

Habakkuk's Two Tables #22

PART TWO: LINE UPON LINE

THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

PAUL

“But before the coming of Christ, important developments in the religious world, foretold in prophecy, were to take place. The apostle declared: ‘Be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for **that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.**’

“Paul’s words were not to be misinterpreted. It was not to be taught that he, by special revelation, had warned the Thessalonians of the immediate coming of Christ. Such a position would cause confusion of faith; for disappointment often leads to unbelief. The apostle therefore cautioned the brethren to receive no such message as coming from him, and he proceeded to emphasize the fact that **the papal power, so clearly described by the prophet Daniel, was yet to rise and wage war against God’s people. Until this power should have performed its deadly and blasphemous work,** it would be in vain for the church to look for the coming of their Lord. ‘Remember ye not,’ Paul inquired, ‘that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?’

“Terrible were the trials that were to beset the true church. **Even at the time when the apostle was writing, the ‘mystery of iniquity’ had already begun to work.** The developments that were to take place in the future were to be ‘after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish.’

“Especially solemn is the apostle’s statement regarding those who should refuse to receive ‘the love of the truth.’ ‘For this cause,’ he declared of all who should deliberately reject the messages of truth, ‘**God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.**’ Men cannot with impunity reject the warnings that God in mercy sends them. From those who persist in turning from these warnings, God withdraws His Spirit, leaving them to the deceptions that they love.” *Acts of the Apostles*, 265–266.

SO CLEARLY DESCRIBED BY THE PROPHET DANIEL

“Jesus declared to the listening disciples the judgments that were to fall upon apostate Israel, and especially the retributive vengeance that would come upon them for their rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah. Unmistakable signs would precede the awful climax. The dreaded hour would come suddenly and swiftly. And the Saviour warned His followers: ‘When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, **spoken of by Daniel the prophet**, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) then let them which be in Judea **flee into the mountains.**’ Matthew 24:15, 16; Luke 21:20, 21. **When the idolatrous standards of the Romans should be set up in the holy ground**, which extended some furlongs outside the city walls, then the followers of Christ were to find safety in flight. **When the warning sign should be seen, those who would escape must make no delay.** . . .

“Not one Christian perished in the destruction of Jerusalem. Christ had given His disciples warning, and all who believed His words watched for the promised sign. . . . Without delay they fled to a place of safety—the city of Pella, in the land of Perea, beyond Jordan.” *The Great Controversy*, 25, 30.

“It is no time now for God’s people to be fixing their affections or laying up their treasure in the world. The time is not far distant, when, like the early disciples, we shall be forced to seek a refuge in desolate and solitary places. As **the siege of Jerusalem** by the Roman armies was **the signal** for flight to the Judean Christians, **so the assumption of power on the part of our nation in the decree enforcing the papal sabbath will be a warning to us.** It will then be time to leave the large cities, preparatory to leaving the smaller ones for retired homes in secluded places among the mountains.” *Testimonies*, volume 5, 464.

And the king shall do according to his will; and **he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods**, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done. Daniel 11:36.

538—THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so **that he as God sitteth in the temple of God**, showing himself that he is God. 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

FLEE TO THE MOUNTAINS

And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly **into the wilderness**, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. Revelation 12:14.

JERUSALEM TRAMPLED DOWN

But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty *and* two months. And I will give *power* unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred *and* threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. Revelation 11:2–3.

WELL IT WOULD BE

“It required a desperate struggle for those who would be faithful to stand firm against the **deceptions and abominations** which were **disguised in sacerdotal garments and introduced into the church**. The **Bible was not accepted as the standard of faith**. The doctrine of religious freedom was termed heresy, and its upholders were hated and proscribed.

“After a long and severe conflict, the faithful few decided to dissolve all union with the apostate church if she still refused to free herself from falsehood and idolatry. They saw that **separation was an absolute necessity if they would obey the word of God**. They dared not tolerate errors fatal to their own souls, and set an example which would imperil the faith of their children and children’s children. To secure peace and unity they were ready to make any concession consistent with fidelity to God; but they felt that even peace would be too dearly purchased at the sacrifice of principle. **If unity could be secured only by the compromise of truth and righteousness, then let there be difference, and even war**.

