

STORIED WORK: THE ESCHATOLOGY TURN AND THE MEANING OF OUR WORK

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Abstract: *This essay engages the conversation about the significance and meaning of work in the present time by framing it within the Bible's new covenant meta-narrative. Over- or under-realizing the new covenant's phases, which are centered in the two comings of Christ, has bearing on how one will see the purpose of work in culture-making in the present time. The article will sketch the Bible's plot line for work beginning with the cultural mandate for Adam, then move to the compromised state of this mandate evident from Noah to the present. Finally, Israel's prophets will chart the course through the NT documents for a possibility of our work's impact on culture that will ultimately dominate the nations of the world when the Lord's anointed Servant-Prince returns in glory. This narrative calls for us to be sober in our claims for the cultural impact of our work in the present time but also not to see our work now as merely futile background for "spiritual" victories while we wait for heaven.*

Key words: *image of God, kingdom of God, biblical eschatology, theology of work, culture, canonical narrative, reign of Christ, OT theology*

Ever since Sisyphus was condemned to endlessly roll the stone uphill in Greek mythology and Israel's Qoheleth pronounced man's labors vanity, "meaningless" describes the very darkest essence and dread of dehumanized work.¹ Within the Christian tradition, work's ontological, relational, and instrumental meaning suffered from residual sacred-secular categories of calling and ministry even after the Reformation's critique of medieval Catholicism.² More recent voices on the theology of work, especially among Western evangelicals, gather much in the value of work under its power to make culture by means of Adamic categories and so call for work in service to the "cultural mandate" of Gen 1:26–28. Redemption in Christ, the reconciler of all things (Col 1:15), has freed the believer in the present age to reclaim the Bible's story for humans to fulfill the divine charge to transform

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¹ Eccl 2:11; 12:10. The plight of Sisyphus in Greek mythology funds also the so-called Sisyphusian condition of work. Research by behavioral economist Dan Ariely suggests that people work harder when their work seems more meaningful, and also that people tend to underestimate the relationship between meaning and motivation for work (Dan Ariely, *The Upside of Irrationality: The Unexpected Benefits of Defying Logic* [New York: Harper, 2011]).

² Darrell Cosden offers three dimensions—ontological, instrumental, and relational—by which we may define work and set its scope. The ontological dimension includes the transcendent, transformative, and eternal value of work as an end in itself. The instrumental dimension involves both material sustenance needs connected with economic issues and personal spiritual formation through work. The relational dimension locates work in the opportunity for self-expression and flourishing as well as for broader societal development and matters of social justice (Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006], 178–79).

and redeem human cultures (“fill and subdue the earth”) to the rule of Christ.³ Such appeals leverage an implicit narrative that frames the present age not only in terms of the biblical story’s protology in Eden, but also in terms of its own reading of Israel’s prophets and the church’s apostles whose visions reached all the way to the world’s end.⁴

The need to locate the meaning of work within the metanarrative of Scripture is surely needed and to be welcomed in the present context. Biblical theology has long contended for the mutual and even symbiotic character of Scripture’s protology and eschatology as necessary for its right reading. However, in contrast to other voices noted above, this essay suggests a different account of the biblical story and thus a more nuanced meaning for work in the present age than typically offered. This account will be proposed in three parts that follow the biblical narrative that specifically bring light to the present work of the church. Part One will examine the beginnings of human work in Genesis with added attention to the limits of human work under the Noahic version of the culture mandate in Genesis 9. As we will see, these narratives establish important paradigms that maintain until the second advent of Christ. In Part Two, we will take up the vision for culture-shaping power of work according to Israel’s prophets. These voices, which well know the limits to human work established after Noah, clearly see an unconstrained future for human culture making that begins under a direct and present patronage of the Suffering Servant King. This will then prepare the way for Part Three, where the NT’s own cruciform character of Christ’s first advent will suggest a two-phased approach to understanding the culture-making power of the believer’s work in the present age.

³ Of the many books advancing work in service of the cultural mandate in the present time, see Hugh Welchel, *How Then Should We Work? Rediscovering the Biblical Doctrine of Work* (Bloomington, IN: Westbow, 2012); Jeff Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God (And What Still Needs to be Fixed)* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010); Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work* (New York: Dutton, 2012). Al Wolters’s so-called “Reformational worldview” has been an important resource of this view (*Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* [2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005]). Andy Crouch’s influential *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008) explicitly claims indebtedness to Wolters’s account of Scripture’s story (p. 276).

⁴ Beneath the concept of Christ’s supremacy, the “Reformational worldview” subsumes the promises of Israel’s prophets under the church and its mission. Welchel is representative: “The Cultural Mandate which God gave first to Adam and his bride has now become the Great Commission, which God has given to Christ (Isaiah 42:1–12; 49:1–26) and through Christ to the church” (*How Then Should We Work?*, 19). While it is true that in Isaiah 42 and 49 God’s Servant is a “light to the nations” (42:6; 49:6), this reading of the prophets reinterprets other elements of the text, namely that the “light” of God’s Servant also has political and national cultural impact. The Messiah will bring “decrees to nations” and establish “justice on the earth” (42:1, 4), restoring “Jacob to himself so that Israel might be gathered to him” (49:6), where kings and princes will rise and bow down when they see him (49:7)—all of which transcends mere gospel proclamation.

I. THE BEGINNING OF WORK

1. *The imago Dei and work.* The opening narrative of Scripture's story is also the beginning of the story of work. In Gen 1:26–28, human activity is commissioned according to humanity's identity as the image of the God:

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth." God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground."

For the purposes of the establishing the meaning of human work, several important observations merit consideration.

a. *Work is intrinsic to human life.* Unsavory as it might appear at first to say, human beings were created to work. In this we do not mean what comes to mind for most with this statement—notions of toil, monotony, and difficult, dehumanizing manual labors. Indeed, such associations with work for most of human history have made work a negative to be avoided. Such was certainly the case for the world context of the biblical writers.⁵ But it was not so in the beginning. Prior to its corruption from sin, work is a good, something that fulfills the intention of the good Creator for human beings. Work in this part of Scripture's story has more of the definition that John Stott offers in his book, *Issues Facing Christians Today*: work is "the expenditure of energy (manual, mental, or both) in the service of others, which brings fulfillment to the worker, benefit to the community and glory to God."⁶ Defined this way, work enters the biblical narrative as part of the initial paradisiacal condition to describe human actions commissioned from God to be fulfilled toward the creation: be fruitful, multiply, fill, rule, and subdue.

