



THE  
MENTORING  
PROJECT

# THE BIBLE, WORK, AND YOU



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## **INTRODUCTION**

What is work for?

What are people for?

What is the world for?

In order to understand work, we must understand the world, and we must understand the place of man in the world. This field guide seeks to show that the Bible teaches that God built the world as a cosmic temple, that he put man in the cosmic temple as his living image, to be his priest-king, to whom he gave the work of exercising dominion and filling the cosmos with God's image bearers that it might be filled with his glory. This great task requires a blessed work-life balance: a harmonious understanding of marriage, family, and the great endeavor, because to be fruitful and multiply, the marriage must thrive, and for the world to be filled with God's glory, the children must be raised in the fear and admonition of the Lord. If he is to do

the job rightly, the man cannot be neither a workaholic nor a sluggard. Success will require a balanced life, thriving at home, flourishing in the field.

Demonstrating that the Bible does indeed teach these things will take us through the whole sweep of the Bible's storyline. We will consider how things began in the very good creation, contemplating the work God gave man to do. From there we will examine how things changed when man fell into sin, then on to the place of work in God's program of redemption, before considering what the Bible indicates about work in the restoration of all things.

The scope of this project will not permit us to be anywhere near exhaustive, so we will focus our discussion on five main figures, and these center on the Lord Jesus himself. We begin with Adam in the garden, move from him to the son of David, king in Jerusalem, Solomon, who had so much to say about work, then on to Jesus, in whom all is fulfilled. Standing across from the teaching of Solomon prior to Jesus, we turn our attention to Paul's teaching after Jesus, before concluding our considerations with the new Adam in the fulfillment of the garden of Eden at the end. The chiasmic<sup>1</sup> structure of this presentation can be depicted as follows:

Adam  
     Solomon  
         Jesus  
     Paul  
 New Adam



## PART I: CREATION

At creation, God built himself a cosmic temple.<sup>2</sup> In the cosmic temple God placed his own image and likeness, mankind. Male and female he made them in his image (Gen. 1:27), and God blessed them and gave them their charge: those in the image of the invisible God had the responsibility to be fruitful and multiply, that they might fill the earth and subdue it, exercising God-given dominion over the animal kingdom (1:28). Thereby they would fill the earth with God's glory as the waters cover the seas (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14; Ps. 72:19), making it so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting, the name of the Lord would be praised (Mal. 1:11; Ps. 113:3). From the beginning God gave man work to do, that God's glory might be magnified.

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The blessing of God in Genesis 1:28 points to a very good, original creation, pre-fall, work-life balance (cf. Gen. 1:31). Unfallen man would enjoy harmonious relations with his wife, and together they would enjoy God's blessing as they reproduced themselves in unfallen children, who would join their parents in the great task of filling the earth with their offspring, subduing it, and exercising dominion over the animals. The result would be that in every corner of creation, the visible representations of the invisible God, those in his image and likeness, would bring his character, presence, authority, and reign to bear, making him known.

When we compare what God does in Genesis 1 with what he has the man do in Genesis 2, we get more insight into God's program. As he created the world, God named what he made in Genesis 1. He would summon something into being by his word of command (e.g., "Let there be light!" [Gen. 1:3]), and then he would name it (e.g., "And God called the light day" [1:5]). This pattern happens over and over (ten times we read "and God said," and seven times the Lord says "Let there be" in Genesis 1), so that when we get to Genesis 2 we recognize it being repeated. Here God makes the animals, but instead of naming them himself, he brings them to the man to see what he would call them (2:19). It is as though God is bringing his apprentice along in the task of vicegerency.

### ***Adam's Great Task***

God gave the man dominion over the animals (1:26, 28), and then God gave the man the opportunity to do with God's creation what God himself had been doing: naming it (2:19–20). This suggests that as the visible representation of the invisible God, man's job consists of bringing the unseen authority, reign, presence, and character of God to bear on all creation.

God has formed and filled the world, and the man's job is to complete the work. In addition to the task of naming, the Lord put the man in the garden to work it and to keep it (Gen. 2:15). These terms "work" and "keep" can also be translated "serve" and "guard," and they are only used together elsewhere in the Pentateuch to describe the responsibilities of the Levites at the tabernacle (Num. 3:8). This indicates that Moses means for his audience

to discern that what the Levites were at the tabernacle, Adam was in the garden.

Thus, as God's vicegerent, exercising dominion in God's creation, Adam reigns ("have dominion," [Gen. 1:26, 28]) as the visible king who represents the invisible one (1:27). Further, as a kind of proto-Levite (2:15) in the place where God walks in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8), Adam serves as a priest in the original holy of holies, mediating the knowledge of the creator to creation.

In Genesis 2, God gave the prohibition against eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17) prior to the creation of the woman (2:18–23). Her knowledge of the prohibition (3:1–4) indicates that the man communicated it to her. He has thus served as a prophetic figure, communicating the revelatory word of God to others.

From what Adam does in God's world, we can conclude the following: though Adam is not specifically referred to as "king," "priest," or "prophet," he exercises each of those functions: reigning over creation, working and keeping the holy dwelling of God, and communicating God's revealed word to others.

### ***Discussion & Reflection:***

1. How does this retelling of the creation account differ from how you've thought of it previously?
2. In what ways can the tasks given to Adam shape your view of work?



