

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Cities of Refuge: Ramoth and Golan

Introduction

Today we come to the fourth and final talk in our series on the cities of refuge. The first talk was on the city Kadesh whose name means holiness. This gave a picture of "Christ the sanctifier". The second talk considered the city of Shechem whose name means shoulder. This enabled a consideration of "Christ, the power of God". The third talk considered two cities, Hebron meaning fellowship and Bezer meaning fortress. This gave rise to the consideration of "Christ as the source of communion" and "Christ as our defender and keeper". Today we will consider the last two cities, Ramoth in Gilead and Golan.

Before we look in detail at the two cities, considering their meaning and how those features allow us to appreciate our Lord Jesus Christ and various aspects of His greatness, let us first read from Joshua 20:8 where the two cities are mentioned: *"And on the other side of the Jordan, by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness on the plain, from the tribe of Reuben, **Ramoth in Gilead**, from the tribe of Gad, and **Golan** in Bashan, from the tribe of Manasseh."* In Joshua 20:8 we have mentioned the two cities under consideration and the tribes of Israel in whose territory the cities were found. As more than one city was called Ramoth, this city of refuge is called Ramoth in Gilead.

Background

Let us remind ourselves about the cities of refuge. There were six cities, three designated on the east side of the river Jordan and three on the west side of the river. The cities were eventually assigned to the tribe of Levi along with many other cities out of each of the twelve tribes. These six cities had a special function of being both a place of refuge as well as being cities which were occupied by members of the tribe of Levi. Refuge cities were a place of safety for anyone who had accidentally killed another person (Numbers 35:11-15). The manslayer was safe as long as he reached the city and his story about the accident turned out to be true. If such a person left the city he placed himself in danger of being killed by a member of the family of the dead person (Numbers 35:29). The crime, though accidental, was only cleared by the death of the high priest (Numbers 35:28). Then the person was free to return home and no vengeance could be taken up. This kind of situation is still very much apparent in some countries today. During the middle ages in our own country the local 'church' was considered a place of sanctuary. Anyone accused of a crime, especially murder, could flee to a 'church' and as long as they reached the door handle and clung to it they were afforded sanctuary until the crime was investigated. The seeking of sanctuary was certainly in operation by 600 AD but was finally abolished by James I in 1623 AD.

Ramoth in Gilead

As mentioned earlier, Ramoth is a city in the territory of the tribe of Gad. Genesis 30 provides the details of the birth of Gad and the intrigues of family life that surrounded his birth. The meaning of the name Gad is 'a troop, more to come'. Gilead apparently is a rocky mountainous area and is in keeping with the meaning of Ramoth, which is 'heights'. As a place of refuge, for a manslayer, it was probably a difficult and hard journey for anyone fleeing for his life. However, as a vantage point, it would no doubt give an excellent view of the surrounding countryside.

Christ the glorified man

As those who have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, we have found Him to be our refuge from judgement (See Romans 8:1). Our consideration of Christ in connection with this lofty city is 'Christ the glorified man'. Therefore, in our thoughts we have moved beyond the cross, resurrection and ascension which are accomplished events. In Romans 6:4 we have this statement, *"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."* It is the phrase *"as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father"* that I want to draw your attention to. Before the cross, the Lord Jesus spoke to His Father in that He had glorified the Father. This was the Lord Jesus in prayer and in anticipation of the cross being completed. John 17:4 states, *"I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do."* The Lord Jesus then followed that statement in John 17:5 with, *"And now, O*

Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." In response to this, the Father raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. However, it is more than resurrection; it includes ascension to the place of heavenly glory at the Father's right hand. In Mark 16:19 we have stated, *"So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God."* This is the place that our Lord Jesus Christ now occupies. In Hebrews 10:12, we have the clear statement that Jesus has paid the full price at the cross, *"after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God."* Peter in his preaching in Acts 3:13 states, *"The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go."* Also John 17:24 states, *"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."* The truth that Jesus is glorified and sitting at God's right hand is one of the major points of the Gospel. A risen, living and glorified Saviour!