Greater clarity in this picture will come in the second creation narrative of Gen 2:4 to the end of chapter 3.⁷ In 2:5, we see that the man's work is specifically to "cultivate [*ābad*, work, serve] the ground": "Now no shrub of the field had yet grown on the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the

⁵ Ancient Babylonians (17th cent. BC) saw work as relegated to humankind because it was beneath the gods (S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, Flood, Gilgamesh and Others* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989], 3). Similar views were held in ancient Greece. See the discussion in Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of This World: Inquiries into Calling, Career Choice, and the Design of Human Work* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 6–16 and Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics* (trans. M. Douglas Meeks; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 38–41.

⁶ John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Basingstoke, UK: Marshalls, 1984), 62; cited in R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 106.

⁷ With others, Henri Blocher asserts that chapter 2 should be read together with chapter 3 as prologue to the fall (*In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1984], 27; cf. Seth D. Postell, *Adam as Israel: Genesis 1–3 as the Introduction to the Torah and Tanakh* [Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011], 79).

ground.” Later, in verse 15, this service (*abad*) is qualified with the broad, and priestly idea of “keeping” (*šamar*) the Garden.⁸ The picture is consistent throughout of a commission to steward, control, and care for God’s creation, but more important for us here is the observation of Hans Walter Wolff that in Gen 2:5 it is work that significantly defines human life: “Labour appears as the only definition of man’s proper significance, and that it is in this way seen simply in the context of creation.”⁹ The statement has important reference to the place of work in the understanding of human uniqueness in the image of God. As we see next, it is by means of their commission and faculty of work that humans demonstrate their distinction from animals as culture-makers. To be human is to create culture by means of work.

b. *Human work is purposed in three relational directions.* Tuned as it is to the *imago Dei* in man, work bears the same relational dimensions as the image.¹⁰ Toward God, the first dimension, human work has its commission, empowerment, and model. The commission to rule the animals and keep the Garden broadly circumscribes the divine mandate, but it is important to see that how much of a co-mission this mandate really is. Specifically, the divine command does not come in the narrative in some deistic fashion whereby God establishes the orders of the creation and simply sets man to steward it as some mere vice-regent. Jeff Van Duzer has ably demonstrated the continuing God-dependence necessary for human work that is woven into the commission—God supplies all resources, vision, and calling,¹¹ but it is in the understanding of the image itself that we see the close, intimate partnership between God himself and his image in the prosecution of the work. In a seminal study of the image of God in man, D. J. A. Clines demonstrates the ancient understanding of images as the spirit-bearers of the one they image.¹² Besides opening a way for the tri-unity of God already in the beginning of Scripture’s story, not to mention engaging the *novum* of the new covenant’s empowerment which we shall see in Part 2 below,¹³ we see that originally commissioned, Adam and Eve are empowered from within by *God himself* as they go about their work.¹⁴

⁸ The language of temple service supports the picture of Eden as a temple with Adam as a priest figure. See William J. Dumbrell, “Creation, Covenant and Work,” *Crux* 24/3 (1988): 18–19. For a full-length treatment, see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (NSBT 17; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004).

⁹ Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 128; Dumbrell, “Creation, Covenant and Work,” 21.

¹⁰ The dominance of the functional interpretation of the *imago Dei* as “dominion” within OT studies need not be seen as mutually exclusive to Barth’s relational view in this second point, which is also with many supporters in the literature. The capacity to function as God’s representative, that is, have dominion, is exercised from the ground of a relational, personal, and spiritual nature. See further the summary chapter of Gunnlaugur A. Jónsson’s, *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26–28 in a Century of Old Testament Research* (ConBOT 26; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988), 219–25.

¹¹ Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God*, 23–39.

¹² D. J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *TynBul* 19 (1968): 89–90.

¹³ That is, a new movement (pouring out) of God’s Spirit, cleansing, and empowering the human heart to obedience by means of new unmediated relationship with God. See n. 45 below.

¹⁴ Against the gods of the surrounding nations for whom work was undignified, Israel’s God was a worker (cf. Lee Hardy, *Fabric of This World*, 6–16; Robert Banks, *God the Worker: Journeys into the Mind*,

The second relational direction of work flows from the plurality of the image we noted in the first. That is, the intrinsic relationality in the image to partner with the personal God also funds the partnership the man has with the woman. Explicit reference to this partnership is present in the first three of the five commission commands (be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth), but it would be grossly reductionist to leave the scope of these directives to procreation only. As the second Genesis narrative clarifies, the man and woman have a mutually dependent relationship which defines their prosecution of the commission *together*.¹⁵ The narrative also grounds the socio-national identity of human life that is displayed finally in the consummation of Scripture's story in Revelation. Heaven is a city populated from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.¹⁶

The final relational dimension of work also concerns the direct object and beneficiary of human work—the creation itself. In the Genesis narratives, the creation is the direct object of the human being's exercise of dominion on God's behalf. And while the animal world is mentioned most prominently as the provenance of human action, the “rule and subdue” of the commission extends to the “all the earth” as well as all that moves upon it (Gen 1:26). In Gen 2:5, it is literally the ground (*āḏām*) that the man “serves” (*āḏād*) and in 2:15 it is the garden in Eden.¹⁷ As we will see below in the next point, it is also important to understand the provenance of human vice-regency as extending to the spiritual realm of angels as well. But for now, it is sufficient to see the picture is that of stewards, fully authorized and disposing *all* of the Master's possessions, and doing it under the direct supervision and participation of the Master himself.

c. *Human work is both offensive and defensive.* The language in the commission, “fill the earth” (Gen 1:28), introduces us to the scope of the human vocation. It is here that we are given an insight not only to the *means* of the human “rule” and “subdue” but also its *extent* as well. To the first, it is namely by the multiplication of vice-regents that Adam and Eve are to effect the call toward the created order. The sheer magnitude of the task will demand more than two individuals functioning and relating as God's image. But this process of filling the earth also points to the fact that the rule of the image is intended to extend beyond the borders of the

Heart, and Imagination of God [repr. ed.; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008]; John Jefferson Davis, “Will There Be New Work in the New Creation?,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* [2007]: 259–61).

