

The Minor Profits

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- [0 : 0 0] There are three items, I guess I call them the big three, that prevent people from embracing theism and Christianity, theism in general and Christianity in particular.
- And by theism, I simply mean the concept that there is a God, there is a deity who is in charge of creation, responsible for it and sustaining it.
- And the major obstacle that prevents people from embracing that concept, and one of the reasons that we as a nation are on our way to secularism, which simply excludes the figure of a deity, is because people have never been able to reconcile themselves with the supposed presence of an omnipotent, benevolent God and the existence of evil.
- And the argument is very simple, and we've dealt with it before, and it goes something like this. If there is a God who is all-loving and all-powerful, then how do you account for all of the unrighteousness and evil that goes on in the world?
- Why doesn't God step in and do something? If I were God, I would. But I'm not God, so I can't. But why doesn't He when He has the ability? That's a big item.
- [1 : 1 5] And theodicy is that which addresses it, but we won't go into that today. And the second item that so many have with Christianity is the idea of justification by faith.
- That is, when one puts their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, they are forever justified. And for the world at large, that is viewed as too easy, too simple.
- There's got to be more to it than that. You have to do certain things. You have to obey certain things. You have to give certain things, etc. And our answer to that, of course, is it is easy.
- And that's because God has already done the hard part. And He's left nothing for us to do but the easy part. And that is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. And then the third item, of course, has to do with the exclusivity of Christ.
- And the charge is often laid against Christians that we are narrow and bigoted because we insist that there is no salvation, no going to heaven apart from a relationship to Jesus Christ.
- [2 : 2 5] Where in the world did you come up with an idea like that? And our response is, we didn't come up with it. It's not our idea. It's God's idea, and if you don't like it, you have to take it up with Him.
- God has a thing about His Son, and He has designed salvation so that it is vested entirely in Him. Because He is the way, the truth, and the life.
- Like it or not, that is a reality. Those three items, perhaps more than any other, present impediments to people for embracing the concept of theism, the existence of a God, in general, or embracing Christianity in particular.
- And we are going to be dealing, in part at least, with some of that as we engage the prophet Haggai. And you'll note that we are taking these in chronological order, not in the order in which they're listed in your Bible, in the canon there.

We are trying to gain a better understanding by seeing how these things developed in the order in which they occurred. And that has caused us to shuffle around the minor prophets just a little bit.

[3 : 33] And that's what we have done with Haggai. In our last study, we looked at Zephaniah, and we concluded that. So if you will open your Bibles, please, to Haggai.

I'm sorry, not Haggai. I got my H's mixed up. We're talking about Habakkuk. Habakkuk is the next prophet. And we'll get to Haggai a little bit later. Haggai is one of the post-exilic prophets.

But for right now, we're in Habakkuk. And it would be accurate to label this the problems of a puzzled prophet.

Because Habakkuk has some real puzzling questions that he is going to address God with.

And they are the very same kind of problems that we have today, that many Christians have today, about the presence of God and his seeming inactivity.

[4 : 34] Where is God when certain really negative things happen in a world, such as 20,000 people being wiped out in a tsunami or something of that effect or an earthquake?

Where is God? He is supposed to be in charge. Years ago, and I'm talking about years ago because I guess I was 23 years old.

Okay? 60 years ago, Dr. Walter Wilson, an author practicing, well, he practiced for many years as a physician, 50 years as a physician.

And he was also the pastor of a church out in Kansas City, and he was here for meetings. And I had the pleasure, as a young man, ushering Dr., chauffeuring Dr. Wilson around to the various stops that he was going to make where he was scheduled to speak.

And he was quite a guy, quite a Bible teacher, and quite a naturalist. He'd written a number of books on naturalism and et cetera. And I was with him. We were talking, chatting in the car as I was driving him to one of his meetings.

[5 : 43] And back then, we were lamenting something about things that were taking place in our society and in our culture. And I made the statement, well, Dr. Wilson, it's just good to remember that God is still on the throne.

And he said, well, I would differ with you on that. And I said, what do you mean? And he said, God is on the throne, but he isn't still.

And I've always remembered that. He is active very often in ways that we do not appreciate or understand. And that's the burden and the lament of Habakkuk.

So, as we engage chapter 1, follow along, if you will, please. The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw. How long?

Great way to start, huh? He is asking God, how long are we going to have to put up with this? How long before you rend the heavens and come down?