“**Well would it be for the church and the world if the principles that actuated those steadfast souls were revived in the hearts of God’s professed people**. There is an alarming indifference in regard to the doctrines which are the pillars of the Christian faith. The opinion is gaining ground, that, after all, these are not of vital importance. This degeneracy is strengthening the hands of the agents of Satan, so that false theories and fatal delusions which the faithful in ages past imperiled their lives to resist and expose, are now regarded with favor by thousands who claim to be followers of Christ.” *The Great Controversy*, 42–46.

EPHESUS, SMYRNA, PERGAMOS AND THYATIRA

“It should be remembered that, as the experience of **Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamos, will be repeated in the last church** before the second coming of Christ, so the history of **Thyatira** will have its counterpart in the last generation.” Stephen N. Haskell, *Story of the Seer of Patmos*, 69.

EPHESUS & PHILADELPHIA

“He applied the test, but all pointed forward to the year 1843 as the time when the world must welcome its Saviour. **The condition of the people at the first advent of Christ was now repeated**.” Stephen N. Haskell, *Story of the Seer of Patmos*, 75.

PERGAMOS & SARDIS

“There was a time in the history of **Pergamos**, when Christianity thought Paganism was dead; but in reality, the religion which was apparently vanquished, had conquered. Paganism baptized, stepped into the church. **In the days of Sardis this history was repeated**.” Stephen N. Haskell, *Story of the Seer of Patmos*, 75, 76.

LAODICEA

“Upon this last church—the remnant,—shine **the accumulated rays of all past ages**.” Stephen N. Haskell, *Story of the Seer of Patmos*, 69.

STRONG DELUSION

“The second angel’s message of Revelation 14 was first preached in the summer of 1844, and it then had a more direct application to the churches of the United States, where the warning of the judgment had been most widely proclaimed and most generally rejected, and where the declension in the churches had been most rapid. But **the message of the second angel did not reach its complete fulfillment in 1844**. The churches then **experienced a moral fall**, in consequence of their refusal of the light of the advent message; but **that fall was not complete**. As they have continued to reject the special truths for this time they have fallen lower and lower. Not yet, however, can it be said that ‘Babylon is fallen, . . . because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.’ She has not yet made all nations do this. The spirit of world conforming and indifference to the testing truths for our time exists and has been gaining ground in churches of the Protestant faith in all the countries of Christendom; **and these churches are included in the solemn and terrible denunciation of the second angel**. But the work of apostasy has not yet reached its culmination.

“The Bible declares that **before the coming of the Lord**, Satan will work ‘with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness;’ and they that ‘received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved,’ will be left to receive ‘strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.’ 2 Thessalonians 2:9–11. **Not until this condition** shall be reached, **and** the union of the church with the world shall be fully accomplished throughout Christendom, will the fall of Babylon be complete. **The change is a progressive one**, and the perfect fulfillment of Revelation 14:8 **is yet future**.

“Notwithstanding the spiritual darkness and alienation from God that exist in **the churches which constitute Babylon**, the great body of Christ’s true followers are still to be found in their communion. There are many of these who have never seen the special truths for this time. Not a few are dissatisfied with their present condition and are longing for clearer light. They look in vain for **the image of Christ in the churches with which they are connected**. As these bodies depart further and further from the truth, and ally themselves more closely with the world, **the difference between the two classes will widen**, and **it will finally result in separation**. The time will come when those who love God supremely can no longer remain in connection with such as are ‘lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.’

“Revelation 18 points to the time **when**, as the result of rejecting the threefold warning of Revelation 14:6–12, **the church** will have fully reached the condition foretold by the second angel, and **the people of God still in Babylon** will be called upon to separate from her communion. This message is the last that will ever be given to the world; and it will accomplish its work. **When** those that ‘believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness’ (**2 Thessalonians 2:12**), shall be left to receive strong delusion and to believe a lie, **then** the light of truth will shine upon all whose hearts are open to receive it, and all the children of the Lord that remain in Babylon will heed the call: ‘Come out of her, My people’ (Revelation 18:4).” *The Great Controversy*, 389–390.

“It is a fearful thing to treat lightly the truth which has convinced our understanding and touched our hearts. We cannot with impunity reject the warnings which God in mercy sends us. A message was sent from heaven to the world in Noah’s day, and the salvation of men depended upon the manner in which they treated that message. Because they rejected the warning, the Spirit of God was withdrawn from the sinful race, and they perished in the waters of the flood. In the time of Abraham, mercy ceased to plead with the guilty inhabitants of Sodom, and all but Lot with his wife and two daughters were consumed by the fire sent down from heaven. So in the days of Christ. The Son of God declared to the unbelieving Jews of that generation, ‘Your house is left unto you desolate.’ **Looking down to the last days**, the same infinite power declares, concerning those who ‘received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved,’ ‘For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.’ **As they reject the teachings of His Word, God withdraws His Spirit, and leaves them to the deceptions which they love.**” *Early Writings*, 46.