## PART II: FALL

And then everyone on stage rebelled. The serpent, who as a beast of the field was to be under the man's dominion, deceived the woman and induced the man to sin (Gen. 3:1–7). The man, whose role of keeping the garden probably entailed keeping out unclean serpents but definitely meant upholding God's prohibition on eating from the tree and protecting the woman, allowed the serpent to speak his subversive lies and deceive the woman. The man then stood idly by as she ate of the tree before eating from it himself (3:8). The woman, who could have at least referred the serpent to the man, entertained the accusations, slanders, and suggestions of the parseltongue, ate of the tree, and handed that forbidden fruit right on to the man.

### ***Adam's Tragic Transgression***

The one with dominion (king) as God's vicegerent over the animals sinned because the snake tempted him. The one with the priestly role of serving and guarding defiled the holy place by his transgression. The one who had exercised the prophetic function of receiving and communicating the

revelatory word of command himself transgressed that very prohibition.

And sin made everyone's job harder.

The woman was made to be fruitful and multiply with the man (Gen. 1:28). As a result of sin, she would have pain in childbirth (3:16a). She was also made to help the man (2:18), but now her desire would be for her husband in the sense that she would want to control him, and he would rule over her with unnecessary force (3:16b; see 4:7).

The man was made to work the garden, but because of sin the ground was cursed (3:17) and would now bring forth thorns and thistles (3:18). God told the man that he would eat by painful toil and sweaty brow (3:19), then banished him from the garden (3:23–24).

The tragic devastation cannot be overstated. The priestly figure charged to protect the clean realm of life allowed an unclean serpent to enter, tempt, and induce sin resulting in death. The prophetic figure given God's direct revelation not only failed to insist that God's word be obeyed but himself transgressed it. The royal figure granted dominion over the animals surrendered his reign to a lying snake.

The story of sin making everything harder continues in Genesis 4, where Cain, a "servant of the ground" (Gen. 4:2, the term rendered "worker" or "servant" is the same term used to describe Adam "working" the garden in 2:15), murders his brother Abel, "a shepherd of the flock" (4:2). When called to account, Cain asks if he was supposed to be his brother's "keeper" (4:9, same term used to describe Adam keeping the garden in 2:15). The Lord then tells Cain, the worker/servant of the ground, that he is "cursed from the ground" (4:11), and further that when he works/serves the ground it will not give him its strength (4:12). The serpent tempts with the message that disobedience will make life easier, but he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). The truth is that sin makes all of life, including work, harder.

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Instead of filling the world with the image and likeness of God who would exercise dominion in accordance with his character, as Genesis 1:27–28 indicates they were to do, the initial couple sinned and filled the world with violence (6:11). God, however, did not surrender his program to the serpent.

#### ***The Promise of the Seed of the Woman***

The Lord tells the serpent that he will have enmity with the woman (Gen. 3:15a), from which three points can be deduced:

1. First, though the woman's hiding of herself from God indicates that she is spiritually dead, and though her expulsion from Eden means she has been thrust from the clean realm of life into the unclean realm of the dead, the fact that there will be enmity means there will be ongoing conflict, so she is not yet going to die physically.
2. Second, the enmity means that she is not joining the serpent but standing against him. When the Lord goes on to tell the serpent that this enmity will extend to his seed and to the seed of the woman (3:15b), we learn that the man will also continue to live and resist the serpent, for he is necessary for the woman to have seed, or offspring.
3. Finally, though the Hebrew term "seed" can be used of an individual or a group (just as in English you can

speak of a single seed or a whole bag of seed), the seed of the woman is identified as an individual male who will bruise the head of the serpent, incurring for himself a heel wound (3:15c). Because a heel wound can be survived while a head wound can be mortal, this suggests victory over the serpent.

At creation, the work of filling the earth (Gen. 1:28) required the man and the woman to be fruitful and multiply. In the promise of redemption in Genesis 3:15, the same truth stands: for the serpent to have his head crushed, the man and woman must be fruitful and multiply. God's project of creation and God's project of redemption both require that man and woman join together in marriage (2:24) to do the work of procreating and raising godly children.

***Discussion & Reflection:***

1. How was Adam's sin a rebellion against all three of his God-given tasks (king, priest, and prophet)?
2. In what ways can you see sin's impact in your own relationships and work?



## PART III: REDEMPTION

God's program of redemption starts with the promise that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head in Genesis 3:15. This promise leads to Abraham. God's promises to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3 elaborate on the initial promise of redemption embedded in Genesis 3:15, and these promises are in turn elaborated upon in the course of Abraham's life (Gen. 22:15–18). Then they are given to Isaac (26:2–5) and Jacob (28:3–4). Jacob's blessing of Judah (49:8–12) likewise adds to and extends the promises.

The line of descent flows down to David, and God promises to raise up the seed of David and establish the throne of his kingdom forever (2 Sam. 7). Back at the birth of Noah in Genesis 5:28–29, Noah's father Lamech had expressed hope that his seed would bring relief from work and painful toil on the cursed ground. The language of Genesis 5:29 recalls the language of Genesis 3:17, suggesting that people like Lamech are looking for a seed of the woman who will not only triumph over the serpent but also roll back the judgments that make work difficult.



The tempter will be overcome. Sin will not prevail. The result of sin — death — will not have the last word. The fact that Enoch did not die (Gen. 5:21–24) indicates that the seed of the woman expect God to overcome death and everything that caused it.