[6 : 46] What is it going to take to get you to intervene? God, can't you see we're in a real mess here? Why aren't you doing something? And these prophets were just as human as we are.

Phil Yancey, one of my favorite authors, who's authored a number of books, has written a volume. It's called, The Question That Won't Go Away.

You all know what it is? Why? Why? Why? Why does God allow this? Why did this happen to me? What did I do to deserve this?

And on and on. And we have a plethora of questions like that. And they really trouble us. And sometimes it is so extreme that it even has been known to cause some to just chuck the faith.

Because God, if He is there, He seems to be completely disinterested and uninvolved. So why do I need a deity like that?

[7 : 51] And some have become apostates and just walked away from Him. So Habakkuk begins with question number one. How long, O Lord, will I call for help and Thou wilt not hear?

Now to say that God doesn't hear is a faulty assumption on our part. But there are times, let's face it, we've all been there.

When it seems like that. Feels like that. I, along with you, I suspect, can attest to times in the past when you felt that your prayers went no higher than the ceiling.

And it just seemed pointless. And where is God when you really need Him? And what is happening? And I don't understand this because I have prayed. And I prayed.

And I prayed. And the heavens are silent. You know, Job had that problem too. So Habakkuk is lamenting. How long will I call for help and Thou wilt not hear?

[8 : 53] I cry out to Thee. Violence! Yet, Thou dost not save. I'm screaming, crying my heart out to you.

Violence! I'm saying, look at the terrible things that people are doing. And heaven is silent. Why dost Thou make me see iniquity and cause me to look on wickedness?

Yes, destruction and violence are before me. Now, that is true of us here.

But if you live in a place like South Chicago, it would be true coming out in speeds, wouldn't it? I mean, these people live on a day-to-day basis, you know, being extra careful when they walk from their residence to the local deli on the corner.

Because you never know when bullets are going to be flying from some gang orchestrated thing where somebody is trying to get even with somebody. And I've lost track of the number of people that have been murdered in Chicago over the last few years.

[10 : 08] It's astronomical. And along with that, we see a serious uptick in the murder of law enforcement in the line of duty.

I can remember the time when anyone who would be so bold and so stupid as to kill a police officer, he just put a death penalty sentence on his own life.

Because there was no way that he was going to get away with life imprisonment. That person is going to be executed. And today we've got an entirely different culture with an entirely different ethos.

And it's taking a toll. And now, you know, it has always been the case that when someone put on the badge and the uniform of a police officer, there was no guarantee that they were going to come home in the evening to their wife and family.

But that attitude has intensified today, dramatically. And it has really, really gotten out of hand. So the evil that is going on is exactly what Habakkuk...

[11 : 27] And by the way, let's not think that we're dealing with something new. Habakkuk was dealing with it in his age. This is thousands of years ago. What we're talking about is approximately 600 to 650 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

That's when Habakkuk was pinning these words. Why dost thou make me see iniquity and cause me to look on wickedness?

Yes, destruction and violence are before me. Strife exists. And contention exists. Would you say there was any strife in the impeachment hearings?

Wow. Any contention? Therefore, the law is ignored and justice is never upheld.

Hello? Nothing has changed. This is the same old world, same old sin, same old sinful nature, same old problems. Strife exists.

[12 : 31] Contention rises. Therefore, the law is ignored and justice is never upheld. So, someone has said that, and I cannot dispute it, that our law courts have gotten to the place where in the United States you can get the best justice that money can buy.

And is that not true? I mean, if you've got the bucks to hire the most high-powered lawyers, it is amazing what people could get off with.

Joe? Quick question. Where is he at? Is he still in Babylon when he's doing this, or is he back to Jerusalem when they got to go? No, he's in Judah.

He's in Jerusalem. Okay, he's in Jerusalem. And this is prior to the Babylonian invasion of Israel, which is actually going to occur in three different segments.

There will be three different attacks of Israel. And in the last one, Jerusalem will fall, and Nebuchadnezzar will destroy the city and the temple, and he will carry thousands of Jews off to Babylon.

[13 : 51] They will walk from Jerusalem to Babylon, distance of, I forget now, it's a couple hundred miles, I think, anyway. And Zedekiah will be the last king, and Zedekiah will attempt to escape, and they will catch him, and they will make him watch the execution of all his sons, and then they will put his eyes out, blind him, and make him walk to Babylon.