GREAT LIGHT AND OPPORTUNITIES

“‘A new heart will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you.’ I believe with all my heart that the Spirit of God is being withdrawn from the world, and **those who have had great light and opportunities and have not improved them, will be the first to be left.** They have grieved away the Spirit of God. The present activity of Satan in working upon hearts, and upon churches and nations should startle every student of prophecy. The end is near. Let our churches arise. Let the converting power of God be experienced in the heart of the individual members, and then we shall see the deep moving of the Spirit of God. Mere forgiveness of sin is not the sole result of the death of Jesus. He made the infinite sacrifice not only that sin might be removed, but that human nature might be restored, rebeautified, reconstructed from its ruins, and made fit for the presence of God.” *Selected Messages*, book 3, 154.

THE FAITHFUL CITY

“One who sees beneath the surface, who reads the hearts of all men, says of **those who have had great light**: ‘They are not afflicted and astonished because of their moral and spiritual condition.’ Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. **I also will choose their delusions**, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before Mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not.’ **‘God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie,’ because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved,’ ‘but had pleasure in unrighteousness.’** **Isaiah 66:3, 4; 2 Thessalonians 2:11, 10, 12.**

“The heavenly Teacher inquired: ‘What stronger delusion can beguile the mind than the pretense that **you are building on the right foundation** and that God accepts your works, when in reality you are working out many things according to worldly policy and are sinning against Jehovah? Oh, it is a great deception, a fascinating delusion, that

takes possession of minds when **men who have once known the truth**, mistake the form of godliness for the spirit and power thereof; when they suppose that they are rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing, while in reality they are in need of everything.’

“God has not changed toward His faithful servants who are keeping their garments spotless. **But many are crying, ‘Peace and safety,’ while sudden destruction is coming upon them.** Unless there is thorough repentance, unless men humble their hearts by confession and receive the truth as it is in Jesus, they will never enter heaven. When purification shall take place in our ranks, we shall no longer rest at ease, boasting of being rich and increased with goods, in need of nothing.

“Who can truthfully say: ‘Our gold is tried in the fire; our garments are unspotted by the world’? I saw our Instructor pointing to the garments of so-called righteousness. Stripping them off, He laid bare the defilement beneath. Then He said to me: ‘Can you not see how they have pretentiously covered up their defilement and rottenness of character? **‘How is the faithful city become an harlot!’** My Father’s house is made a house of merchandise, a place whence the divine presence and glory have departed! For this cause there is weakness, and strength is lacking.” *Testimonies*, volume 8, 249–250.

CAPERNAUM

“One matter burdens my soul: The great lack of the love of God, which has been lost through continued resistance of light and truth, and the influence of those who have been engaged in active labor, who, in the face of evidence piled upon evidence, have exerted an influence to counteract the work of the message God has sent. **I point them to the Jewish nation and ask, Must we leave our brethren to pass over the same path of blind resistance, till the very end of probation?** If ever a people needed true and faithful watchmen, who will not hold their peace, who will cry day and night, sounding the warnings God has given, **it is Seventh-day Adventists. Those who have had great light, blessed opportunities, who, like Capernaum, have been exalted to heaven in point of privilege,** shall they by non-improvement be left to darkness corresponding to the greatness of the light given?

“I wish to plead with our brethren who shall assemble at the General Conference to heed the message given to the Laodiceans. What a condition of blindness is theirs! This subject has been brought to your notice **again and again**, but your dissatisfaction with your spiritual condition has not been deep and painful enough to work reform. ‘Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.’ The guilt of self-deception is upon our churches. **The religious life of many is a lie.**” *Manuscript Releases*, volume 16, 106–107.

HIS OWN CITY

“At Capernaum Jesus dwelt in the intervals of His journeys to and fro, and it came to be known as ‘His own city.’ It was on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and near the borders of the beautiful plain of Gennesaret, if not actually upon it.” *The Desire of Ages*, 252.