The believing remnant in the Old Testament understood and believed that God would raise up an individual seed of the woman, seed of Abraham, seed of Judah, seed of David, who would defeat the serpent and thereby put things back on track, and the track leads to God's purposes being accomplished.

### ***The Seed of the Woman and Adam's Work in the World***

What were those purposes? As noted above, God built the world as a cosmic temple. When he redeemed Israel from Egypt and entered into covenant with them at Mount Sinai, he gave them a small-scale replica of the cosmic temple: the tabernacle. This explains why David wanted to build the Lord a temple once he had rest from all his surrounding enemies (2 Sam. 7:1).

To put it bluntly, David understood Adam's task, understood that he was in the line of descent of the seed of promise, understood his role as king of Israel, and so he sought to carry out the task God gave to Adam. He received the promises in 2 Samuel 7, then began to conquer in every direction in 2 Samuel 8–10. David's desire to build a temple for Yahweh represents his desire to establish Yahweh's reign in Israel, as the starting point for the king of Israel reigning over all the nations for Yahweh (see Ps. 2:7–9).

David articulated his desire to pursue this great work to Nathan the prophet (2 Sam. 7:2), and that night the Lord revealed to Nathan that though David had shed too much blood to build the clean realm of life (1 Chron. 22:8, all that death apparently making him unclean), God would build David a house (2 Sam. 7:11), raise up David's seed (7:12), establish his kingdom and throne (7:13), and be to him a father (7:14).

### ***Solomon as New Adam***

The Lord's promise of a house to David (2 Sam. 7:11) seems to refer to a dynastic house, a line of kings that descend from

David. At the same time, the Lord's promise of a particular seed whose throne will be established forever (7:12–13) points to the king in whom the line culminates. The ambiguity in the statements would create anticipation that each new king from David's line might be the one. And with the promise in 2 Samuel 7:13 stating that David's seed would build a house for God's name, Solomon's accomplishment of that feat would be interpreted as fulfillment (1 Kings 5–9) until his own idolatrous failure became manifest (1 Kings 11:1–13). 1 Kings 4 portrays Solomon as a new Adam, undertaking Adam's work by exercising dominion (4:24), and like Adam naming the animals, Solomon "spoke of trees . . . He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish" (4:33).

Solomon's own reflections on what he undertook to accomplish in the book of Ecclesiastes are particularly relevant to our consideration of the work that God's people do. Solomon undertook the great task God gave to Adam, and he found that because of sin and death, the attempt was vanity.

Solomon relates that his objective was to "see what was good for the sons of Adam to do under heaven the number of the days of their lives" (Eccles. 2:3, author's translation). As Solomon proceeds to detail what he undertook to do, his projects are reminiscent of what God did when he created the world. Solomon seems to have understood that his task was to image forth the character of God in his work, and thus he describes what he did in terms that recall what God did.

In the original Hebrew and in English translation the terminology of Ecclesiastes 2:4–8 matches both the words and phrases used and the sequence of events described in the Genesis creation account (and other parts of the Old Testament). Solomon first says in 2:4, "I made great my works." God's works in creation are certainly great, and they are described as such, elsewhere in the Old Testament (e.g., Ps. 104:1). We have noted that at creation God built himself a cosmic temple, or a house (see Isa. 66:1; Ps. 78:69), and Solomon next says, "I built for myself houses" (Eccles. 2:4).

Here the terminology becomes strongly parallel. The language used in Genesis 2:8, "And Yahweh God planted

a garden in Eden in the east,” is picked up by Solomon when he asserts, “I planted for myself vineyards. I made for myself gardens and paradises” (2:4b–5a). Genesis 2:9 relates how “Yahweh caused every tree desirable to the sight and good for food to sprout from the ground, and the tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” So also Solomon: “I planted in them a tree of every fruit” (2:5b).

Genesis 2:10 relates, “And a river went out from Eden to water the garden.” Solomon too provided irrigation: “I made for myself pools of water to water from them the forest of sprouting trees” (Eccles. 2:6). The flow of thought in Genesis corresponds step by step to Solomon’s flow of thought in this section of Ecclesiastes. Genesis 2:11–14 describes the four rivers that flow from the one that went out of Eden to water the garden in 2:10, and then in Genesis 2:15, “Yahweh God took the man and caused him to rest in the Garden of Eden to serve it and to guard it.” Having prepared his garden, to put this in a way that resonates with other statements in Scripture, “the servant of Yahweh” is put in the garden to “work” it. Whereas Genesis 2:15 employs the verbal form of the Hebrew root that can be translated “serve/work,” in Ecclesiastes 2:7 Solomon uses the noun form of the same root, which can be translated “servant/slave” when he says, “I acquired servants and maids, and sons of the house were to me, also many cattle of the herd and flock were to me, more than all who were before me in Jerusalem.” Just as God made man to serve his garden, Solomon acquired servants to work his attempt at Eden.

In the midst of the description of one of the four rivers, Genesis 2:12 mentions gold, bdellium, and onyx, and so also in Ecclesiastes 2:8 Solomon asserts, “I gathered for myself also silver and gold . . .” Solomon again asserts how he surpassed all who were before him in Jerusalem in 2:9, which would include not only his father David but the esteemed priest-king Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18–20; Ps. 110:4). He then asserts, “And all that my eyes asked I did not reserve from them. I did not withhold my heart from any joy, for my heart rejoiced from all my toil, and this was my portion from all my toil” (Eccles. 2:10). Thus, Solomon affirms his great satisfaction and enjoyment of the monumental tasks he undertook. And yet he goes on

to say in 2:11, “But I turned to all my works that my hands had done, and to the toil at which I toiled to do, and behold, the whole was vanity and a striving for the wind, and there was no gain under the sun.”