Offices that Christ holds

As to the various "Offices" that our Lord Jesus Christ holds, these can be considered as follows, Prophet (Apostle), Priest, King and Judge.

The Lord Jesus as Prophet

A prophet was someone sent by God with a message for the people. This was the normal way in which God communicated with individuals and nations, whether Jew or Gentile. Eventually, in the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4), God sent His Son. This links with the prophetic prediction of Moses as found in Deuteronomy 18:15, *"The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear"*. Hebrews 3:1 refers to our Lord Jesus as the Apostle (prophet), which means 'sent one', and He has fully represented God and communicated God's mind while here in this world and later through His servants the apostles. This communication is recorded for us in the Scriptures. After the Lord Jesus went back to glory prophets, such as Peter, Paul and others, communicated and documented God's word. These prophets were divinely guided by the Holy Spirit and we have recorded in 2 Timothy 3:16 that *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God."*

The Lord Jesus as Priest

What is the Lord Jesus doing today? We know we have a risen Saviour seated in the heavens at the Father's right hand. In the book of Hebrews we are introduced to an Old Testament character call Melchizedec. Melchizedec first arrives on the pages of scripture in Genesis 14 when he comes to the assistance of Abram, providing sustenance after his battle with, and the defeat of, five kings with their armies. He is also presented as greater than Abram in that Abram is blessed by him. Melchizedec is next referred to in the Messianic Psalm 110 which shows that the Messiah belongs to a new order of priests, the order of Melchizedec. However, it is in Hebrews 5-7, that our Lord Jesus is identified fully with this new priestly order, someone who is both priest and king. In Hebrews 7:1-4 we read, *"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated 'king of righteousness,' and then also king of Salem, meaning 'king of peace,' without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually. Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils."* In a coming day, the world will see and experience the twin features of the Lord of glory as both King of peace and King of righteousness. We do not read of Melchizedec having any beginning or any end and this presentation of him is to highlight what is true of God's Son, Jesus. The priesthood of Christ does not change; He ever lives and this is in contrast to the priesthood of Aaron. In the Aaronic priesthood priest succeeded priest, a constant change. Today, Christ is in heaven to maintain His people before the throne of God, representing them there, and because of His experience here He sympathises and supports His people in the trials and temptations through which they go. John in his first epistle expands on this supportive role of Christ. 1 John 1:9 states, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* Again in 1 John 2:1, *"If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."* Here we find the restoring work of Christ and He is the One who pleads our cause before the Father. It is ever Christ's intention that His redeemed people are maintained in holy fellowship with both the Father and Himself, see 1 John 1:3.

The Lord Jesus as King

As King, we have a number of references in the New Testament which comprehensively designate the Lord Jesus Christ as King in waiting. We will consider His rejection and absence with the next city of refuge, Golan. The Lord Jesus Christ at the moment is absent in the heavens and only awaits the moment of His coming again. This coming will be radically different from the last occasion as the babe of Bethlehem's manger. Revelation 19:11-21 clearly describes the nature of His coming, *"Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and*

on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, 'Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.' And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh." This is a vivid picture of the destruction of all who oppose Christ. It is also a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ as the victorious warrior King. This will be the moment when God ushers in a world reign of Christ where peace will be real, there will be no wars and there will be food in abundance for everyone in the whole world. This will be the kingdom of righteousness and then will be fulfilled what the angel said to the shepherds on the first Christmas morning, Luke 2:14, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

The Lord Jesus as the Judge

There is an office which the Lord Jesus holds but will not be seen until a future day. There are two aspects to this office. First, the Lord Jesus will judge believers and second He will judge unbelievers. In 2 Corinthians 5:6-11, Paul writes about the time when we leave this earthly scene and in heaven we will have a new body. Paul stresses the need to live godly lives that please our Lord in heaven. The reason for this is, that in the heavenly scene our lives will be assessed by our Lord as 2 Corinthians 5:10 states, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." There are many honours, or crowns, to be given by the Lord. But if we fail Him in our lives then we will have no honours! Here is a list of scriptures where crowns are mentioned for various situations of faithfulness to Christ today.

