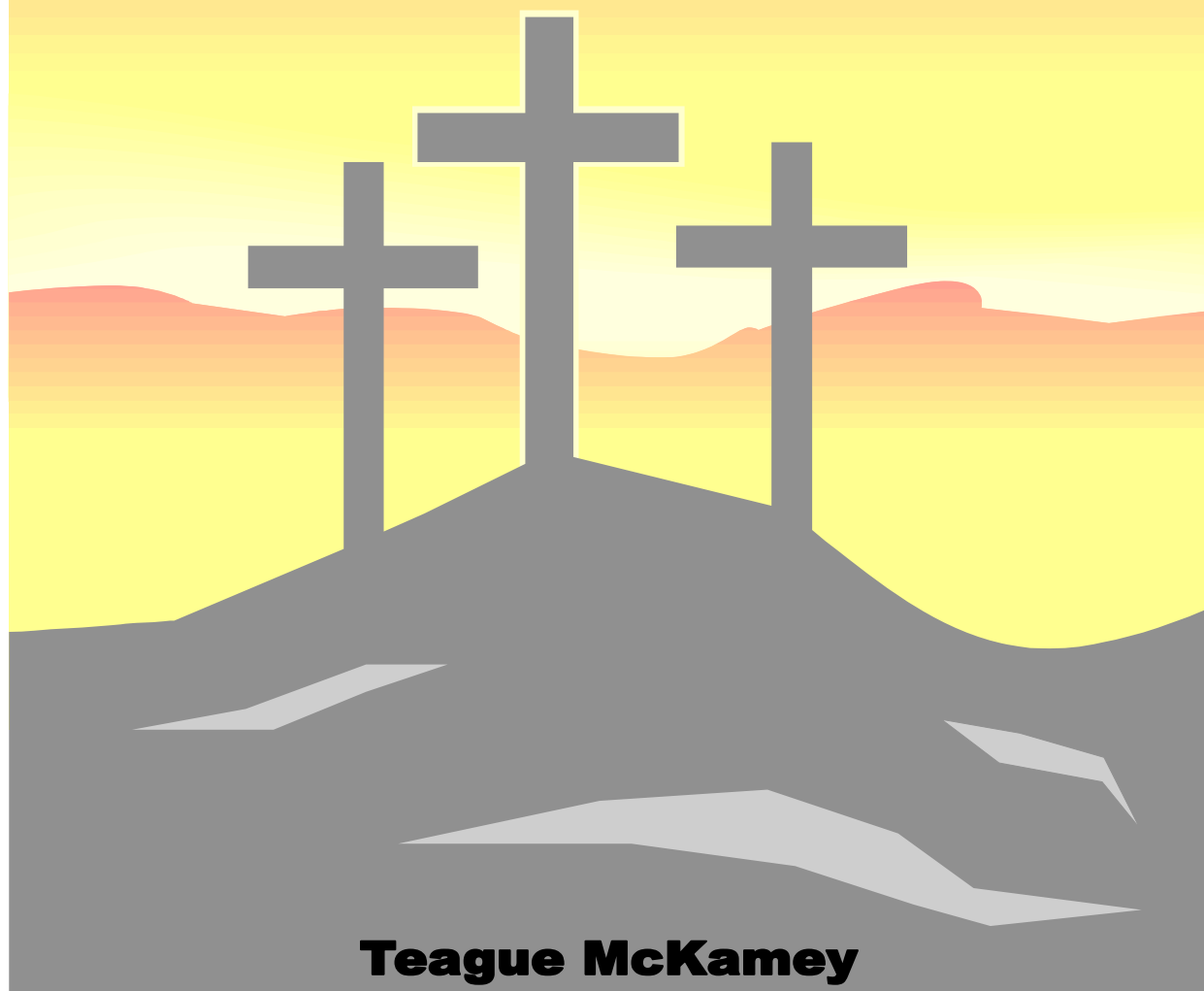


The Spirit of Prophecy Series

Habbakuk:

The Righteous Will Live by Faith



Teague McKamey

“He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27).

“He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day’” (Luke 24:44-46).

“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days, he has spoken to us in his Son” (Hebrews. 1:1, 2).