For all the significance and satisfaction that Solomon found in doing the work, he found that he could not accomplish the Adamic task. Trying to do so was a vain attempt for all the reasons he goes on to enumerate through the course of the rest of the book of Ecclesiastes. Attempting to accomplish what God gave Adam to do is like trying to catch the breeze as it flows over — the wind slips right through one’s fingers. There are no handles on it, and there is no way a mere human can take hold of it. Solomon’s words are groping to express the futility of the fallen human condition. Sin causes everything to be bent, and what is bent is not easily straightened (Eccles. 1:15a). Sin also causes something essential to be missing in all endeavor, and what is lacking cannot be enumerated (1:15b). And the mortality that ends every human life adds to the vanity, the brevity, of what any human achieves.

Ecclesiastes 2:12 seems to continue the line of thought: “And I turned to see wisdom, along with madness and folly, for what is the man who comes after the king whom they have already made?”<sup>3</sup> Duane Garrett argues that “‘the king’ refers to none other than ‘Adam’ of Gen 2–4,” explaining the plural “they . . . made” as matching the plural “Let us make man” in Genesis 1:26, and he paraphrases Ecclesiastes 2:12 as follows: “Is a human likely to come along who will be better than the king—Adam—whom God made long ago?”<sup>4</sup>

Solomon thus seems to be attempting the grand project of reigning as Israel’s king in God’s image and likeness. He sought to fulfill his responsibility as the seed of David in the line of descent of the seed of the woman, essaying to be a new Adam. He found that for all the ways God had gifted him with wisdom, wealth, and greatness (1 Kings 3:10–14; Eccles. 1:16; 2:9), because of what Adam did, he was confronted with an insuperable barrier to success, namely, death. The fact that death happens to all — wise and foolish — results in vanity in Ecclesiastes 2:14–17. Adam’s sin brought death into the world. The fact

that Solomon will die means an end to his projects and no lasting remembrance (Eccles. 2:16; 1:11). Solomon not only recognizes that his death will guarantee the end of his own endeavor, he also sees that all his work will be left to another, who could be wise or foolish, which only adds to the sense of vanity (Eccles. 2:18–19).

Being very discouraged by these realities (Eccles. 2:20), Solomon laments the fact that skillful workers who have earned things must leave them to those who did not work for them (2:21). Picking up on the idea in 2:3, where he had stated his intention to find out what is good for man to do, Solomon asks what man has from his toil and striving (2:22), in view of the fact that life is full of sorrow, work is vexing, and sleep is often fleeting (2:23). At this point in his masterful book, Solomon introduces the ideas that he commends to his audience, and his sentiments are relevant to all who live and work between Adam’s fall and Christ’s return.

| Ecclesiastes Reference | Nothing Better   | Eat and Drink  |
|------------------------|--|--|
| 2:24–25                | There is nothing better for a person   | than that he should eat and drink  |
| 2:24–25                | I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; | also that everyone should eat and drink  |
| 3:22                   | So I saw that there is nothing better  |  |
| 5:18                   | Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting  | is to eat and drink  |
| 8:15                   | And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun  | but to eat and drink and be joyful,  |
| 9:7–10                 |  | Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. |

What counsel does Solomon offer to those who attempt to honor God by fulfilling their destiny as human beings in God’s image and likeness only to realize that death makes their efforts vain? The answer can be found first in Ecclesiastes 2:24–25, and Solomon repeats the substance of this answer again and again through his book (see Eccles. 3:12–13; 3:22; 5:18; 8:15; and 9:7–10, and 11:8–10 is similar). The big ideas are that

- (1) there is nothing better for a man
- (2) than that he should eat and drink and
- (3) enjoy his work, because
- (4) if he can do that it is God’s gift to him, and God doesn’t give the gift to everyone (see 2:26; 6:1–2).

The following table shows these texts from the English Standard Version:

| Enjoy Work   | God’s Gift  |
|--|---|
| and find enjoyment in his toil.  | This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?  |
| and take pleasure in all his toil—                                     | this is God’s gift to man.  |
| than that a man should rejoice in his work,                            | for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?   |
| and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun  | the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot.   |
| for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life     | that God has given him under the sun.   |
| Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life | that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going. |

**Solomon's Positive Conclusion**

These statements are fundamentally hopeful. They affirm that though the experience of mortal man is vain, there is nevertheless value in receiving life, labor, and food as good gifts from God.