¹⁵ Sam A. Andreaes in his book, *enGendered: God's Gift of Gender Difference in Relationship* (Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2015) offers a compelling treatment of the nature of the gender asymmetries in the relationship of the man's and the woman's fulfillment of their commission from God. The relational necessity of the man and the woman also sits as the framework for the fall into sin that comes later in the second Genesis narrative. Whatever the transgression of each in the episode with the serpent, they were both guilty of not preserving the relational union with one another that is intrinsic to their commission.

¹⁶ See here Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).

¹⁷ See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), 159–60. Dumbrell summarizes man's role in Genesis 1 as “vice-regent over all creation with power to control and regulate it” (Dumbrell, “Creation, Covenant and Work,” 17).

Garden.¹⁸ The whole earth is not yet Eden! And the work of God in “planting” the prototype (Gen 2:8) provides the vision and parameters for this work of his image.¹⁹

The means and extent of the task brings in a final but crucial aspect of the commission and why I have labeled it a fundamentally offensive and defensive work. The terms for “rule and subdue” (*rādâ* and *kābaš*, Gen 1:28) tell us the human task at this point enjoins conflict. Something related to the earth is contrary and hostile to human work, as Oswalt explains:

Despite recent interpretations of Gen 1:28 which have tried to make “subdue” mean a responsibility for building up, it is obvious from an overall study of the word’s usage that this is not so. *kābaš* assumes that the party being subdued is hostile to the subduer, necessitating some sort of coercion if the subduing is to take place. Thus the word connotes “rape” in Est. 7:8, or the conquest of the Canaanites in Num. 32:22, 29; Josh. 18:1; I Chr. 22:18. In II Chr. 28:10; Neh. 5:5; Jer. 34:11, 16, it refers to forced servitude.²⁰

Seth Postell summarizes the thought of other interpreters in a similar way, saying that with these two terms (*rādâ*, *kābaš*) the commission is “both royal and overtly militaristic.”²¹

But why the strong language of ruling and subduing is just about extending the food supply and making more sacred space, which is where most versions of the “culture mandate” leave it?²² The answer suggested by the text itself as well as the rest of the canonical narrative is that the commission for human beings from God aimed at something more, namely, *human domination of the spirit world*. For the text,

¹⁸ C. Beetham, “From Creation to New Creation: The Biblical Epic of King, Human Vice Regency, and Kingdom,” in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis* (ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 240.

¹⁹ Beale’s study of the temple motif in Scripture’s narrative (cf. n. 8 above) provides insight to the significance of the Garden in Eden and the charge to expand its culture to the whole earth. The new earth of Revelation 21 has no temple because the whole earth is now sacred space. The vision of Eden’s expansion is complete (G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014]; see chapter 2: “Expanding Eden: The Call in Gen 1:26–28.” For the general eschatological sense of Genesis 1–3, see G. K. Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011], 29–46).

²⁰ John N. Oswalt, “*kābaš*,” *TWOT* 1:30. See also Andreas Kunz-Lübcke who writes, “While *ka-vaš* implies the forcible conquest of a land or the subjugation of a people, *radab* generally refers to responsible royal sovereignty” (“Human Work from the Perspective of Creation Theology,” in *Dignity of Work: Theological and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* [ed. Kenneth Mtata; Documentation 56; Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2011], 13).

²¹ See Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 99, and sources cited there. The case for a conflicted commission is also made in Gen 2:15 and the charge “to keep” the Garden. According to Victor P. Hamilton, “The basic meaning of this root is ‘to exercise great care over,’ to the point, if necessary, of guarding. This emphasis on guarded keeping is substantiated by the fact that the poetic synonym of *šamar* is always *nāšar*, ‘to protect’ (Deut 33:9; Ps 12:8 [Eng 7]; 105:45; 119:34, 55–56, 145–146; 140:5 [Eng 4]; 141:3; Prov. 2:8, 11; 4:6; 5:2; 27:18). The same root is used in the next chapter to describe the cherubs who are on guard to prevent access to the tree of life in the garden (Gen 3:24)” (*The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 171).

²² Beale and Kim cite John Walton (*Genesis* [NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001], 186) to summarize the goal of Eden’s expansion this way (Beale and Kim, *God Dwells Among Us*, 34).

regardless of the status one gives the “anomalies” of Gen 1:2,²³ the only role hostile to God’s image is played by the serpent who appears abruptly in chapter 3.²⁴ Unlike the rest of what is created in the text and called “very good” (Gen 1:31), the serpent’s creation is not mentioned. Thus, many see the serpent’s presence in the Garden already as a failure of the image of God to keep the sacred space of Eden according to the charge of Gen 2:15.²⁵ Likewise, the serpent’s curse coming later in chapter 3 (v. 15) probably should be seen as a word guaranteeing the reestablishment of the original charge that a human person would deal out the serpent’s fateful blow.²⁶

The literary function of the creation narratives for the entire canon also locates the conflict with Satan as part of the original commission for human beings. Following earlier Jewish tradition, Postell argues that the compositional strategy of the creation narratives in Genesis intend to offer parallels to the commission and failure of Israel in the Promised Land. Adam is Israel and both fail their commissions to expel the seditious enemies from the Land.²⁷ The pattern continues into the NT’s second/last Adam tradition for Jesus Christ, the God-man. His appearance to “destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8) and wage war on Satan stands as the restoration of the human calling.²⁸ The future human judgment of angels Paul mentions to the Corinthians (1 Cor 6:1–3) stands in this tradition as well. It is *human* to put down the Adversary of God, and human work is thus also defined by this theological reality.