GREAT LIGHT & OPPORTUNITY DEFINED

“Among the professed children of God, how little patience has been manifested, how many bitter words have been spoken, how much denunciation has been uttered against those not of our faith. Many have looked upon those belonging to other churches as great sinners, when the Lord does not thus regard them. Those who look thus upon the members of other churches, have need to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God. Those whom they condemn may have had but little light, few opportunities and privileges. If they had had the light that many of the members of our churches have had, they might have advanced at a far greater rate, and have better represented their faith to the world. Of those who boast of their light, and yet fail to walk in it, Christ says, ‘But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, **Capernaum [Seventh-day Adventists, who have had great light]**, which art exalted unto heaven [**in point of privilege**], shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.’ At that time Jesus answered and said, ‘I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent [in their own estimation], and hast revealed them unto babes.’

“And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the Lord, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; **therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight,** as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim.’

“The Lord has established among us institutions of great importance, and they are to be managed, not as worldly institutions are managed, but after God’s order. They are to be managed with an eye single to his glory, that by all means perishing souls may be saved. To the people of God the testimonies of the Spirit have come, and yet many have not taken heed to reproofs, warnings, and counsels.

“Here now this, **O foolish people,** and without **understanding;** which have **eyes, and see not;** which have **ears, and hear not:** fear ye not me saith the Lord: **will ye not tremble at my presence,** which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual degree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it? but this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone. Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest. **Your iniquities have turned away these things,** and your sins have withholden good things from you. . . . They judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge. Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord; **shall not my soul be revenged on such a nation as this?**’

“Shall the Lord be compelled to say, ‘Pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee’? ‘Therefore the showers have been withholden, and there hath been no latter rain. . . . Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou art the guide of my youth?’

“Will not those to whom have been committed **the treasures of truth**, consider the superior advantages of **light and privilege** that have been purchased for us by the sacrifice of the Son of God on Calvary’s cross? **We are to be judged by the light that has been given us, and we can find no excuse by which to extenuate our course.** The Way, the Truth, and the Life has been set before us. Many seek to excuse themselves by saying, ‘You must not judge me by some weak trait of character, but consider my character as a whole.’ We always feel deep pain at heart when the sinner seeks to apologize for his sin, to smooth it over, and fails to realize the danger of cherishing one un-Christlike attribute of character. We are to place our will on the side of the Lord’s will, and firmly determine that by his grace we will be free from sin. Sin is the transgression of the law, and it is not the magnitude of the action in iniquity that stamps it as sin. Adam and Eve were prohibited from eating of the tree of good and evil. **The test was a slight one, but the act of disobedience to God was the transgression of his law.**

“The little sins that men think are of so trivial a character that on their account they will not be brought into condemnation, **are very offensive in the sight of God.** Says one, ‘You are too severe, a man must be allowed these little defects of character.’ Let us hear the words of Christ. He says, ‘Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.’ People venture to commit sins that are grievous in the sight of God, and think that they are not to be called to task for them, because they say they are due to nervousness, to a peculiar temperament; but this is simply soothing the conscience, and crying, ‘Peace, peace, when there is no peace.’ **Sin is sin, and it is the delusion of Satan to look upon it in any other light than that it is grievous.**

“We may flatter ourselves that we are free from many things of which others are guilty; but if we have some strong points of character, and but one weak point, there is yet a communion between sin and the soul. The heart is divided in its service, and says, ‘Some of self and some of thee.’ The child of God must search out the sin which he has petted and indulged himself in, and permit God to cut it out of his heart. He must overcome that one sin; for it is not a trifling matter in the sight of God.

“One says, ‘I am not the least jealous, but then I do get provoked and say mean things, although I am always sorry after giving way to temper.’ Another says, ‘I have this fault or that, but then I just despise such and such meanness as is manifested by a certain person of my acquaintance.’ The Lord has not given us a list of graded sins, so that we may reckon some as of little consequence, and say that they will do but little harm, while others are of greater magnitude and will do much harm. A chain is no stronger than is its weakest link. We might pronounce such a chain good on the whole, but if one link is weak, the chain cannot be depended on. The work of overcoming is to be the study of every soul who enters the kingdom of God. That impatient word quivering on your lips must be left unspoken. That thought that your character is not rightly estimated must be put from you; for it weakens your influence, and works out the sure result, making you of light estimation in the minds of others. You should overcome the idea that you are a

martyr, and lay claim to the promise of Christ, who says, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee.’” *Review and Herald*, August 1, 1893.