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**BIBLICAL THEOLOGY**



# WORK

AND OUR LABOR IN THE LORD

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# Work and Our Labor in the Lord

James M. Hamilton Jr.

Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt,  
series editors

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*For Kameron Slater,  
a blessing to all who know him*



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# Introduction

How did the biblical authors view work? To answer this question we need to understand the place of work in biblical theology. Biblical theology, in my view, is the attempt to understand and embrace the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors.<sup>1</sup> To attempt to understand the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors is to attempt to understand their *worldview*. The only access we have to their worldview is what they wrote. Understanding the worldview of the biblical authors requires the ability to see the ways they intended their statements to be read against a wider understanding of the *history of redemption*, and I am convinced that an evangelical and canonical approach to these issues best positions us to make progress in the task of understanding and embracing the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors.<sup>2</sup> One's perspective on redemptive history will be an inextricable component of one's worldview, and if we are pursuing *biblical* theology we will (whether consciously or not) oper-

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1. James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

2. Those who have read Edward W. Klink and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012) will see that I am consciously combining what they describe as three different types of biblical theology (history of redemption, worldview story, and canonical approach). In my view, these issues are inseparable. I have attempted biblical theology in this way in *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); and *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014).

ate with some kind of perspective on the relationships between the various books of the Bible.

Because this is a biblical theological study of the topic of work, the structure of the canon will play a less explicit role.<sup>3</sup> For our purposes here, the following questions will help us to seek the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors on the topic of work:

- What part did work play in the big story of the world through which the biblical authors interpreted their lives?
- What propositional truths about work did they understand to flow out of and back into that big story?
- Do the biblical authors understand work to symbolize something beyond mere labor?

These questions will be used to get at what the biblical authors believed about work, and when we have understood what they believed about work, we will know what we should believe about it.

We will begin with (1) God's design for work in the very good creation, prior to sin. From there we will move to consider (2) what work looks like in a fallen world, (3) what work should be in the kingdom that the Lord Christ has inaugurated, and finally (4) what the Bible indicates about work in the new heaven and the new earth the Lord Jesus will bring. We will thus look at work at creation, after the fall, now that Christ has accomplished redemption, and in the restoration.

A word about biblical theological method: on the one hand, the contents of this book move through the salvation-historical storyline, i.e., the worldview story of creation-fall-redemption-restoration. On

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3. For further discussion, see Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 15–51; and for a comprehensive consideration of the issues, see Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985).

the other hand, in chapters 2 (fall/old-covenant instructions) and 3 (redemption/new-covenant instructions) we are not looking at *events* that can be plotted on the storyline but considering the gracious instructions God gave to his people for everyday life.

The incorporation of Old Testament Wisdom Literature into biblical theology has sometimes been seen as a challenge, particularly for those who move along the salvation-historical storyline, as this study does. Chapter 2 gives considerable attention to the ways that the books of Ecclesiastes and Proverbs speak to work in everyday life under the old covenant, so here the Wisdom Literature is having its biblical theological say.<sup>4</sup>

We are looking for the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors. The following four chapters will enable us to explore work as it was meant to be, as it is, as it can be, and as it will be.

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4. A longer project could include discussion of the Song of Solomon, particularly in light of what we will see about marriage and work in chapter 1. Time and space do not permit such discussion here, but see James M. Hamilton Jr., *Song of Songs: A Biblical-Theological, Allegorical, Christological Interpretation* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2015).



# Creation

## Work in the Very Good Garden

The stories we tell reveal our understanding of the world, with our hopes and fears, and the songs we sing are poetic crystallizations of the deep longings of our hearts. The deep longings of our hearts correspond to what we envision as the good life. Our vision of the good life can be understood as our vision of “the kingdom.”<sup>1</sup>

### **God’s Design for Work**

The soundtrack to the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* includes the song “Big Rock Candy Mountain.”<sup>2</sup> The lyrics celebrate handouts that grow on bushes, trees that sprout cigarettes, and bulldogs that have rubber teeth so their watchdog bites are harmless. This song’s idyllic landscape includes streams of alcohol beside a lake of stew,

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1. See further James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

2. First recorded by Harry McClintock in 1928.

and whiskey too, because those who sing it want to escape reality by means of intoxication and to be fed though they have not worked. They want mountains made of rock candy. They want no tools such as shovels, axes, saws, or picks. They want to sleep all day, and they want to hang the jerk that invented work. I wonder if the songwriter realized that would put the noose around God's neck!

The song's sentiments fall significantly short of the glory that God intended when he created man in his own image and gave him work to do. Life at the Big Rock Candy Mountain would not result in true and lasting happiness or satisfaction. The Bible says there is a primal mountain that is our destination, but it's not one that will rot teeth and indulge character deficiencies. Contrast "Big Rock Candy Mountain" with Psalm 128:

A Song of Ascents.

Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,

    who walks in his ways!

You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;

    you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.

Your wife will be like a fruitful vine

    within your house;

your children will be like olive shoots

    around your table.

Behold, thus shall the man be blessed

    who fears the LORD.