At this point we can draw out relevant features of work’s ontological, relational, and instrumental functions for culture-making here at the beginning of Scripture’s story. Since “human culture is produced in work,” as Karl Barth rightly notes, the Bible’s understanding of culture emerges by means of studying work as

²³ Common among the commentators is to see reference to the parallels in ANE chaos myth where the world is born of the battle between creator-god of order and forces of chaos (Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984], 29). So-called anomalies of Genesis 1:2 include existence of darkness, no creative word until verse 3, the deeps, and a restraining action of the divine Spirit. See further Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 181–83.

²⁴ Sauer, *King of the Earth*, 65. “Serpent” here is used in the same way as Rev 12:9: “The ancient serpent, the one called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world.”

²⁵ Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 87; Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 102–4; Dumbrell, “Creation, Covenant and Work,” 19.

²⁶ Erich Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 59.

²⁷ Adam’s failure to “conquer” (Gen 1:28) the seditious inhabitant of the land (the serpent), his temptation and violation of the commandments, and his exile from the garden is Israel’s story *en nuce* (Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 3; and William J. Dumbrell, “Genesis 2:1–17: A Foreshadowing of the New Creation,” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect* [ed. Scott J. Hafemann; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002], 61–62). Besides Jewish tradition in this direction (cited in Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 5–7) the thesis follows the narrative typological analysis of authors like John Sailhamer (*The Pentateuch as Narrative* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992]). Scripture’s intertextual/compositional unity highlights key narrative episodes as paradigmatic to understanding key elements of the biblical plot.

²⁸ Sauer, *King of the Earth*, 63–64. James Kallas sees the miraculous works of Jesus as defining his ministry fundamentally as “waging war” with the devil (*The Significance of the Synoptic Miracles* [London: SPCK, 1961]).

well.²⁹ In this connection, we have seen that creating culture is intrinsic to human life because work is intrinsic to life. Next, we saw that human culture is resourced and developed in line with the three fundamental human relational dimensions. Toward God, human culture receives its vision and empowerment from the Creator. Culture-making is also human work carried out socially for the welfare and benefit of human social existence. And finally, human culture concerns the application/commissioning of all human capacities for the benefit, or the stewardship, of the created order, including conquest of perverse angelic realms that are hostile to human culture in all dimensions. Thus, it is important to understand that human culture-making at the beginning of the biblical story proceeds offensively gaining ground against adverse forces but at the same time remains vigilant in defending against their threats. The narrative crown of the process and goal of human work is summarized by the rich biblical themes of Sabbath and blessing (Gen 2:3).³⁰

2. *Work after Noah.* The next significant movement in the scriptural story of work brings us to consider Noah, the second Adam-figure of Genesis. By this point in the narrative, the failure of God's image, Adam and Eve, to execute the commission for work has been explained (Gen 3:1–8) as well as the consequences for work and human culture-making enumerated. Instead of human work being the instrument of blessing and advancing God-sponsored ordering of the creation, it is now toil and pain (Gen 3:16–19), a source of violence (Cain, Genesis 4), exploitation in slavery (Canaan, Gen 9:26; Israel, Exodus 1), human autonomous technological pride (Babel, Gen 11:1–9) and everything else filling the Preacher's mind when he pronounced man's labor as burdensome, futile, and hard (Eccl 2:21, 23; 4:4; 9:9). Corruption of God's image had reached such proportions that God intervened with the flood to "wipe humankind . . . from the face of the earth" (Gen 6:7). He would begin again and resume his covenant and commission for work with Noah (Gen 6:18).

At this point it is important to note that Noah is not Adam, and neither are his culture-making capabilities those of Adam. The issue is highlighted in the

²⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.4; cited by Richard Bouch, *The Faith-Work Window: Why Work Matters to Christianity in a Fallen World* (Enumclaw, WA: Pleasant Word, 2009), 86. Technical definitions of culture from anthropology can be offered: culture is a system of symbols and meanings given to organize domains of space, time, meaning, and communication transmitted from one generation to another (Amos Rapoport, "Spatial Organization and the Built Environment," in the *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, 465, 474; cited by John Jefferson Davis, "Will There Be New Work in the New Creation?" 263). A less technical understanding of culture in this sense here might simply be "way of life" along the lines of E. B. Tylor's classic statement: "Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (*Primitive Culture: Researches in the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom* [3rd rev. ed.; London: J. Murray, 1871]; cited by Ben Highmore, *Culture* [New York: Routledge, 2015], 3).

³⁰ Barth summarizes the point well: "Not only does the seventh day rest note the goal to which creation points, but it is the call to man to begin history holding firmly in view that 'the goal of creation, and at the same time the beginning of all that follows, is the event of God's Sabbath freedom, Sabbath rest and Sabbath joy, in which man, too, has been summoned to participate'" (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.1; cited by William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984], 34-35).

commission text of Gen 9:1–11. Using the same terminology as with Adam, God charges Noah “to be fruitful, multiply and fill” the earth. But unlike Adam, the culture mandate now lacks the specific charge to “rule” (*rādâ*) and “subdue” (*kābaš*). The absence of these key words, or better, the way they are recalibrated in the verses that follow, has been picked up by commentators as indicative of the new atmosphere humanity faces with regard to its work and culture-making.³¹ Because Noahic humanity is still subject to “curse” (Gen 3:17) and enslaved to sin where “every inclination of the heart of man is [still] only evil from his youth” (Gen 8:21; cf. 6:5), the ability to rule for God in both advancing and defending Eden’s order is compromised.³² And it is with this compromised situation that the story of work reaches us in the present age. Paul will speak of the present age still as a time of groaning, futility, hope, and waiting for all the creation—believers in Christ included (Rom 8:18–25).³³ More on this in Part Three.