What would justify the idea that even though the project cannot be accomplished in this life, death making it always and ever a vain attempt, it nevertheless retains value and should be enjoyed in the pursuit and labor and toil and vexation? There may be indications of belief in the bodily resurrection of the dead and belief that all God's purposes and promises will be achieved in a new heaven and new earth in Ecclesiastes, but even if Solomon does not directly articulate them in this book they are certainly part of his tradition, stemming from Genesis, continuing through the Torah of Moses, proclaimed by prophets from Isaiah to Daniel.<sup>5</sup> We are safe to assume that Solomon believed these ideas and expected his audience to know that the future hope he himself articulates in Proverbs would inform the value he affirms even vain work to have (see Prov. 2:21; 3:18; 12:28; 13:12, 14; 15:24; 19:23; 23:17–18; 24:14, 20; 28:13, 16).<sup>6</sup>

Solomon recognizes that no mere human can accomplish God's purposes (see Ps. 127), and yet because they are God's purposes, and because God rewards those pursuing them with the promise of future joys, they are well worth endeavoring to accomplish with all one's might, and one should enjoy oneself in the course of seeking to do God's will. Thus the sluggard is encouraged to learn from the diligent preparations of the ant (Prov. 6:6–11), diligence results in wealth and honor, where the slack and lazy get only shame (10:4–5; 12:27; 13:4; 18:9; 20:4, 13; 21:5; 24:30–34), and a sluggard is like smoke in the eyes (10:26). "In all toil there is profit" (14:23). Sluggards have unwarranted fears (22:13; 26:13–16), but the diligent boldly soldier forward. Frugality and temperate avoidance of luxury is part of the equation of hard work as well (21:17, 20; 28:19). Skillful workers will be honored (22:29) and will enjoy the fruits of their labor (27:18; 28:19).

Before we consider the New Testament declaration that

resurrection makes it so that our labor in the Lord is not in vain, we turn our attention to the one greater than Solomon, the new Adam, Jesus of Nazareth.

**One Greater Than Solomon**

Michelangelo is famous for his work. One of his most significant achievements adorns the center of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and depicts the fingers of God and Adam almost touching. That famous depiction, however, has a context. The ceiling of that chapel is more than 130 feet long and more than 40 feet wide, covered with some 5,000 square feet of frescoes. There are more than 300 figures painted on the ceiling, depicting stories from the Bible, retelling in visual form the story of creation and redemption. The point I am driving at is that the depiction of the fingers of God and Adam at the creation of man has a wider context in which it must be understood, and so it is with the work of the Lord Jesus.

We could of course comment on the way that Jesus, as the son of a carpenter/builder, no doubt did excellent work, and we could comment on the way that his teachings commend good stewardship (see the parables of the wicked tenants in Mark 12:1–12, of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1–13, and of the unworthy servants in Luke 17:7–10) as well as entrepreneurialism, ambition, ingenuity, and diligence (especially the parable of the talents in Matt. 25:14–30), but we must not fail to see the biblical theological context in which Jesus does his work. He has come as the new Adam, representative Israelite, seed of David, king of Israel. As such, he has work to do that must be understood against the backdrop of the whole story of the Bible.

As the second Adam, he must succeed where the first failed. The first was to exercise dominion over God's cosmic temple, serving and guarding, filling and subduing. He failed. Then Solomon, son of David, king in Jerusalem, who attempted the project himself, asserts in Psalm 127 that the Lord must build the house — likely referring to the house of David and the house of the Lord — and keep watch over the city, else all is vain (Ps. 127:1–2). Jesus came, wonder of wonders, as the Lord himself (Mark

1:1–3), Yahweh enfleshed (John 1:14), Son of God and son of David (Matt. 1:1–23; Luke 3:23–38), to build the house (Matt. 16:18) and keep the city (John 18:4–9).

Along the way he had to establish righteousness (Rom. 3:24–26) throughout his life to overcome the sin and death (1 Cor. 15:21–22, 45–49) that the first Adam unleashed on the world (Rom. 5:12–21). Jesus lived that righteous life, doing no violence with his hands, speaking no deceit with his mouth (Isa. 53:9), tempted in every way like as we yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). The fact that he committed no sin made it so that he did not earn its wage, death (Rom. 4:23), and so though he died to pay the penalty incurred by others, death had no power to hold him (Acts 2:24).

Jesus not only reversed Adam's disastrous defeat, he also recapitulated the history of Israel throughout the course of his life (see Matt. 1–4). His remarkable birth repeats and transcends the pattern of remarkable births from Isaac to John the Baptist. Herod trying to kill the male children of Israel is like Pharaoh trying to kill the male children of Israel. Joseph takes Mary and Jesus to Egypt, and then returns to the land of promise, where Jesus is baptized in the Jordan before his forty days in the wilderness, where he withstood temptation. Jesus then ascends the mountain to deliver a new deposit of revelation (Matt. 5–7), before a tenfold demonstration of his mighty power (Matt. 8–10).

All this, with the rest of his life, stands behind what Jesus prays in John 17:4, "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do." Jesus completed the work the Father gave him to do in his life, and he completed the work the Father gave him to do in his death.

All that Jesus did was in pursuit of the broader project of building both the house of David and the house of the Lord that he might be the Melchizedekian high priest of the new covenant (Heb. 2:9–10, 17; 5:8–10). Jesus establishes the house of David by devoting himself to the work of knowing the Torah and enacting it. Jesus lived out Proverbs 28:4 as he opposed Satan and the seed of the serpent by adhering to the Torah of Moses: "Those who

forsake the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law strive against them." His evident righteousness was a rebuke to the brood of vipers that stood against him: "those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will come upon them" (Prov. 24:25). By keeping his way according to the law, Jesus proved himself to be the worthy Deuteronomy 17 king, the blessed man of Psalm 1, the king whose throne the Lord would establish forever (2 Sam. 7:14).