The LORD bless you from Zion!

    May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of  
    your life!

May you see your children's children!

    Peace be upon Israel!

This song is addressed to a man who works, and the blessing comes to him because he fears Yahweh and walks in Yahweh's ways. The blessing of Yahweh takes the form of this man enjoying the results of his work, which he has done to provide for his wife and children. Psalm 128's depiction of the good life, then, entails hard work done to provide for others, dependents, whose growth and fruitfulness are evidence of God's favor and blessing. Prosperity here includes godliness, responsibility, stewardship, and awareness of God, prompting fear and obedience and virtue.

The man blessed in Psalm 128 is a God-fearing man (v. 4), and in the context of the whole book of Psalms, the mention of Zion in verse 5 evokes the Davidic king Yahweh set there (cf. Ps. 2:6).<sup>3</sup> The references to the prosperity of Jerusalem and children and grandchildren in verses 5 and 6 hint that what has resulted in this individual blessed man experiencing the joys of Psalm 128 has spread to the wider culture. Jerusalem prospers because its men fear God, obey his Word, and work with their hands for the benefit of their wives and children. Psalm 128 is a poetic depiction of the blessings of the Mosaic covenant (cf. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28).

"Big Rock Candy Mountain" and Psalm 128 sing different versions of the good life. In the Bible, the land of promise is not the place sought by freeloaders and slackers who long for an El Dorado where theft is easy, the hills are made of sugar, work is abolished, and handouts are freely distributed to tramps and bums who have neither responsibilities nor families.

The Bible's songs are rooted in hopes seeded by its wider story, watered by God's promises. What is the role of work in that story? We begin our answer to that question by looking at what God created

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3. For the significance of Psalms 1–2 for the whole book of Psalms, see Robert L. Cole, *Psalms 1–2: Gateway to the Psalter* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013); see also Gordon J. Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

the good life to look like, when the world was without sin. We will start with work in the garden in Genesis 1–2. From there we will seek insight on what life in Eden could have been like from the blessings of the covenant in Deuteronomy 28:1–14. We will then consider how the judgment on God-given tasks in Genesis 3:16–19 subjects work to futility (cf. Rom. 8:20).

### **Work in the Garden (Genesis 1–2)**

The Bible’s story of the world opens with God doing work, six days of it. Once completed, not from weariness but because the work was done, God rested on the seventh day (Gen. 1:1–2:3; Heb. 4:3–4). Given that man is made in God’s image and likeness (Gen. 1:27), with Christians called to be imitators of God (Eph. 5:1), the fact that the Bible opens with this scene of God doing the work of creation by his powerful word calls for reflection. God works by speaking words. Among other things, this validates all kinds of knowledge work in which the hard work of thinking and communicating accomplishes what those made in God’s image have set out to do. But what words are like God’s words? What words could make worlds?

In addition to being able to marshal his army of words to accomplish his purposes, then, we see from this vast and splendid universe that God is a skilled worker who completes his tasks with unparalleled excellence and creativity. Work is neither punishment nor cursed drudgery but an exalted, Godlike activity. Nor should we think that once God completed the work of creation he was finished with work—as though he made the watch then simply left it to tick away the seconds. As a justification for his right to heal on the Sabbath, Jesus declared, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (John 5:17). The Bible opens with a depiction of God at work, and the operational understanding throughout the Bible is

that God continues to work, guiding, upholding, loving, judging, and saving.

The first thing the Bible shows us about God is that he is a creative, competent, efficient, caring worker, whose work provides for others, blesses others, meets the needs of others, and makes life possible for them. Surely this is meant to inform readers of Genesis as they confront the idea of man made male and female in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26–28).<sup>4</sup>

The creation of man and woman is accompanied by a blessing and a task, a charge and commission, which spring from God's intention for man as he made them, male and female. Genesis 1:26 presents God intending to grant *dominion*, royal rule, over the animal kingdom from the moment he decides to make man in his own image and likeness—indeed, dominion *because* made in God's image and likeness. God made male and female in his own image (Gen. 1:27); then he blessed them and told them what he wanted them to do (1:28).

Man was created not for passive observation of the world but for an epic task, a worldwide venture. Genesis 1:28 recounts,

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

God commands the man and woman in Genesis 1:28 to be fruitful and multiply and thereby fill the earth—the whole thing. Then they are to subdue it—the whole thing. God next charges them to exercise dominion over the animal kingdom—the whole thing. The tasks in Genesis 1:28 are interrelated and interdependent. Man is to be

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4. On this theme, see now Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).

fruitful and multiply so as to fill, subdue, and rule. It is interesting to observe that in order to subdue and rule, man will have to be fruitful, multiply, and fill. This makes the fact that man was made male and female (1:27) indispensable.<sup>5</sup>

The marriage of the man and the woman (Gen. 2:18–25) will make possible the fruitful multiplication, which will enable the filling, subduing, and ruling. This tells us that the work God gave the man to do is not to be disconnected from marriage and family. In fact, marriage and family enable the man to accomplish the work God told him to do. These foundational realities in Genesis naturally give rise to songs such as Psalm 128, where the blessed man enjoys the fruits of his labor in the context of his family.