All is not lost in curse, though. From the moments after the fall itself, God revealed his intention to restore his creation and again bring blessing to it by means of human work. The so-called *protoevangelium* of Gen 3:15 not only confirms the divine intention for restoration of the commission but also reasserts the human charter to control angelic resistance in the process.³⁴ It is the seed of the woman—a human being—that would crush the Serpent’s head in narrative parallel to later episodes in Scripture’s story of redemption, and would fulfill the vocation to expand Eden to the whole earth (Rom 16:20; Heb 2:14; 1 John 3:8; Revelation 12).³⁵ Further, with Noah, the covenant governing the human commission regarding work is renewed (Gen 6:18) and Abraham soon appears in chapter 12 as the foun-

³¹ Genesis 9:2–17 makes clear that human dominion continues in the new condition under sin but that it will be one of violence and fear. See on this Mark D. Vander Hart, “Creation and Covenant: Part One: A Survey of the Dominion Mandate in the Noahic and Abrahamic Covenants,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 6.1 (1990): 12–13. Keil and Delitzsch consider man at this point as “having lost the power of the spirit over nature” (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. 1: *The Pentateuch* [3 vols. in 1; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981], 1:152).

³² Beetham, “From Creation to New Creation,” 242–44; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, “The Pentateuch,” in *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981; repr. of 1878–89 original), 1:151–52; Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 284; Dumbrell, “Creation, Covenant and Work,” 19; idem, “Genesis 2:1–17,” 63. Emil Brunner puts the issue well in terms of lost freedom: “When man is no longer bound to God he becomes a slave to the world, for indeed this ‘bondage’ to God is his freedom. The things which are intended to serve man become his masters” (*The Divine Imperative* [trans. Olive Wyon; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1947], 392).

³³ Paul also considers the present in terms of slavery either to righteousness or sin (Rom 6:17).

³⁴ Sauer, *King of the Earth*, 93–94.

³⁵ While many scholars deny a gospel promise to this text, Gordon Wenham reads the text in light of the complete story of Scripture and finds narrative parallels to later parts of Scripture’s gospel (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* [WBC 1; Dallas: Word, 1987], 80–81). See also the discussion in Sauer, *Dawn of World Redemption*, 59–60; and Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 107–8. Justin Martyr (c. 160) and Irenaeus (c. 180) introduce it to Christian theological reflection as the first telling of the gospel, the protoevangelium.

tainhead of the creation's return to blessing, including its "societary model" in the nation of Israel.³⁶

The covenant and national dimensions for work will be an important preface to the subject of Part Two coming next, but for now the key is to note that the Noahic condition or atmosphere in our work still obtains at the present time. Against many who would go back to the Adamic cultural mandate for us and our work now, it is the Noahic one that still defines the context. David VanDrunen is correct on this point when he says,

God does not call Christians to take up the original cultural mandate of Genesis 1:26–28 *per se*, but calls them to obey the cultural mandate *as given in modified form to Noah in Genesis 9*. Through the Noahic covenant God formally established the common kingdom and commissioned all people—believers and unbelievers alike—to be fruitful and multiply and to exercise dominion on earth. The goal of this commission is not to provide a way to earn or to attain the new creation but to foster the temporary preservation of life and social order until the end of the present world.³⁷

In its Noahic terms, our work is still limited because of the evil within and outside the human heart. This gives the meaning of our work still as having only transitional and not ultimate significance in light of the fundamental human calling as the *imago Dei*. However, as we will see below in Part Two, God's story has not abandoned the Adamic mandate for work as the means of expanding Eden's spiritual *and* cultural order against forces that would resist it. Human work on this earth will achieve its intended original meaning of dominating the earth, including evil, to the blessing of all creation.

II. PROPHETIC VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK

It is with Israel's prophets that God's vision for restoration of Adam-type impact of work over and against the limitations intrinsic to the Noah-type gain detail. As God's societary model for the world, Israel was originally commissioned as the "kingdom of priests" (Exod 19:6) to mediate the knowledge of the Living God to the surrounding nations.³⁸ And work's story within this commission is

³⁶ The covenant relationship governing God's "attention to humans" in Scripture defines the context for all human activities including work and culture building (Scott J. Hafemann, "The Covenant Relationship," in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity* [ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 20–65). Israel as the societary model for the world under the covenant program is noted by Dumbrell: "Probably ... we are here ... thinking of Israel as offering in her constitution a societary model for the world. She will provide, under the direct divine rule which the covenant contemplates, the paradigm for the theocratic rule which is to be the biblical aim for the whole world" (*Creation and Covenant*, 87).

³⁷ David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 164–65 (italics original).

³⁸ Martin Noth states, "Israel is to have the role of the priestly member in the number of earthly states. Israel is to do 'service' for all the world (cf. also Isa 65:5–16); this is the purpose for which Israel has been chosen" (*Exodus* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962], 157; cf. Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus*

regulated to bless the Land and nation within the covenant bond to Yahweh.³⁹ However, as the story of Israel's national life unfolds, the Noahic limitations to work proved the need of further enablement for God's people in a new covenant arrangement. Israel failed to cling to the Lord, and this meant work would still be the instrument of evil rather than the means to its demise. The prophets document this tragic trajectory in great detail.⁴⁰ Israel's habit in work oppresses the poor and marginalized (Isa 58:1–8). It made for inferior products and unjust wages: “We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat” (Amos 8:5–6). Rather than a culture of justice, the prophets indict Israel for work that produced unjust class structures that reinforced self-interest and greed of the powerful at the expense of the vulnerable and weak (Isa 3:3–15). Such structures are against God's decree and deny the oppressed the power to enjoy the fruit of their work—houses are seized and inheritances stolen (Mic 2:1–2). These social structures promote a climate where illegitimate work like prostitution can take root and flourish (Mic 3:1–2) and where wealth and self-sufficiency breed apathy to the poor (Amos 3:9–15, 6:1–7). And all of it is rooted in failure at the spiritual level of Israel not keeping covenant with her God (Hag 2:14). When Israel abandoned the One who had delivered her and raised her, all of work's intended cultural ends become corrupted and work itself even becomes twisted to promote the service of other gods (Hos 4:1–3, 6; Hab 2:18). So, too, the Land lies waste under the weight of corrupted work (Jer 2:7; 4:23; 7:20; Zech 7:14).⁴¹

1. *New covenant hope.* To their indictment of Israel's work the prophets nonetheless added hope. Covenant failure was not so great that God would abandon

[Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974], 467). The final purpose for Israel is captured by the prophet Isaiah (44:23): “And in Israel He shows forth His glory” (cf. Isa 42:6–7; 51:4–5; 60:1–33).