“For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:17-19).

The Spirit of Prophecy

Introduction

Prophecy...

As the word hangs there in the ether, what comes to mind? A hairy man in burlap, pointing his finger and shouting? A one world government? The end of the world? For many of us, the only thing we definitely associate with prophecy is a big question mark. Yet, as the scriptures on the preceding page show, the New Testament contains some clear statements about prophecy. Jesus taught that all scripture, prophecy included, found its fulfillment in Himself. While every prophecy has an historical fulfillment relating to the circumstances in which it is given, its full meaning is only realized in the person and work of Christ. This holds true even of prophecies whose fulfillment we still await.

The “end times” seem to be a continual sources of curiosity, intrigue, and confusion among Christians. Mountains of books—fiction and non-fiction—have been written on the subject. Movies have been made and remade. Every teacher worth his salt has weighed in. Theologians and fanatics alike have fastidiously woven scripture and world events into timelines. What has been lost in all of this is Jesus. Many have searched the prophets more diligently for the antichrist than for Christ, though the prophets themselves did not do this (1 Peter 1:10, 11). Wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, pestilence, and persecution are clues in a cosmic “who-dunnit” instead of being seen for what they are: signs of *His coming* (Matt. 24:3-14). When Christ ceases to be the center and interpretation of the end-times, it is little wonder that there is so much confusion about them among believers.

To put this in theological terms, the chief value of prophecy lies in its Christology, not its eschatology. Jesus said the law and the prophets all hang on two commandments: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37-40). “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:16). Prophecy has no purpose other than to draw us into Christ and to make us living sacrifices in His image (Rom. 12:1, 2). If our treatment of prophecy does not compel us to live for Jesus instead of ourselves, we may fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, but, not having love, will be nothing in the sight of God (2 Cor. 5:15; 1 Cor. 13:2).

The “Spirit of Prophecy” series is based on Revelation 19:10—“For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” The aim of this series is two fold: 1) To discover the testimony of Jesus in the words of the prophets; 2) By discovering the testimony of Jesus, to rescue the prophetic books from the carnal and even fantastical interpretations which they have sometimes been subjected. Restoring the testimony of Jesus to the prophets also allows prophetic voices to fulfill their original ministry. God spoke through prophets to deal with the hearts of His people, to heal their unfaithfulness, to draw them back to Himself so that they might worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). This ministry is largely lost when prophecy is treated as a way to decode current events. Only by lifting up Jesus will men be drawn to God (John 12:32, 33).

This is not to say that the interpretations offered here are the only ones possible. Hopefully, the ways of seeing Jesus in the prophets are as endless as God Himself. But if this series can cause the reader to think differently about the prophets, to search them for Jesus instead of end-times timelines, then it will have accomplished its purpose.

Habakkuk: The Righteous Will Live by Faith

1:1-4

When Habakkuk begins we find the prophet giving God a piece of his mind. Habakkuk sees no fruit. All he can see among the people of God is violence, injustice, strife, and wrongdoing. But what really ticks him off is that the Lord seems unresponsive, even tolerant of the evil surrounding him. “Therefore,” he concludes angrily, “the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails” (Hab. 1:4). The failure of God’s law to produce the fruit of righteousness leaves Habakkuk dismayed and frustrated.

1:5-2:1

After Habakkuk is finished bending God’s ear, God attempts a rebuttal. He has no need to defend Himself, nor is He in the habit of doing so. But He is more than willing to talk things out with Habakkuk because He loves His child. It is a privileged relationship to be His disciple: “He did not say anything to [the crowds] without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything” (Mk. 4:34).

God assures Habakkuk that He will punish sin and uphold justice by sending Babylon to invade Judah (Hab. 1:6). In this, God is baiting Habakkuk a little. He knows Habakkuk will not be satisfied with this answer, and, true to form, he is not. Initially, he extols God for promising to discipline his people, but there is almost a whiff of sarcasm when Habakkuk says, “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?” (Hab. 1:13). In other words, “Great solution, God. Punish those who are merely wayward by giving godless pagans free reign.” For Habakkuk, God’s cure is worse than Judah’s disease. Sure, the Israelites are way off track. But what justice is there in letting them be conquered by a nation who is even more evil?