In the very good world as God created it (Gen. 1:31), prior to the entrance of sin (cf. 3:1–8), God gave man marriage to enable the completion of God-given and God-sized responsibilities. This is true in merely logistical terms—without the woman the man cannot be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. What the narrative draws our attention to, however, is the more significant relational blessing that God’s gift of the woman was designed to be.<sup>6</sup> God said that it was not good for the man to be alone (Gen. 2:18), and he created a very good companion in the woman (2:22). This means that the fellowship and companionship and soul-deep oneness in the marriage of the man and the woman (2:23–25) were given to make the filling, subduing, and ruling over the world a delightful adventure undertaken together.

In the true story Genesis tells, God gave marriage not only to

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5. For the vital necessity of women and motherhood, see my essay, “A Biblical Theology of Motherhood,” *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 2, no. 2 (2012): 6–13.

6. Contrast this with the Greek myth that purports to explain the creation of women as punishment for men in the poem “Works and Days” by Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, Loeb Classical Library 57 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 7.

enable the great task but also to *enrich* the life and work God gave to man.

Again, the multiplying is for filling, and the filling is for the image of God to cover the dry lands as the waters cover the seas so that all the earth will be subdued by those who image forth God's likeness, and thus all animals will be ruled by those who exercise godly dominion. The subduing of the earth seems to call for wild tangles of vegetation to be transformed into places where humans can live and cultivate gardens. The dominion over the animals suggests a stewardship of all living creatures so that all enjoy God's goodness.

To summarize: God built a cosmic temple when he called creation into being.<sup>7</sup> In that temple he placed his own image and likeness. He then blessed his image and likeness and charged them with a responsibility. Their job was to make the world that God made good (Gen. 1:31) even better (!) for both plant and animal life. Being in God's image and likeness, mankind was to cultivate the world of vegetation and living creatures in ways reflecting God's own character and creativity.

Humans were made and put on earth as the visible representations of the character, authority, and rule of the invisible God.

A fundamental answer to the question of why we are here, therefore, is that we are here to reflect the character of God in the way we subdue the earth and exercise dominion over the animal kingdom under the blessing of God. Doing these things as the image and likeness of God means that our task is to bring the nature and character of God to bear on all living things in the world that God made.<sup>8</sup>

Work is therefore built into the created order, right from the start. God gave man stewardship of the land and all life on it. All tasks man

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7. 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, IL: IVP Academic, 2004).

8. So also Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 56.

undertakes in God's world can be seen in relationship to that original commission. Some jobs deal directly with plants and animals. Other jobs enable the stewardship of land and life. All jobs relate to those great tasks. The making of roads and markets enables us to subdue the earth and exercise dominion over the animals. The tasks related to helping other humans to flourish intellectually and spiritually enable people to deal with the land and living creatures. Arguably every righteous task in the world—from that of the farmer or rancher to that of the engineer, the software developer, or the nuclear physicist, from that of the ditchdigger to the physician (or veterinarian), from the coach to the pastor, the zookeeper to the politician, the sergeant to the mailman—every task in the world can be seen in relationship to the subjection of the earth and the exercise of dominion over the animal kingdom.

Not all jobs are righteous, of course. Sometimes wicked people hire others to commit sin: people are paid to commit murder, to bear false witness, to corrupt justice, or to commit adultery. Such jobs not only transgress God's commands; they image forth the character of the usurper rather than the likeness of the Creator.

At its most basic level, a righteous job is one that does not exist to commit or promote sin but to accomplish the tasks God gave to humanity at the beginning: fill, subdue, rule. Such work affords everyone who does it the opportunity to image forth the likeness of the one living and true God.

Genesis 1:26–28 tells us who we are as human beings and what God put us here to do. Who we are as the bearers of the image and likeness of the Creator is inherent in what God has given us to do. The filling, subduing, and ruling are to be done for God's sake and in God's way to display God's own character. There is to be no disconnect between what a man is and the way he does his work. How a man understands himself, his fundamental assumptions about the

world, God, and his own sense of purpose will be made manifest in the way he does his work.

We get more insight into what God made man and woman to do in the Genesis 2 interpretive expansion on the Genesis 1 creation narrative. The connection between man and the working of the land can be seen in Genesis 2:5: “When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground . . .” Here Moses is not directly discussing man’s role, but man’s function is clear from the explanatory comment that God had not yet made man, so there was not yet a man to work the ground. This unexplored explanatory comment shows that Moses assumes that his audience will understand what he declares in the near context (e.g., 1:28; 2:15): that man was made to exercise stewardship over God’s world by working the land.