³⁹ Within Israel's constitution set forth by Moses, work is assumed as a norm for human life (Exod 20:9; idleness characterized the fool, Prov 21:25); work is also limited by Sabbath rest (Exod 20:9); work is done for the sake of the community (Deut 24:14–15, and therefore done excellently and ethically, Deut 25:13; Prov 16:3; 23:4; 31:10–31); work is a source of joy for the worker (Eccl 3:22); and work was a result of relationship with God but not a cause of it (Exod 20:24–25).

⁴⁰ Much of what follows was gleaned from relevant sections of www.theologyofwork.org, which have been recently published in a series of *Theology of Work Bible Commentaries* (here vol. 3: *Isaiah through Malachi* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016]). Also, it should be noted that Israel's practice in work is not only failure. Under the rule of David, Israelite work produces a culture that progressively grows in wealth, power, and renown. As we will see, this cultural high point is directly tied to the covenant faithfulness of the leader, in this case David, the central personage of the OT (Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* [NSBT 15; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003], 231–33).

⁴¹ The land of Israel is always party to the covenant agreements in Scripture. As the whole earth was God's (Ps 24:1), so Israel's special covenant bond with Yahweh always had implications for Israel in the Land of promise, which God explicitly names as his Land (cf. Hos 9:3). Therefore, violation of covenant with Yahweh desecrates the land (Lev 18:25; Num 35:34; Jer 2:7; 3:2, etc.), and by contrast Israel's fidelity to the covenant was always the root of a prospering society and flourishing land (Magnus Ottosson, “עֲרֵשׁ” *ereš*? TDOT 1:401–5; cf. David W. Torrance and George Taylor, *Israel, God's Servant: God's Key to the Redemption of the World* [London: Paternoster, 2007], 52–59).

Israel to the consequences of exile only. A “new” covenant would come one day from the wellspring of God’s intention marked out with Abraham: a restored nation of Israel would again be the source of blessing to the world.⁴² Also called “my covenant” and “an everlasting covenant” (Ezek 16:60–62; Isa 55:3), the new covenant stands as the subject of the prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah (esp. 40–66), Jeremiah, Hosea, and Malachi.⁴³ The visions of these prophets revealed the outline of Scripture’s story all the way to its end, including a *summum bonum* later described by Revelation 21 and 22 as the “new heavens and earth” (Isa 65:17–25). Specific gracious provisions of God punctuate the new covenant hope and define its *novum*.⁴⁴ These include (1) a new outpouring of God’s Spirit (Joel 2:28–32; Ezek 19:11; 36:25–27), which Eichrodt names the “central miracle of the new age,”⁴⁵ which would (2) provide a divinely immanent impulse for obedience within the human heart itself (Jer 31:33, the Law written on the heart), from a (3) new relational depth of knowledge that would eliminate all heretofore mediating forms of access to God (Jer 31:33, “they will all know Me”).⁴⁶ The ground of all these provisions for the individual in the new covenant age would come from a final, once-for-all resolution of the problem of sin (Jer 31:34, “for I will forgive their sin”) in the Lord’s Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53) who would bear (v. 12) and be crushed by (v. 5) the sins of the rebellious people.⁴⁷

2. *Work in the new covenant.* The atonement for sin and the spiritual effects that flow from it, however, do not complete the prophetic vision for the new covenant age. No, the Lord’s salvation must be felt beyond the measures of the individual. It must redeem all dimensions of human life: family, community, society, and nation. And so, in the prophetic script for Israel and the world, the newly enabled human heart would be the engine for new human social structures and the flourishing of

⁴² The “new” covenant is mentioned only in Jer 31:31. The Abrahamic root of the new covenant is set forth by Hafemann, “Covenant Relationship,” 28–34.

⁴³ William J. Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21–22 and the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 79–103. Principal passages of the new covenant include: Jer 24:7; 32:38–40; 50:5; Ezek 16:60; 34:25; 36:27–28; 37:26; Isa 42:6; 49:8; 54:10; 55:1–5; 59:21; 61:8; Mal 3:1; cf. 2:1–9.

⁴⁴ A *new enablement* is where most scholars place the locus of the new covenant’s *novum*. See Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36* (AB 21B; New York: Doubleday, 2004), 470, and sources cited there.

⁴⁵ Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961–67), 2:59.

⁴⁶ The new condition of the heart is reflected in the knowledge of Yahweh placed therein which will no longer need the external reminders provided under the institutions and offices of the old covenant. In his prediction of the Law written on the heart, Jeremiah also thus predicts the end of the ministry of the Law’s custodians who were charged with teaching and reminding the people of the Law (priests and prophets; Potter, “New Covenant,” 352–53; Dumbrell, *End of the Beginning*, 92–93; Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion*, 329–31). The new covenant thus also provided for a non-mediated fellowship with God in the restoration of communion between individuals and God, which is the heart of the new covenant as Thomas Edward McComiskey states (*The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985], 86–88; cf. Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion*, 325).

⁴⁷ On forgiveness of sins as the basis of all new covenant promises, see the comments on Jer 31:34 by Dumbrell, *End of the Beginning*, 92–93; Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2:458; and Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36* [AB 21B; Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 2004], 470–71).

the creation itself.⁴⁸ And it is here where a new episode for meaning in work and human culture-making begins: a vision for culture-making and work that overcomes the limitations of the mandate of Noah and actually fulfills the one given to Adam.

