthians 7:1: *"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."*

Peter: I once read somewhere: "If there is any point on which God's holiest saints agree, it is this: that they see more, and know more, and feel more, and do more, and repent more, and believe more - as they get on in spiritual life." (Ryle JC, *Holiness*. ISBN: 9780340656327)

George: I guess that's what is meant by *"...perfecting holiness in the fear of God"* (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Peter: We've seen how essential the word of God is in our daily cleansing and holiness; but is there sanctification without the word?

George: Some people would say so. They might quote a scripture like 1 Peter 3:1: *"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear."*

Peter: "Conversation" there means "manner of life" doesn't it?

George: Yes. In this circumstance where a wife is to witness to her husband in order to win him for the Lord, she is to live out the word rather than speak it. In other words, she has to obey it. Her life has to be an epistle of God's grace. You would say it is the Word in action.

Peter: Would you agree then that sanctification is evidence that we have been called by God to be Christians?

George: Certainly. When a person truly repents and puts his faith in Christ, then there will be a change in lifestyle. The Holy Spirit and the word of God act upon Him to make him more like Christ.

Peter: So 2 Thessalonians 2:13 would apply: *“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth...”*

George: It most definitely would, and that may be a good place to wind up this talk. Christ is the One who sanctified Himself in order that we might be sanctified through Him. We have been set apart to God through the offering of Christ’s body at Calvary. He continues to sanctify us by the washing of water by the word; but we are responsible to remain in close communion with Him through studying the truth and through prayer.

Peter: May the Lord help us to practice holiness and so glorify His name.

George: Amen.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.