Jesus accomplished the work the Father gave him to live righteously, die vicariously, and rise triumphantly, and he also accomplished the work of building the temple of the Holy Spirit, the church (Matt. 16:18). The church only exists because of the righteous life, saving death, and justifying resurrection of the Lord Jesus (Rom. 4:25). He then ascended to heaven and poured out the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33), gifting the church that it might undertake the task of filling the world with God's glory (Eph. 4:7–16).

Jesus not only accomplished the works of mastering Torah, living it out, and loving his disciples to the end (John 13:1) by going to the cross and building the church as the temple of the Spirit, he also explained to his disciples before his departure that he was going away to prepare a place for them in the Father's house (John 14:1–2). Understood in the context of the Bible's story and symbolism, the Father's house refers to the fulfillment of the cosmic temple, the new heaven and new earth, whose holy of holies is the new Jerusalem, which will come down out of heaven from God at the consummation of all things (Rev. 21:1–2, 15–27; 22:1–5).

Jesus is the word, through whom the world was made in the beginning (John 1:3; Heb. 1:2), and having done that work, he also does the work necessary to make the world new in the end, promising also to return for his disciples (John 14:1–3; Heb. 1:10–12; 9:27–28). He has done, and continues to do, so much that John asserts that if everything were written down the world would not contain the books detailing his accomplishments (John 21:25).

Jesus builds the church, and he builds the cosmic temple of

the new heavens and new earth. He also builds his people, gives them the Spirit (John 20:21–23), and sends them out to do greater works than he did (14:12) by spreading the gospel to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18–20)

### ***Paul's Instructions***

What is the controlling framework for Paul's thinking about who Christians are and the significance of the work they do? The New Testament authors understand the Old Testament to be fulfilled in Christ and the church, and Paul twice asserts that the Old Testament Scriptures were written for Christians (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 9:9). This means that Paul assumes and builds on material from across the Old Testament, from the creation account in Genesis right through the covenant in Deuteronomy to Solomon's teaching in Ecclesiastes and Proverbs.

Paul's controlling framework for discussing work, then, will include the things we have discussed about the Old Testament and its fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth. Paul sees Christians as being in Christ, the new Adam, and therefore the work Christians do must be understood in the Bible's master story. God put Adam in the garden to work and keep it. Because of his sin he was expelled. God then gave Israel the tabernacle, and later the temple, with the Levites and the Aaronic priesthood as the stewards of the dwelling of God, the seed from David's line being the temple builder. As Adam was expelled from Eden, Israel was exiled from the land. Jesus came as both the fulfillment of the temple (John 2:19–21) and the temple building king from David's line (Matt. 16:18; John 14:2), and he inaugurates the new covenant between God and his people (Luke 22:20), becoming as the high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 1:3; 5:6–10).

With the changes that come in the new covenant, however, Jesus does not build a literal temple in Jerusalem. Rather, he builds his church (Matt. 16:18). This explains the New Testament's insistence that the church is the temple of the Holy Spirit (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:16; 1 Pet. 2:4–5). Jesus is building the church, and his people are not required to worship in particular locations but wherever they gather in his name (John 4:21–24; Matt. 18:20).

All this means that as Christians, we should conceive of ourselves as being in Christ, the new Adam (see Rom. 5:12–21). We are being conformed to the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18), who is himself the image of God (Col 1:15). Those who are in Christ are part of the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), and as the gospel bears fruit it is as though the new Adam is being fruitful and multiplying (Col. 1:6, and cf. the Greek translation of Gen. 1:28). Jesus makes his people “a kingdom, priests to his God and Father” (Rev. 1:6; see also 1 Pet. 2:9).

How does this framework inform our identity and understanding of the significance of our work? Taking our thoughts captive to the knowledge of Christ includes the following ways of thinking: God created the world as a cosmic temple. God created man to be the visible image and likeness of his invisible presence, power, reign, authority, and character. That is, man was made to exercise God's dominion as God's king-priest in the world. Christ succeeded where Adam failed, and those who belong to Christ are being renewed in his image. Believers now have the opportunity to build one another up in the church, the temple of the Holy Spirit, until Christ returns to make all things new.

As king-priests in Christ the new Adam, believers are urged by Paul to offer their bodies as living sacrifices, the reasonable service in the temple of the Holy Spirit, the church (Rom. 12:1). The language of “mutual upbuilding” (14:19) and Paul's call for each to “please his neighbor for his good, to build him up” (15:2) partakes of the imagery of believers contributing to the way Christ is building his church.

Imagining our lives in these terms helps us to embrace Paul's admonition that we do everything for God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31), explains why he himself worked so hard (15:10), substantiates his claim that our labor in the Lord is not in vain (15:58), and, given the way Adam failed to keep the snake out of the garden and protect the woman from it (see Gen. 2:15; 3:1–7), provides a contextual background for understanding Paul's instructions when he writes, “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love” (1 Cor. 16:13–14; see also Rom. 16:17–20).

Paul's concept of the church directly informs what he says about thieves no longer stealing but doing honest work that they might "have something to share with anyone in need" in Ephesians 4:28, these comments being immediately preceded in 4:25 by the assertion, "for we are members one of another." Paul's concern for the believers in Ephesus to work in such a way that they commend the gospel can also be seen in his comments on slaves and masters in Ephesians 6:5–9. Whatever the economic relationship in which believers find themselves, they should relate to those with whom they work in a way that honors Christ and testifies to the gospel, serving Jesus (6:5, 7) and believing he will reward and judge (6:8–9, see also Col 3:22–4:1).