The new vision for work is predicated on a new manifestation of the glory of God in his world (Ezekiel 43–44). His anointed Scion from the line of David will again return to lead his people in work that brings justice from oppression, peace to nations, and Sabbath order to the whole creation (Isaiah 11). The Spirit empowers this work that will bring effects to Israel (Zech 12:10) and spiritual conversion to the nations (Isa 19:23–25). Consider the culture-making backstory for work inherent to the prophet Micah’s vision of the new covenant world:

And it will come about in the last days that the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains. It will be raised above the hills, and the peoples will stream to it. And many nations will come and say, “Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD And to the house of the God of Jacob, That He may teach us about His ways And that we may walk in His paths.” For from Zion will go forth the law, even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He will judge between many peoples and render decisions for mighty, distant nations. Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they train for war. (Mic 4:1–3)

Likewise, consider the words of Isaiah about the reign of the Lord’s Messiah:

And He will delight in the fear of the LORD,
 And He will not judge by what His eyes see,
 Nor make a decision by what His ears hear;
 But with righteousness He will judge the poor,
 And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth;
 And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
 And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. (Isa 11:3–4)

If we consider the original contours of Adam-work described above, the prophets describe a time when human work fulfills its calling in both manner and scope. *Toward God*, the prophets saw a time when work would be free of autonomous human pride that separates it from God. The Lord’s sovereignty will cover the world as the waters in the sea (Isa 11:9). God himself will empower a new work ethic: “I will *cause you to walk* in My statutes,” says Ezekiel (Ezek 36:27). A new movement of his Spirit in the people will replace the ruin and insecurity of exile with blessing and bounty (Isa 32:15, 20). Workers again learn from God how to work (Isa 28:26); they see no good coming from their own hand because they know it is God who gives all success to labor (Ezekiel 26–28). Worship of other gods is

⁴⁸ Donald E. Gowan summarizes the prophetic picture in three areas: “God must transform the human person; give a new heart and a new spirit. ... God must transform human society; restore Israel to the promised land, rebuild cities and make Israel’s new status a witness to the nations. ... And God must transform nature itself” (*Eschatology of the Old Testament* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], 2).

not tolerated in the new age (Mic 5:12–14)—or the work that sponsors it (Hab 2:18), and the status of Israel’s temple is connected to the flourishing of work and prosperity (Hag 1:11, 2:18–19; Ezekiel 40–48).

Toward others, the new Messiah-sponsored culture means work will serve worldwide justice and peace for all people. In Israel itself, “they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit” (Amos 9:11). No work of oppressors will prosper to cripple work with futility or shame (Isa 60:3–17); each will enjoy the fruit of their own labor (Isa 62:8–9; Joel 2:24, 26). No more will there be work that exploits the weak; no work that promotes class structure and privilege that elevates some and not others. Mercy and justice are God’s heart (Mic 6:8), and they reign in this new covenant culture (Isa 11:3–4). It will be a reign of peace that will eliminate the need of work that promotes warfare and weaponry (Mic 4:3).

Toward the creation, human work will coax abundant yields and wealth from the land: “The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. . . . You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you” (Joel 2:24–25). Eden again enters the picture to describe the state of nature (Isa 51:3, Ezek 36:29–30, 35), including the status of the animal kingdom (Isa 11:6–9). The result is joy—joy of satisfying work, work that is fruitful, creates a generous society without scarcity, and is faithful to God and led by him.

Eden’s mandate also returns in the scope of the prophets’ vision. Although the anointed Servant of the Lord returns first to the land of Israel (Zech 14:1–14; Ezekiel 43–44),⁴⁹ his rule will ultimately expand to cover the world—he will be a “light to the nations” (Isa 42:6–7) and bring salvation to all peoples (Isa 49:6). His people will go throughout the earth extending the knowledge of God (Isa 66:19; Zech 8:23): “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9). The new covenant culture will not only come to all nations, it will actively *overcome* all enemies and resistance under the patronage of its supremely powerful Messiah (Zech 12:9; 14:12). All resistance will be crushed and humiliated (Isa 45:14; 49:23). No threat can prosper or be successful; Messiah’s people dwell in peace and security (Isa 60:11). All the families of the earth find the blessing they were created for as the covenant with Abraham for the world’s blessing is fulfilled in the nation of his people (Zech 8:13, 20–23): “In those days ten people from all languages and nations will grasp hold of—indeed, grab—the robe of one Jew and say, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’” (Zech 8:23).

III. WORK IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The final task of this essay is to track the progress of the new covenant story for work in the NT writings. Specifically, we will ask how the NT writers read the

⁴⁹ Ezekiel marks the presence of God once again in a visible way through the terminology of the “glory of the Lord” (M. Weinfeld, “כְבוֹד, *kābōd*,” *TDOT* 7:62).

present time in view of the prophets' hope for work. Does their "inaugurated eschatology" centered in the Messiah's first advent mean work's culture-making capacity is now unleashed to produce the final messianic culture the prophets envisioned?⁵⁰ Should believers consider their work now as the expansion of Eden's cultural values overcoming all resistance and extending impact up to the social and national levels of human life? Does our work develop the kingdom of God, as Pope John Paul II writes in the encyclical *Laborem Exervens*?⁵¹ Perhaps the NT writers' "revisioining" of the prophetic hope for believers' work and culture makes possible only an "essential fulfillment" that is wrapped up and concluded at Christ's second coming? As we shall see, the eschatological outlook of the NT writers offers a two-phased fulfillment of the prophets' vision for work with the present age as *preparatory* and *transitional* to the final fulfillment in a coming age that follows Christ's visible return to the world.

1. *Work is still Noahic before the Second Coming.* The question of the culture-making potential for the believer's work in the present time engages the very core of the NT writings. The meaning of Christ's person and passion, his present exalted ministry, the believer's gift of the Spirit for union with Christ's body in mission and transformation, the spiritual collision of flesh and Spirit, even themes of suffering and victory—these and more must be included in the conversation about the "Already" and "Not Yet" of the NT's proclamation.⁵² If we allow the prophets' script of the future hope to set the pace, the NT's treatment of two topics helps us to see that the present age still is not the time for transformational culture making from our work. These two topics are: (1) the status of the reign of Christ; and (2) the conversion of the nations. As we saw in Part Two, according to the prophets both topics are intrinsic to the expansion of God-culture that will make work an instrument to confront and overcome all resistance and bring justice, peace, and prosperity to the world.

a. *The reign of Christ.* Christ's appearance in the "fullness of time" as Paul says (Gal 4:4) marks the new movement of the Spirit promised in the new covenant.