He will be the last king of Judah to sit on that throne. And that throne has been empty ever since. And the next person who will occupy it will be Yeshua HaMashiach, Jesus the Messiah, and he will sit on that throne of David.

So, the law is ignored and justice is never upheld, for the wicked surround the righteous. Therefore, justice comes out perverted.

And, of course, perverted justice is nothing but injustice. But, again, it just depends on the bribery that goes on, the capability of the lawyers and the counsel that's hired, the pleas that are made, and all the rest of it.

And now, in verse 5, God is going to answer Habakkuk, and he says, Look among the nations, observe, be astonished, wonder, because I am doing something in your days you would not believe if you were told.

[15 : 51] And all that is saying to me is this. Like Dr. Wilson said, God is on the throne, but he isn't still. And our difficulty is, we know that God has a plan and a purpose and a timetable, etc.

But what really gets to us is when he won't let us in on it. When we don't know how long it's going to be, or when it's coming, or what the outcome is going to be, and that just drives us up a wall.

And yet, God has the secret things reserved unto himself, and he fully plans to reveal them, but in accordance with his timetable, not in accordance with our demands.

And Habakkuk here is making some demands. And that's just purely human. That's all. That's just, we make demands. When are you going to do something?

Hey, listen, if you are up there, this is no way to run a railroad. This is no way to get things done. Now, why don't you get with it?

[17 : 00] And why don't you zap the guilty, and free the innocent, and get on with it? And the frustration level is very real, and it has always been there, because even though, even though we, each of us, tend to be part of the problem, we're eager to excuse ourselves, and see ourselves as only part of the solution, not part of the problem.

But as long as we entertain a fallen sinful nation, in which we have no choice, we remain, at least to some degree, a part of the problem, and to some degree, a part of the solution.

If we place ourselves in the hands of God, and are willing to be used by Him, regardless of how He wants to do that. So, he is telling Habakkuk, in an answer here, be astonished and wonder, because, I am doing something, in your days, you would not believe, if you were told.

For behold, and what he is doing, Habakkuk isn't going to like either. What he is doing is, behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans.

Well, who are they? That's just another name for the Babylonians. These are a wretched, wicked, evil, brutal, people.

[18 : 35] Some of the most brutal, on the face of the earth, at that time. Now, the question that I would have for you, is the same question that, Habakkuk had, and that is, how in the world, are you, God, going to justify, dealing, with a wicked nation, idolatrous nation, like Judah is, by bringing, a more wicked nation, against them, and defeating them, and imprisoning them.

Where in the world, is the logic, for something like that? And that is exactly, what God is going to do. And why would he do it?

Simply, on the basis, of the culpability, of the children of Israel. Because, Israel as a nation, was far more responsible, to God, than were the Babylonians.

Why? Because, Israel had, an inside track, with God, that the Babylonians, knew nothing about. Israel was, plugged in, to the one true God, and had the advantage, of revelation, and information, and care, and provision, and protection, from the Almighty, that the other nations, never had, never enjoyed at all.

And the principle is, unto whom much is given, from him, shall much be required. And Israel, nationally, had fumbled the ball, big time, time and again.

[20 : 20] If there was anyone, who ought to have had, extreme difficulty, in, embracing, idolatry, it would have been Israel.

Israel. And they were warned, repeatedly about it, and they were warned, not to attach themselves, to other nations, nor let their sons, and daughters, intermarry with them.

And God even told them, why they were forbidden, to do that. Because he said, they, will turn your hearts, away from me. And I'm sure, that many of these, could say, well we can handle it.

But no they couldn't. And they didn't. And they succumbed, and the results, were disastrous. What'd you? If God was grooming them, that grooming them, to be the priests, to be the leaders, for us.

He was grooming them, to be the ones, to tell us, how to come to God. Absolutely. Absolutely. And it was really, important to him, they were raised up, to be, among other things, they were raised up, to be, a light to the Gentiles.

[21 : 25] But their own light, had grown so dim, that it no longer, sufficed even for themselves, much less, to share with other nations. And all of this, is the picture, of the waywardness, of the human heart.

There's a hymn, that is written, that's one of my favorites. And one of the lines, in it goes like this. Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave, the God I love.

Here's my heart. Oh, take and seal it. Seal it for, thy courts above. love. We all have that natural tendency, and the reason is because, we all suffer, from what is probably, the most significant, fallout item, of the fall.