Paul echoes Solomon's call to diligence with the doxological goal in Colossians 3:17, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (see also 3:23). And for all these reasons Paul instructs believers: "aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one" (1 Thess. 4:11–12). Thus the idle are to be admonished (5:11), and those who do not respond are to be disciplined from the church (2 Thess. 3:6–15):

Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. 9 It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. 10 For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. 11 For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. 12 Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. 13 As for you, brothers,

do not grow weary in doing good. 14 If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

***Five Observations on This Passage:***

1. The tradition received from Paul (2 Thess. 3:6) is that believers should work to provide for themselves and others rather than expect others to support them.
2. This is the way that Paul conducted himself, working for his food rather than burdening others by expecting them to provide for him (3:7–8).
3. Paul's rule is that those who refuse to work are not to be fed by others (3:10).
4. Those who do not engage in useful, honest, productive work are likely to engage in destructive behavior (3:11).
5. Paul calls the church to shame those who refuse to work and have nothing to do with them (4:14).

God did not put Adam in the garden of Eden for him to have a nice place to take naps and indulge the vice of slothfulness. Rather, God put Adam in the garden for him to subdue the world, for him exercise dominion, for him to work and keep the garden (Gen. 1:26, 28; 2:15). Believers in Jesus, those who are united by faith to the new Adam and are thus in him, seek to live out their new creation identity (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15) as faithful stewards leveraging all they have and are for the kingdom.

***Discussion & Reflection:***

1. How can you maintain a balance between working too much and working too little? What in your perspective of work needs to be shaped by the words of Eccles. 2:24–25: "There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?"
2. As the new temple of God, what must we, the church, make our ultimate goal through our work?
3. Make a list of how these biblical foundations for work are different from that of worldly views of it.



## PART IV: RESTORATION

The Bible does not provide specifics on what exactly resurrection life will look like in the new heavens and new earth. What we have are trajectories that flow out of lines of expectation from the Old and New Testaments. We can combine these with the information we are given in the more direct statements to make some suggestions about what we can expect regarding the work resurrected believers will do in the restoration of all things. We can say the following on the basis of the broader teaching of the Old and New Testaments:

God will keep his promises and accomplish the purposes that he set out to achieve at creation.

This means that the cosmic temple defiled by sin and death will be purified and made new, with life overcoming death in the new creation of the new heavens and new earth.

Christ was raised from the dead and glorified, and those who belong to him will be raised as he was (his enemies being consigned to hell). Christ was embodied and



recognizable, which implies we will be too.

Paul asserts that the resurrection implies that our labor is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). The ongoing value of the work we do now could imply some ongoing ramifications in the new creation, though the purging judgment that remakes the world could consume everything, with the result that the lasting value stems from the character development achieved by the work we have done.

Christ's people will reign with him in the restoration of all things, establishing Adamic dominion throughout the cosmic temple.

A number of statements make clear that God's intention in creation and redemption was to make known his glory.<sup>7</sup> A sampling of these will make the point:

- “But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord” (Num. 14:21).”
- “For from the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is to be praised!” (Ps. 113:3).
- “And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa. 6:3).
- “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14).
- “For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name . . .” (Mal. 1:11).
- “‘Father, glorify your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven: ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again” (John 12:28).
- “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36).
- “And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’” (Rev. 5:13).

God built the cosmic temple as a theater for the display of his glory, and he put man in the cosmic temple to fill it

with those who represent him. The history of redemption details how man defiled God's cosmic temple with sin and death, but God accomplished salvation, redeeming men from their bondage to sin and corruption. When God brings all things to their proper consummation, the world will be full of the knowledge of his glory. God's purposes at creation will be achieved.

The Bible also indicates that in the new creation the judgments and curses will be removed as God makes new heavens and new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22). Isaiah 11 is interesting in this regard, as the depiction of the reign of the shoot from the stump of Jesse (Isa. 11:1–5) includes the wolf dwelling with the lamb, the leopard with the young goat, calf and lion together, and a little child leading them, as the cow and bear graze together and the lion eats straw like an ox (11:6–7). Since this scene includes the nursing child playing by the hole of the cobra (11:8), it seems that the Genesis 3:15 enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent has come to an end.

Isaiah indicates, then, that once the seed of the woman has definitively crushed the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15), the enmity between the two will be over, and the ravenous, malicious, killing meat-eaters will be content to graze like herbivores. This seems to point back to a time before the Lord allowed meat to be eaten (Gen. 9:1–4), before sin entered the world (3:6–19), when “every beast of the earth” had “every green plant for food” (1:30). Isaiah 11 points to a time when everything will be as it was, or better than it was, in the very good beginning (1:31). Isaiah 65:17 describes this future state of affairs: “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind” (see also Isa. 66:22; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; 2 Pet. 3:4–10, 13; Rev. 21:1).