The idea that man was made to work the ground is elaborated upon in Genesis 2:15, which states, “And Yahweh God took the man and caused him to rest in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it” (AT). This is the first instance in the Bible of the term I have rendered “rest” (נוח), but the root will appear again in the naming of Noah (נח) in Genesis 5:29, where Noah’s father articulates the hope that Noah will be the seed of the woman who will roll back the curse on the land (cf. Gen. 3:17–19 and 5:29). Earlier in Genesis 2 a different term was used to describe the way God “rested” (שבת) from his work on the seventh day. When God completed his work, he took a Sabbath, as it were (our word *Sabbath* being derived from the verb used to describe God resting on the seventh day, *shabbat*). When God put man in the garden to work, by contrast, he caused him to rest (נוח) there. John Piper once said on a panel discussion, “Productivity is restful to my soul.” God caused Adam to rest in the

garden that he might work it and keep it. Genesis 2:15 seems to point to a restorative rhythm of work and rest, even a restful work.

Significant, too, is the fact that God put the man in the garden to work and keep it. This language, “work and keep,” could also be rendered “guard and serve,” and these terms are found together elsewhere in the Pentateuch only when they describe the duties of the Levites at the tabernacle, which they were to guard, where they were to minister (e.g., Num. 3:7–8).<sup>9</sup> Once Moses’s audience has gotten as far as Numbers, subsequent encounters of the use of this language in Genesis 2:15 cast a priestly hue over the work that God put Adam in the garden to do.

God charged man with the tasks of filling, subduing, and ruling in Genesis 1:28, and this same task is restated as working and keeping the garden in Genesis 2:15. Working the garden (2:15), thus, elaborates on the charge to subdue the earth (1:28), even as the tasks of filling and subduing the earth indicate that the man and the woman were to work together to make all the land that God made like the garden of Eden. Keeping the garden (2:15) would seem to overlap with the exercise of dominion over fish, birds, and land animals (1:28). Fruits and flowers can be delicate things that need to be protected from the unwieldy bulk of an elephant or the overenthusiastic puppy. Given the fact that serpents and other animals will later be declared unclean,<sup>10</sup> the man’s work of keeping the garden may have included the task of keeping snakes out (cf. Gen. 3:1).

The narrative of Genesis 2 proceeds to show God guiding the man through what it will look like for him to subdue the earth and exercise dominion over the animals. We also see what working and

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9. See Gordon J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard Hess and David Toshio Tsumara (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 399–404.

10. See Leviticus 11: for serpents v. 42; for lizards vv. 29–30.

keeping the garden entails, as the man is to keep *himself* from the forbidden Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, on pain of death (2:17).

Reinforcing the interconnectedness of marriage and family with work, for the man cannot be fruitful and multiply by himself, God says that it is not good for the man to be alone. God then purposes to remedy what is not good by making a helper for the man (Gen. 2:18). Just as the man was made to work and keep the garden (2:15), the woman was made to help the man (2:18). These roles are built into the nature of man and woman by the one who created humanity male and female as his own image.

The man's role of working will entail providing; his role of keeping will entail protecting; and implicit in the narrative we also see that the man is to lead since he has heard the prohibition in Genesis 2:17 though the woman has not. The man was to provide, protect, and lead.

What does the woman's role of helping entail? Perhaps it would be easier to say what helping does not entail, for helping would seem to involve everything *but* what the man is to do. God created the woman so that together they could be fruitful and multiply, and God created her to help the man lead, protect, and provide. The jobs were given to the man to do, and the woman was given to help him do them. These roles are established so that together the man and the woman can accomplish the tasks set out in Genesis 1:28 and 2:15.

They can multiply only together. They cannot do that without a total investment in the project from both. They can fill the earth only with their children, and they can subdue the earth and have dominion over all those animals only with the help of those children. Clearly these children will need strong character and a diligent work ethic for the big jobs before them.

Our culture is in revolt against the idea that biology corresponds

to sexual identity, to say nothing of the fact that some roles are given to men that are not given to women, and vice versa. The revolt seeks to overthrow the “gender binary,” the view that humanity exists as male and female, as though being either biologically male or female is too restrictive a way to approach the issue.<sup>11</sup> Rather than viewing biological sex and the accompanying gender roles as some kind of straitjacket, however, we should receive how God made us as his gift and purpose for us and marvel at the enormous freedom and flexibility within the broad indications of God’s created purpose for the man to work and keep and for the woman to help. The specifics are not spelled out, leaving room for different personalities and relationships to maneuver freely as they dance to the music.

The creational realities are like the ballroom, within which we find the dance floor, with the music and its beat provided as well. How each married couple dances to the music is up to them, but as creatures in God’s world they will dance in this ballroom, on this dance floor, to this music, with the man leading and the woman helping. Not to do so is to rebel against the created order.

A theological analogy can be observed between the interpersonal relationships enjoyed by the members of the Trinity and the creation of male and female in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Within the Godhead, among the members of the Trinity, we find that the Father takes on certain roles, the Son takes other roles, and the Spirit does other things also. There is a diversity of persons and responsibilities within the Trinity, and God creates humanity in his image and likeness of two sexes, male and female, with differing responsibilities. As Richard Lints writes of the plural (“let us”) in Genesis 1:26, “The immediate context at least signals a reflection

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11. For a full treatment of these issues, see Denny Burk, *What Is the Meaning of Sex?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

of the Creator in human creatures. And that reflection must be considered relational in part.”<sup>12</sup>

Men and women who reject the distinctions in roles given to male and female at creation rebel against God’s purpose: he made man male and female to reflect his own image and likeness. We cannot reflect the character of God’s unified diversity as the one God who ever exists as three persons if we reject the roles *he gave* to man and woman.