And that is, our own, wretched, self-centeredness. And for any, poor soul, that says, well that's not a picture, of me because, I'm not self-centered, at all.

Well, according to the scriptures, you are not only, self-centered, you are self-deceived. Because, we all, march to that drumbeat. And the three, most important people, in the lives, of each and every one, of us, is I, myself, and me.

[22 : 46] That's human nature. That's the way it is. And only, an insertion, of the gospel, and the grace of God, can turn that, self-centeredness, toward God. And even then, we are prone to wander.

How many times, have Christians, taken two steps forward, in their spiritual life? Only to have, one step backwards, next time. And we call this, growth in grace, and it's always, checkered, and staggered, and it's never consistent.

It's sporadic, and that's the way we are. So, Habakkuk is dealing, with something, that is, was not new then, and it is not new now. I'm raising up the Chaldeans, that, fierce, and impetuous people, who march, throughout the earth, to seize, dwelling places, which are not theirs.

These are, expansionists, we would call them. And they are seeking, to gobble up, all the territory, and the geography, and the peoples around, because, they want to be, top dog.

They want to rule everything. And we've had despots, over the centuries, that have come, and gone, who had the very, same ambition, and Stalin was one, and Adolf Hitler, was another, and you can name them, and go back in history, and it's always been that way.

[24 : 13] Because of what we've already talked about, the nature of the human heart. And these people, he says, listen, you've never come up against any people, like these Babylonians.

God is saying, to Habakkuk, let me describe them for you. This is what you're going to be dealing with. Their horses, they are dreaded and feared, their justice and authority, originate with themselves.

You see that? Their justice and authority, originate with themselves. In other words, they answer to no one, but themselves.

They do not recognize, the higher power at all, and if they do, it's an idolatrous situation. Their horses, are swifter than lepers. I don't know if they had, a special breed of horses or not, but he is saying, you've never seen horses, run like these horses.

And keener than wolves, in the evening. That's a curious expression. Wolves are nocturnal, and they're always looking for prey, they're always on the prowl, and he's saying, that's what these Babylonians are like, these Chaldeans.

[25 : 23] Their horsemen come galloping, their horsemen come from afar, they fly like an eagle, swooping down to devour. This is kind of reminiscent of, of Alexander the Great's tactics, that were also picked up, by Adolf Hitler, and the Germans called it, the Blitzkrieg, where they would mass troops, at the border of a country, and before you know it, they were pouring over the border, and into that country, by the tens of thousands, and there was no way, of turning them back.

And that's what they did in Poland, and that's what they did in Russia, and that didn't turn out so well, but that's exactly, what this was all about. The Blitzkrieg, means to strike militarily, with a lightning like force, whereby the enemy, or the one you're invading, has no opportunity, to prepare themselves, to defend themselves, they are at your mercy, and you just overrun them, and you decimate them, and you take complete control.

And that has been the story, throughout human history. One nation after another, and this is a repeat of it, this time, the victim, is going to be, the people of God.

How in the world, could God allow something like that, to happen, to his own people? And we might follow that question, with how in the world, could God allow something like, death by crucifixion, happen to his own son?

Same answer is bound up, in both of those, and it's very involved, but their horsemen come galloping, their horsemen come from afar, they fly like an eagle, swooping down to devour.

[27 : 24] Have you ever seen a picture of that? It's just amazing. Some of these, some of these nature programs, that you see on PBS, they get some of the most incredible, camera work, of these animals.

I don't know how they do it, but to see, to see an eagle in flight, and these, these birds, can see a mouse, rustling under a leaf, from an incredible distance away, and they zero in on that, they swoop down, and come out of nowhere, and they grab that prey, and are up and going with it, in just split seconds.

It is absolutely amazing, to watch it. They fly like an eagle, swooping down the devour. All of them, come for violence. Their horde of faces, moves forward, they collect captive like sand, they mock at kings, and rulers, are a laughing matter to them.

That's what Israel, is going to be facing. And this is the first question, that he has, is that, where is God? And why is this, happening to us?

And, thank you, thank you Cheryl, for, thank you, I think, thank you, I think, for, for bringing our study, to a conclusion, because, once the food comes, I lose my audience.

[28 : 53] And, it's, it's, it's an entirely human thing, but, thank you for your kind attention.