The Gospel accounts and the words of Paul shed some light on the nature of Christ's resurrection body. He entered a room whose doors had been locked (John 20:19). His physical body could be touched (20:27). He could eat food (21:15; see also Luke 24:41–43). Paul says that the resurrection body is raised imperishable (1 Cor. 15:42), in glory and power (15:43), and spiritual (15:44),

being from heaven (15:47), and he asserts that believers who belong to him (15:23) will “bear the image of the man of heaven” (15:49). Elsewhere Paul says that he hopes to be like Christ in death that he might attain to the resurrection from the dead (Phil. 3:10–11), and he goes on to say that Christ “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (3:21). Though we lack many specifics, we can be confident that believers in Jesus will enjoy resurrection bodies like the one possessed by Christ himself (see also Rom. 8:21–23, 29–30).

Paul’s lengthy discussion of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 concludes with thanksgiving “to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57). In his next words, Paul establishes a link between the resurrection and the assurance that what we do here is more than vanity: “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (15:58). This tantalizing statement assures us of the value of what we do even as it leaves us wanting more information. As noted above, it may be that just as there will be some level of continuity between the pre- and post-resurrection body, with Jesus being recognizable but at the same time glorified and transformed, so there may be some level of continuity between the world as it now is and as it will be. Will work “built on the foundation” that “survives” (1 Cor. 3:14) last into the new creation? We can scarcely imagine what that might look like. It is perhaps easier to imagine how the strides we have made in the direction of Christlikeness will be manifest in the resurrection, but here again we await the revelation of what will be. We believe, however, that our work is not meaningless, absurd, and vain, because we do this work in the Lord.

Luke’s parable of the ten minas (Luke 19:11–27) may shed some light on the way believers will reign with Christ in the consummation of all things. A parable responding to the expectation that the kingdom of God would appear immediately (Luke 19:11), Jesus tells a story about a nobleman who entrusted minas to his servants that they might steward them (19:12–13). Those who do well are

granted authority over cities (19:17, 19), and this seems to point to the way that good stewards of Christ’s gifts now will be granted authority from him in the future. Along these lines, Paul tells the Corinthians that believers will judge the world and angels (1 Cor. 6:2–3). It seems that the royal priesthood that Christ made the church into (Rev. 1:6) will be priest-kings in the new creation, ruling and judging, working and keeping, filling and subduing, as it was in the beginning (Gen. 1:28; 2:15).

Several statements in Revelation indicate that when Christ establishes his reign on earth, his people will reign with him (Rev. 3:20; 5:10; 20:4). The work of exercising dominion over God’s creation, the cosmic temple, will bring to pass God’s plan for his vicegerent in his image and likeness to establish his dominion over all the earth. In Revelation 2:26–27, John presents Jesus making the following promise from Psalm 2 to those who overcome: “The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.” The overcomers will exercise the authority that the Father granted to Christ himself.

***Discussion & Reflection:***

1. How was your view of what the future will be like challenged or affirmed in this section?
2. In what ways can your work aid in the spreading of God’s glory (Hab. 2:14)?
3. Why should we keep the consummation of God’s purposes in mind when we go to work?



## CONCLUSION

We all interpret our lives in the context of a wider story that we believe to be true about the world, about God, and about ourselves. Believers in Jesus want to understand and embrace the story the biblical authors believed. This story makes sense of why we long for perfection — man was made for a sinless world and a very good creation. It explains what has gone wrong and why we die — Adam sinned and brought death into the world, and we follow our first father into rebellion. The story also explains why work is frustrating, difficult, even futile — sin made everyone’s job harder. And yet God will not let Satan win. The ancient dragon has been and will be overcome (John 12:31; Rev. 20:1–3, 10). God’s purposes will prevail. Death will be swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:54).

The Bible’s story also informs the work we do as image bearers of God made to represent him in the cosmic temple. Every activity in which people engage can be related to the tasks God gave to man in Genesis 1:28, 2:15, and 2:18. Nothing, except sin, is disconnected from the great tasks of filling and subduing, exercising dominion,

working and keeping, and helping. Now that Christ the new Adam has established God's victory, believers are in him, and we seek to build the church (Matt. 28:18–20; 1 Cor. 12–14), do good to all men (Gal. 6:10), and adorn the gospel by honorable, excellent work in whatever vocation we receive (Titus 2:1–10).

## END NOTES

1. The term “chiastic” is derived from the Greek letter chi, which is shaped like our letter “x,” and it refers to the way the first item corresponds to the last, the second to the second to last, and so on to a central turning point. Chiastic structures are literary devices that are extensions of parallelism, vehicles for artistic beauty, tools for memory, forms that provide structure and boundaries, and generators of symbiotic relationships between the chiasm's corresponding parts. See further the discussions in chapter 11 of James M. Hamilton Jr., *Typology—Understanding the Bible's Promise-Shaped Patterns: How Old Testament Expectations Are Fulfilled in Christ* (Zondervan, 2022).
2. See G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004); and Hamilton, *Typology*, 221–253.
3. This translation follows the proposal of Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993), 293.
4. Garrett, 294.
5. See Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Mitchell L. Chase, “From Dust You Shall Arise: Resurrection Hope in the Old Testament,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 18, no. 4 (2014): 9–29; Mitchell L. Chase,

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“The Genesis of Resurrection Hope: Exploring Its Early Presence and Deep Roots,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57 (2014): 467–80; Mitchell L. Chase, “Resurrection Hope in Daniel 12:2: An Exercise in Biblical Theology” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Louisville, KY, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013).

6. See Jonathan David Akin, “A Theology of Future Hope in the Book of Proverbs” (PhD diss., Louisville, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012).
7. See further James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

## FIELD GUIDE





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