But again, the Lord is no fool. He knows Habakkuk’s heart and is drawing it out. He knows that Habakkuk’s dilemma has little to do with the sins of Judah or the godlessness of Babylon. It has to do with Habakkuk’s own point of view. Habakkuk has his mind set on earthly things. He is searching for justice and righteousness in the world and is outraged because he can’t find it. By dialoguing with him, God is trying to help Habakkuk realize the futility of his search. God knows that Habakkuk must look elsewhere if he wishes to find what he seeks.

Habakkuk only sees the letter of the law. Consequently, he is acutely conscious of the sin all around him (Rom. 3:20). But God would open his eyes—like David—so he can behold things more wondrous than law (Ps. 119:18). Habakkuk wants fruit. God wants faith. Habakkuk wants God to act, to take charge of the world. God wants Habakkuk to realize His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). Habakkuk is walking in the flesh. God would have him walk in the spirit (Gal. 5:25). It would seem God and His prophet are at an impasse, unable to reconcile their disparate points of view.

2:2-20

Clearly, Habakkuk's own viewpoint has left him blind. He needs a revelation, and the Lord is glad to accommodate him:

Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay (Hab. 2:2, 3).

The revelation Habakkuk receives concerns the coming judgment and humbling of Babylon. God promises Babylon will be recompensed for her greed and arrogance. They will not go unpunished for oppressing Israel, for scripture says to God's people, "whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye" (Zech. 2:8). A day of justice is coming, a day when God's righteousness will be upheld. Until that day, Habakkuk must walk in patience and faith. He must fix his eyes, not on the unrighteousness he sees, but on the promise of a righteousness he can't see (2 Cor. 4:18).

Babylon did in fact fall to the Medes and Persians in a single night (Dan. 5:30). But Habakkuk's revelation means more than its historical and literal fulfillment. From various passages we learn that Babylon is the origin and head of all human government, the ruler of the kings of the earth (Gen. 10:10; Dan. 2:37, 38; Rev. 17:18). Habakkuk says, "He gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples (Hab. 2:5). Prophetically, Babylon represents all nations and the willful independence that characterizes them. Judgment must begin with the house of God, and the Lord must purify His people through discipline (as seen in Habakkuk chapter 1), but what Habakkuk witnesses in this revelation is nothing less than the destruction of the kingdom of man.

Habakkuk's eyes are now opened to a startling truth: God has appointed a time when He will execute justice and bring forth the fruit of righteousness. Man's anger will not achieve it, nor will prophetic ministry or law. "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith" (Rom. 1:17). Now Habakkuk understands God's master plan, that "in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished" because He always intended to present His Messiah "as a sacrifice of atonement" (Rom. 3:25, 26). Justice for all times and peoples and places would be gathered into the cross and carried out in one devastating blow. For God does not judge, as Habakkuk does, one nation a little better and one a little worse. Jew and Babylonian alike "are all under sin" (Rom. 3:9). Righteousness, then, cannot be found in this world at all but only comes "through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (Rom. 3:22). "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18). The revelation, then, that God gives to Habakkuk is, "the righteous will live by faith (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17).

3:1-19

Habakkuk's response to this revelation is worship. Having come to share God's thoughts, His heart, and His person, he exalts the Lord (this time, without the whiff of sarcasm). He no longer demands partial justice here and now, in the flesh: "I will wait patiently for the day of calamity," the day which came at the cross (Hab. 3:16). He no longer expects the world or those around him to be fruitful: "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the

vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food...yet I will rejoice in God my Savior” (Hab. 3:17, 18). Instead of judging people based on what they produce, he rejoices in God his Savior, in the “righteousness that comes from God and is by faith” (Php. 3:9). Understanding the righteousness that is by faith liberates Habakkuk from walking in the flesh and enables him to walk in the spirit: “The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights” (Hab. 3:19).

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The word is not just knowledge about God. Rather, as John 1:1 says, "the Word was God." It is hoped that the reader will not just receive knowledge or teaching about God but God Himself. "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent"

(John 17:3).

Contact us:

thewordwasgod@excite.com