The world ranged against God has cultivated a sense that what is “normal” is for biological sex to be irrelevant both to gender identity and to the nature of the work someone does. In Genesis 1–2 by contrast, biological sex is directly tied to the roles given to man and woman. Our society is in rebellion against God’s created order. This aspect of secular culture is at war with God’s purpose for people as men and women. This culture also wants to normalize sexual rebellion, redefining marriage to include same-sex unions that by their very nature cannot be fruitful and multiply.<sup>13</sup>

The man exercises God’s dominion over the animals by naming them (Gen. 2:19–20), and then the man names the woman (2:21–23). The man’s exercise of his God-given authority over the woman, naming her, partakes of no oppression, no exploitation, and no lack of concern. It is noble, loving, biological, theological, true, righteous, pure, and poetic.

God built this vast world, and then he created two people whose responsibility it was to be fruitful and multiply and fill this world, to subdue the earth and to exercise dominion over all the animals. Can you imagine a bigger task? Could there be a more daunting challenge, a more ambitious undertaking?

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12. Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 68.

13. See Sherif Girgis, Robert George, and Ryan T. Anderson, “What Is Marriage?” *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* 34 (2010): 245–87; and Denny Burk and Heath Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality: What the Bible Says about Sexual Orientation and Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015).

What does God do to enable the man and the woman to accomplish these tasks? He made them in his image and likeness and blessed them (Gen. 1:26–28), and he gave them to each other in marriage (2:22–24).

What Moses narrated in Genesis 2:22–23 prompted a statement in 2:24 that applies what just took place between the first man and woman to all humanity. In Matthew 19:4–5 Jesus says that the Creator spoke the words of Genesis 2:24. This means that on the basis of what happens in Genesis 2:18–23, God says that men are to leave their parents and cleave to a wife, the two becoming one flesh (cf. Matt. 19:4). Note that to this point in Genesis 1–2 neither the man nor the woman has a father or a mother, but God is speaking in 2:24 of a man leaving his father and mother. This assumes that from what takes place in this scene forward, all men everywhere will have a father and a mother. In fact it is impossible to have a male child, or any child, without a father and a mother. Those male children are to leave their parents, cleave to a wife, and become one flesh with her, and then the new pair becomes father and mother.

Before moving from this discussion of Genesis 1–2, let us return to our guiding questions in an attempt to bring together what we have observed to this point.

What role does work play in the Bible's big story? By charging the man to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, having dominion over all other creatures, God was commanding his image bearers, the visible representation of the authority and character of the invisible God, to cover the dry lands with the glory of God as the waters cover the seas.<sup>14</sup> This means that at the root level, man's task is to work in such a way that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting, the name of the Lord is praised, the goodness

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14. Cf. Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 53: "creation is 'built' for worship."

of God is savored, and the character of God is known and enacted. Thus the work that Adam made impossible by his sin is the work that Jesus has made possible through his death and resurrection and will accomplish when he returns. The earth will indeed be full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

What propositional truths about work flow out of and back into that big story? The task of multiplying and filling the earth so as to subdue it and have dominion over the animals makes marriage foundational to the work that God gave man and woman to do on the earth. From the pre-fall, pre-curse narrative in Genesis 1 and 2 Paul derives normative, prescriptive gender roles determined by biological sex. Paul bases his argument that men and women are to be distinguished from one another both in behavior and apparel on the reality that the woman was made from man and that the woman was created for the man (1 Cor. 11:8–9; cf. 11:2–16; 1 Tim. 2:9–15).<sup>15</sup> This means that so-called egalitarians have rejected the roles assigned to men and women by the Creator on the basis of biological sex. We can further say that same-sex “marriage” and transgenderism rebel against the created order by rejecting the normative nature of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 articulated by Jesus in Matthew 19:4–5. Same-sex marriages cannot be fruitful and multiply, and transgender behavior rejects the sex assigned by the Creator.

On the positive side, we can say that the narratives present the man’s job in the context of his family. Adam was to work the garden

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15. For an exposition of 1 Corinthians 11, see James M. Hamilton Jr., “Gender Roles and the Glory of God: A Sermon on 1 Corinthians 11:2–12,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 9 (2004): 35–39; on 1 Timothy 2, see Thomas R. Schreiner and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005); for a synthesis of the relevant NT passages, see James M. Hamilton Jr., “What Women Can Do in Ministry: Full Participation within Biblical Boundaries,” in *Women, Ministry and the Gospel: Exploring New Paradigms* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 32–52; and for discussion of virtually every aspect of the debate, see Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004).

and protect it. He was to lead his wife and the brood they begat, provide for her and the children through his work, and protect his wife and offspring as he guarded the garden.