- 1 Corinthians 9:24-25: "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, **but we for an imperishable crown.**"
- 2 Timothy 4:8: "Finally, there is laid up for me the **crown of righteousness**, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."
- James 1:12: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the **crown of life** which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."
- 1 Peter 5:4: "... and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the **crown of glory** that does not fade away."
- Revelation 2:10: "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the **crown of life.**"

The salvation of believers is not in question here, only their lives. Their salvation was secured by the Lord Jesus at the cross of Calvary.

The other act of judgment by our Lord Jesus Christ is at the end of time when unbelievers are judged and cast into the lake of fire for eternal punishment, read Revelation 20:11-15. This is a very serious and sobering scripture as we see their destiny hangs on whether their names are in the book of life or not. Life is only obtainable through faith in Christ.

Our spiritual blessings

In Ephesians 1:3 we are reminded that we "have been blessed with every spiritual blessing...". These spiritual blessings are heavenly in character but should produce a tangible activity in the lives of saints. These are the good works for which we have been created in Christ Jesus, see Ephesians 2:10. Ephesians 1:4-14 contain references to spiritual blessings which belong to believers now.

Golan

The city of Golan is in the territory of the tribe of Manasseh. There are two possible meanings connected to the name Golan, "exile" and "joy or rejoicing". We can think of our Lord Jesus as the rejected King waiting to take up His kingdom - a King in exile. His Kingship is primarily connected with Israel and the nations. But in relation to joy we can also consider Christ as the bridegroom in relation to His church, the heavenly bride.

Christ the rejected King

As King we have already seen a number of references in the New Testament which comprehensively designate the Lord Jesus Christ as King in waiting. He came as the one who was born King, Matthew 2:2. In Matthew 21:5 the cry went out to the people, "*Behold, your King is coming to you.*" 1 Timothy 1:17 states, "*Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.*" This refers to our Lord Jesus as the eternal King with all the attributes of God. But at the cross the Jewish nation rejected their Messiah and King as it states in John 19:15, "*But they cried out, 'Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar!'"* This state of rejection still exists today as it has done throughout the whole church period. There will be no change to the Lord's Kingship until He comes to establish His kingdom after both the rapture of the church and the seven years of tribulation or judgment that will come upon this world.

Christ the Bridegroom

As the rapture is a turning point in God's dealings with this world, it will also usher in a new event in heaven. The church will embark on a fuller relationship with Christ. Ephesians 5 likens the affections of a husband for his wife to the affections of Christ for His church. Christ's sacrifice at the cross was the commencement of a chain of events which culminates in the church being presented gloriously in heaven (Ephesians 5:25-27). In Revelation 19:1-10 we have reference to the marriage of the Lamb, the scene is in heaven and the bride is ready. The bride is made ready on account of her place now in glory and in recognition of the righteous acts or deeds that saints have accomplished through grace from Pentecost to the rapture. The eternal union completed, we see in Revelation 21:1-27 the bride portrayed as the heavenly Jerusalem coming down out of heaven to be involved in the administration of the kingdom with Christ. The final reference to consider is in Revelation 22. We now come back to the present day and Revelation 22:17 states, "*And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.*" Every believer who has their affections moved to see by faith Christ glorified, desires two things: the rapture when we will be caught up into His presence and the day of His glorious kingdom reign. The Lord's reign will right the wrongs of His rejection.

Conclusion

As we draw to a close of today's talk and the close of the series, let me remind you of the cities of refuge and the meaning of their names which we have associated with blessings that are found in Christ:

- **Kadesh**, holiness, Christ the sanctifier;
- **Shechem**, shoulder, Christ the power of God;
- **Hebron**, fellowship, Christ the source of communion;
- **Bezer**, fortress, Christ our defender and keeper;
- **Ramoth**, heights, Christ the glorified man; and
- **Golan**, exile and joy, Christ the rejected king and the Bridegroom.

Thank you for listening and the Lord bless you today.

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