

Addis Ababa Bible Training Institute Report

“The Devil is in the Details”

The Inventions of Professor Lucifer G. Butts

by Rube Goldberg

Professor Butts chokes on a fish bone & coughs up an idea for an awning that lowers itself when the Sun comes out. Sunlight(A) shining through the magnifying glass (B) burns rope (C) which separates and allows bent tree (D) to snap back and catapult harpoon (E) into neck of pet whale (F). Pain in the neck causes him to spout with anguish, thereby sprinkling plant (G). As plant grows it lifts end of see-saw (H) and pushes spike (I) into balloon (J) causing it to burst with loud report. Professional Orator (K) thinks it is a firecracker and stands up to make a fourth of July speech. Hot air lights candle (L) which burns rope allowing awning (N) to drop. Note: If awning catches fire and the house burns down it will let in even more sunlight.



The title and 1931 Rube Goldberg cartoon above may prompt the thought, “is this appropriate for such a Newsletter?”. You will be the judge of that. There is so much wrapped up in both the title and the cartoon, that I question my ability to do the subject/s justice. But it is not just the “subjects” brought up by the above that are of concern to me. It is the potential “gaps” in the training our class of students may be facing. I have often discussed with the class “the law of unintended consequences.” Rube Goldberg clearly thought through the consequences involved in the scenario portrayed in the cartoon and its textual description (including his note about potential unintended consequences – and his take on the “good” to come from the house potentially burning down!).

They/we have been so blessed to have so many different good brothers from Ethiopia, the US, (and in another week from Cameroon) teaching them. We are blessed to have a course schedule and syllabi from Sunset International Bible Institute to “keep things on track.” Yet, I still question what additional needs/gaps may exist in their minds and hearts as they approach the end of our two years together. In the remaining short period of time I will have with them in August, I’ll be emphasizing some “basic” issues that are suggested by the title and cartoon above (as I spend 2 weeks teaching the Book of Psalms).

The first things I’ll be emphasizing are the “truths” in the statements above. Yet, in preparing this Newsletter on this topic, I was amazed to learn that the Maxim “The Devil is in the Details” is amazingly recent (1963 –

look at the Wikipedia.org article on the topic). So that's the first "truth" that surprised me. I was also surprised to learn that the Maxim we're discussing began only 100 years earlier as its "antithesis" as a more positive Maxim from the mid 1800's, that is, "God is in the detail/s."

I don't have the room to even list all the things that could be discussed about Rube Goldberg's life and even just this one of his cartoons. Most all of them could have relevant Biblical and spiritual applications. A very important one is the observation regarding Goldberg's Professor's first name (Lucifer). The law of unintended consequences in human affairs is most clearly and often negatively associated with the "Luciferian" deceptions and choices that we succumb to. Putting it that way reminds me that perhaps it should not be the "law of unintended consequences" but "the law of the unintended (and too often shockingly unexpected) results of our sin."

Speaking above of teaching the Book of Psalms, I am reminded that even the structure of the Psalms in five "Books" reminds us of "the law of unintended consequences." Books I-III are heavy with lament over the divided monarchy and smoldering with shocked surprise at the pain that sin in both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms brings to the nation. The "unintended consequences" (in their minds) of Israel and Judah's idolatry, oppression, and broken covenants, birth the catastrophe of the Babylonian exile. And the exile itself birthed the profound and respectful praise of Yahweh God in books IV-V. These experiences and sentiments from the post-exilic Jews set the stage for the arrival of the Messiah. And we are somewhat shocked at the "missed opportunity" from the nation as a whole failing to accept him.

Such thoughts also prompted my musings about Rube Goldberg's own Jewish faith. It was not expressed in his career, or obvious in his private life. So sad to consider the failure to see "God is in the detail/s." We all need to be people that deeply consider the details of our and the Jews journey through life and salvation history.

Jim Wilson and the students of the AABTI

P.S. - Yes, I didn't do the topic justice