Does work point beyond mere labor? Being in the image and likeness of God, working to fill the earth with God's image bearers, subduing it according to God's character, ruling it as God's representative—work points to the character and glory of God. As man works, he is to make the ways of the invisible God visible to any and all who behold what he does.

Genesis 1–2 is the archetypal fountainhead of biblical symbolism, and it seems that the work spoken of in these chapters, working and keeping the garden, subduing the earth and exercising dominion over the creatures, symbolizes all the work that man will do under heaven.

We know what happens in Genesis 3. But can you imagine what life would be like had Adam not sinned? We can fertilize our imaginations on this point from the descriptions of the good life in the land that hint at what life and work were meant to be. These descriptions can be found, among other places, in texts such as Psalm 128 and the blessings of the covenant, where God promised what life would be if his people would obey his commands (see Lev. 26:1–13 and Deut. 28:1–14). We turn to a consideration of the blessings of the covenant for more light on what life under God's blessing was meant to be.

### **The Blessings of the Covenant (Deut. 28:1–14)**

Why would the blessings of the covenant give insight into what un-fallen life in Eden would have been like? Because though sin got Adam expelled from Eden, God did not alter his purpose from what he set out to achieve when he put Adam there in the first place. That purpose was and is to cover the dry lands with his glory. The prom-

ise made in Genesis 3:15 was passed down through the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11, and then the blessing of Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3 elaborated upon the promise. That blessing of Abraham was passed to Isaac in Genesis 26:3 and to Jacob in 28:4. The blessing is then passed to the sons of Joseph in Genesis 48:15–20, but the blessing of Judah indicates that the conquering king would come from him (Gen. 49:8–12; cf. 1 Chron. 5:1–2).

The wording of Genesis 5:1–3 creates the impression that as Seth was Adam's son in his image and likeness, so, in a sense, Adam was God's son in his image and likeness (cf. Luke 3:38). Along these lines, when God declares that the nation of Israel is his firstborn son, it is as though the nation of Israel has become a new Adam. When God brings Israel into the Land of Promise, it is as though the new Adam enters the new Eden with a new opportunity to dwell in God's land under God's law enjoying God's blessing. Just as Adam was to expand the borders of the garden to fill the world with God's glory, so Israel's king was offered the ends of the earth as his possession (Ps. 2:8–9).

For Israel to enjoy the Land of Promise by keeping the Mosaic covenant would be for them to realize God's purposes and experience God's blessing. It would be as close to Eden as someone could get on this side of Adam's sin.

We will look mainly at Deuteronomy 28, but there is one element of Leviticus 26 that particularly corresponds to the scene in the garden of Eden: the presence of God. The best thing about life in Eden was that God walked there with man in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8). The best thing about Israel's life in covenant with God was that God promised to make his dwelling among them (Lev. 26:11–13). Once this has been stated in Leviticus, it is assumed all through the rest of what Moses says and does not need to be restated in Deuteronomy 28. The enjoyment of God's presence, however, is what makes even life in the desert seem like life in Eden (cf. Ex. 33:15).

Eden apart from God's presence would be a hellish absence of the one thing that makes life sacred. Life in Eden without God would be no different from godless life in some lush place now (Breckenridge, Colorado; Beverly Hills, California; or the South of France). Heaven without God is nothing but a pretty hell.

Deuteronomy 28:1–14 opens and closes with statements that Israel will know these blessings if they obey Yahweh and do what he commands (28:1, 13–14). Between the opening and closing statements, the good things detailed in 28:3–12 are promised to the obedient.

Deuteronomy 28:3–6 presents a series of merisms. A merism is a figure of speech in which contrasting extremes are used to communicate totality. For instance, if you say, "I searched high and low," what you mean is that you searched everywhere. Similarly, to be blessed in city and field (Deut. 28:3) is to be blessed in those places and all others; to have God's blessing on the fruit of womb, ground, cattle, herds, and young of the flock is to have God's blessing on all forms of life: people, animals, and lands (28:4). To be blessed in basket and kneading bowl is to be blessed in all forms of collection and preparation (28:5), and to be blessed coming in and going out (28:5) is to be blessed everywhere you go. These verses proclaim that obedience to God results in everything you do being blessed, all forms of life around you being blessed, and your every movement from one place to another being blessed. Is it any wonder that Psalm 1 is in the Bible?

Deuteronomy 28:7 declares that God will defeat the enemies of his people, 28:8 says that everything his people store and anything they undertake will be blessed, and 28:9 announces that God will consecrate his obedient people to himself as holy. This will result in 28:10 in the nations' seeing that God's people are called by his name, with the result that the nations fear them, and 28:11 is virtually a restatement of the promise to Abraham of land, seed, and blessing (cf. Gen. 12:1–3). Deuteronomy 28:11 says God's obedient people

will have abundant prosperity in the fruit of womb, livestock, and land. God will give them the rain in its season, bless the work of their hands, and cause them ever to be lending, never to be borrowing (28:12).

Could there be any way for life to be any better?

Deuteronomy 28:1–14 holds forth a vision of the good life, promising that if God's people will obey him, this life will be theirs. The life described in these blessings of the covenant holds out the possibility of pre-fall gladness in post-fall gloom. God drove Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden, but he extends to those who walk with him and obey his Word the opportunity to have an Eden-like experience though they live outside the garden's gates.

If sin results in death, how can God promise life? He can promise life because his love is stronger than death (cf. Song 8:6), and because he instituted sacrifices for atonement. In the old-covenant context, the promise of life is contingent on obedience. The obedience of Israel included their obligation to realize the guilt of their sin and offer blood sacrifice to atone for it (see, e.g., Lev. 5:1–6; 18:5). The blood sacrifices that made life possible to those who believed under the old covenant were fulfilled in Christ's death on the cross, as the author of Hebrews demonstrates.

In the Bible's grand narrative, we see that the blessings of the covenant extend the hope of God's blessing even to the work God's people do. A clear propositional truth that can be derived from the blessings of the covenant is that God's promised blessing is contingent upon obedience. Work continues to point beyond itself, with the character of God being displayed in the way God's people do their work.

God put man in the garden to work, and God intended to bless that work. What does the Bible say about how life and work changed after sin? To answer that question we look at what God said in

Genesis 3:16–17. Before we look at the judgment God spoke in Genesis 3:14–19 in response to Adam’s sin in 3:1–7, however, we should note again that the blessings of the covenant pertain to (1) protection from enemies (Deut. 28:7, 10), (2) blessing on the fruit of the womb (28:4, 11), and (3) blessing on the fruit of the land (28:3, 4, 8, 11). This corresponds precisely to the words of judgment in Genesis 3:14–19, where (1) enmity is introduced between the people of God and the people of the Snake in 3:15, then (2) difficulty in childbearing is introduced in 3:16, and (3) the land is cursed in 3:17.

### **Judgment on God-Given Tasks (Gen. 3:16–19)**

We saw what God created man and woman to accomplish in Genesis 1–2, and then we looked to Deuteronomy 28:1–14 to catch a glimpse of what life might have been like under God’s blessing in the land of life, in Eden, prior to sin. We now turn to Genesis 3:16–19 to see how God’s word of judgment on Adam’s sin affects the work God gave humanity to do.

The woman was made to be fruitful and multiply with the man and to help him. Those two roles are made more difficult in Genesis 3:16, when God promised pain in childbearing and a desire to usurp the man’s authority with corresponding harsh treatment from him. The first thing to note about the words of judgment spoken to the woman in Genesis 3:16 is that they presume the continuation of the woman’s life, which is surprising in light of the prohibition and threatened penalty of death in 2:17. The ongoing life the man and woman will experience—the fact that there will be childbearing at all means the man’s life, too, will continue—joins with statements made to the Snake (on which more shortly) to create hope. The words of judgment, then, are merciful. God had every right to put the man and woman to death, but he mercifully allows them to continue in life.

The life the man and woman mercifully enjoy, however, will be

marked by new pain. The term rendered “pain” in both Genesis 3:16 and 3:17 occurs only three times in the Old Testament, the third being Genesis 5:29. Both the man and the woman will experience this pain in their work, and at Noah’s birth, his father, Lamech, hopes that Noah will bring relief from painful toil (5:29).

Because of sin, the woman will experience a kind of pain that would not have been there had she not disobeyed God. Having been commissioned to be fruitful and multiply with the man, the woman’s sin added pain to what God created her to do.

The woman was also made to help the man, but in Genesis 3:16 she is told that her “desire” will be for her husband. The term rendered “desire” occurs only three times in the Old Testament, the other two instances being Genesis 4:7 and Song of Solomon 7:10. Both shed light on the term’s meaning in Genesis 3:16. In Genesis 4:7 Cain is told that sin’s desire is for him, but he must “rule over it.” The syntax and terminology of Genesis 3:16 and 4:7 are remarkably parallel (my very literal translation follows):

3:16, “and for your husband your desire, and he will rule over you.”

4:7, “and for you its [sin’s] desire, and you must rule over it.”

The similarity in phrasing and vocabulary suggests that Moses intended his audience to interpret these two statements in light of each other. Sin desires Cain in Genesis 4:7 in the sense that it wants to determine his actions. Cain must rule over sin by rejecting its attempts to influence him. This would suggest that the woman’s desire for her husband is a desire to determine his actions, and the man’s ruling over the woman will be a rejection and suppression of her influence. The relational harmony seen in the unashamed nakedness of Genesis 2:25 is gone. No longer does the woman gladly embrace her created

role of helper, and no longer does the man lovingly accept input. As a result of sin, God speaks a word of judgment over the woman that introduces relational difficulty between her and the one she was made to help.

In Genesis 3:16 God's judgment falls on the two things the woman was created to do. She will have pain in childbearing, and she will have a difficult relationship with the man she was made to help. Her sin has made her tasks harder, but in God's mercy she still has those tasks. And as we will see, hope remains.

Just as the woman's sin resulted in judgment that made it harder to accomplish what God created her to do, so also with the man. His role was to work and keep the garden, but he and the woman were driven out of the garden (3:23). He was promised, moreover, painful toil on the ground God cursed (3:17). The man is faulted for not leading the woman into holiness but following her into sin when the Lord prefaces his judgment with the words, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife" (3:17). This reinforces what we saw above about the relationship between gender roles and work. The man failed to lead and followed instead, and in the next statement in 3:17 the Lord indicts the man for doing exactly what the Lord told him not to do. The Lord then cursed the ground in 3:17. The Serpent had been cursed in 3:14, but neither the man nor the woman was cursed. Instead, pain and complication were added to the tasks God made them to accomplish. Rather than working a blessed creation, the man will toil on a cursed ground, and he will have pain in the production of food all his life. Obstacles and impediments will frustrate the man's toil (3:18), and sweaty struggle will mark his labor until he dies (3:19).

It is interesting to observe that in the Bible's grand narrative, God's judgment falls in particular on the domains of what God made man and woman to do. From the narrative we derive propositional

truths: God made man to work, but sin resulted in God's judgment. God's word of judgment against sin makes the work painful, the environment cursed, and the relationships between men and women strained. Because of sin, work will be futile, frustrating, and fatal. Everyone dies.

### **Work outside Eden**

Is there any hope? Hope remains because work, though made difficult because of sin and judgment, continues to point beyond itself to God's character. The fact that the man and woman are allowed to continue in their work, cursed though it is, means that they still have the job of making the ways of God known in the world. But the hope for what the work points to is founded on God's word that indicates that evil will be defeated (Gen. 3:15).<sup>16</sup>

When we considered the curses of Genesis 3:14–19 above, we passed right over 3:14–15 to start with what God said to the woman in judgment on her tasks in 3:16. We noted, however, that what God said to the woman assumes both that she and the man will go on living and that they will have children and continue in their work.

That assumption joins with what God said to the Serpent in Genesis 3:14–15 to lay the foundation for all biblical faith and hope. God cursed the Serpent in 3:14, then told him in 3:15 that he would put enmity between the Serpent and the woman and between his seed and hers. Enmity requires that the man and the woman continue to live. Enmity between the seed of the Serpent and the seed of the woman requires that the man and the woman have offspring. God's final word in 3:15 is that the seed of the woman would bruise the

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16. See Walter Wifall, "Gen 3:15—A Protevangelium?," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1974): 361–65; Jack Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?," *Tyndale Bulletin* 48 (1997): 139–48; and for the influence of Genesis 3:15 on the rest of the OT, James M. Hamilton Jr., "The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2006): 30–54.

head of the Serpent, while the Serpent would bruise the heel of the seed of the woman.

Believing what God said in Genesis 3:14–19, the man named his wife “Eve,” mother of all living, as an act of faith (3:20). Eve’s response to the births of Cain and Seth in 4:1 and 4:25 indicate that she was looking for the rise of the Serpent-crushing seed. The hope that Adam and Eve felt at the birth of their sons was built on God’s word of promise that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the Serpent. That hope brought the woman through painful childbirth, and that hope helped Adam and Eve work through the relational difficulties to forge a union that would produce offspring. That hope helped Adam in his sweaty toil and painful labor, and that hope was passed from one generation to the next.

We see the impact this promise has on expectations for work in Lamech’s words at the birth of Noah in Genesis 5:29, where Lamech “called his name Noah, saying, ‘Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.’” This statement employs the concepts and terminology of Genesis 3:16–19, and, joining with 3:15, indicates that Lamech hopes that Noah will be the promised seed of the woman who will bruise the Serpent’s head. Lamech further seems to hope that Noah’s triumph will result in a rollback of the curses, such that relief comes from painful toil. As noted above, Noah’s name employs the same root used in 2:15, when God “caused [the man] to rest in the garden of Eden” (AT).

Moses thus presents these biblical characters as understanding that the promised redeemer would bring about relief from work and painful toil. Because the language of Genesis 5:29 employs the language of 3:17, the point is not that when the seed of the woman triumphs over the Serpent, man will be relieved from work altogether, but rather that God’s judgment on man’s work will be removed. God

made man with a task. Man was made to fill the earth, subdue it, and exercise dominion. Man was made to work.

God spoke judgment over man's work in response to man's sin.

The promise of the seed of the woman heralds a day when justice will be satisfied, curses will be removed, and work will once again be blessed by God, unimpeded and unhindered by judgment on sin.

*"You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall  
be blessed, and it shall be well with you."*

PSALM 128:2

Work has been a part of God's good creation since before the fall—created to reflect his image and glory to the world. What are we to make of this when work today is all too often characterized by unwanted toil, pain, and futility? In this book, biblical scholar and pastor James Hamilton explores how work fits into the big story of the Bible, revealing the glory that God intended when he gave man work to do, the ruin that came as a result of the fall, and the redemption yet to come, offering hope for flourishing in the midst of fallen futility.

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