⁵⁰ "Inaugurated eschatology" is language for the scholarly consensus regarding the NT writers' presentation of Jesus's ministry of the Kingdom. Something of the Kingdom Jesus announced is present and active in the person of the Holy Spirit, but the fullness of the Kingdom remains yet future. Most common but not exclusive use of the "inaugurated eschatology" language tends to read that future Kingdom only in terms of the second coming of Christ and heaven, which immediately follows. The reading of it here includes a transitional interregnum—a millennium—after Christ's second coming and before the Eternal State. For a biblical theological overview of inaugurated eschatology, see now Part 1 of Benjamin L. Gladd and Matthew S. Harmon, *Making All Things New: Inaugurated Eschatology for the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016).

⁵¹ "Let the Christian who listens to the word of the living God, uniting work with prayer, know the place that his work has not only in *earthly progress* but also in *the development of the Kingdom of God*, to which we are all called through the power of the Holy Spirit and through the word of the Gospel" (*Laborem Exervens* 27.7 in *The Encyclicals of John Paul II* [ed. J. Michael Miller; Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1996], 193).

⁵² The resurrection from the dead was the turn of the ages for the apostle Paul (Herman N. Ridderbos, *Outline of Paul's Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 55). Unpacking what is in the "Already" and still ahead in the "Not Yet" is, of course, the source of much theological reflection in the church.

Anointed with the Spirit the power of the coming age is present in Jesus of Nazareth enabling his proclamation and demonstration of the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:16–19; Matt 12:28).⁵³ It is the power that drives his passion (Heb 9:14) and resurrection from the dead (Rom 8:11). In his present exalted status at the right hand of God he is the Melchizedekian King-Priest to whom the Lord God has given the nations as an inheritance after the doctrine of Psalms 2 and 110. Both Psalms are paradigmatic to the NT writers' view of the present and the future times. Psalm 2 we will consider later, but Ps 110:1 dominates the NT landscape not just as the most cited and alluded to OT verse in general but also for what it says to the NT writers about the nature of Christ's present status at the right hand of God:⁵⁴

Here is the LORD's proclamation to my lord:

"Sit down at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool!" (Ps 110:1)

Examination of the NT writers' use of Ps 110:1 shows their belief in Christ's present undisputed authority as exalted and ascended King and their understanding of his present kingly activities. To the former—Christ's present authority—the epistle that uses this Psalm the most of all, the epistle to the Hebrews, begins the first chapter with two citations/allusions to announce the supremacy of the Son over all (Heb 1:3, 13). To the latter—Christ's present actions—it is a activity of *intercession* aimed at establishing and supporting his own people, rather than a rule of judgment that brings enemies to heel, that the NT authors see for Christ in the present.⁵⁵ For the writer to the Hebrews, the session at the right hand is an achievement signaling the conclusion of Christ's redemptive work: "When he had accomplished cleansing for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb 1:3). Exalted as King-Priest, his actions are now more characterized as those of a royal Priest: "Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We have such a high priest, one who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven" (8:1). Conversely, it also marks him now as relatively passive and waiting regarding his enemies in the present: "He sat down at the right hand of God, where he is now waiting until his enemies are made a footstool for his feet" (10:12–13).

In this accent of the priestly role for the present, the rest of the NT is unanimous and consistent (e.g. Rom 8:34: "Christ ... who is at the right hand of God, and who also is interceding for us"). The point is all the more striking because Psalm 110 itself also provides ample opportunity to apply notions of ruling and judging and submitting enemies (Ps 110:2: "rule in the midst of your enemies"; 110:5: "strike down kings"; 110:6: "execute judgment against the nations"), but the

⁵³ Power of the Kingdom in the Spirit (Matt 12:28; Rom 14:17; Heb 6:5). The disciples summarize Jesus's ministry in Acts 10:38 as doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil because he was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power.

⁵⁴ Psalm 110:1 in the NT, including five direct citations: Matt 22:44 // Mark 12:36 // Luke 20:42–43; Acts 2:34; Heb 1:13; and fourteen allusions: Matt 26:64 // Mark 14:62 // Luke 22:69; Mark 16:19; Acts 7:55–56; Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22.

⁵⁵ See further Mark Saucy, "Exaltation Christology in Hebrews: What Kind of Reign?" *TrinJ* 14 NS (1993): 41–62 and sources noted there.

NT writers never go there for the present action of the exalted Christ. These parts of the Psalm are *never cited* or taken up in the NT for Christ in the present age.⁵⁶

The picture of a present *priestly action* over and against direct actions against his enemies is consistent with Christ's own description of the progress of the ages in Luke 19:11–27.⁵⁷ In line with the “absentee Christology” of Luke-Acts,⁵⁸ Christ describes himself as a nobleman who goes to a distant country “to receive a kingdom” (19:12). Yet while he enjoys the status of king, in his absence his kingdom is marked with two kinds of citizens: those who refuse his authority over them (19:14) and his stewards who are resourced and commissioned to continue work. Both groups are allowed to go about their business *until the King returns* when he deals with them in turn. His stewards are judged and rewarded according to their investment (19:15–26), and his enemies judged and executed (19:27).⁵⁹

b. *Conversion of the nations.* The focus of Christ's actions in the present from Psalm 110, particularly in what is still allowed to God's enemy, directly impacts the picture for work against the prophets' script. As we saw already, the prophets saw the reach of the Adamic-type vocation for work expanding to the ends of the earth. Under the patronage of the reigning Servant of Yahweh, Eden's cultural mandate—including right human relationships with God, others, and creation—will claim the social structures of human society and dominate the cultures of the nations of the earth. No forces alien to this cultural program will prevail. Funding this cultural transformation is work done in service of the reigning King from converted, new covenant hearts of kingdom servants. How do NT writers see progress of this program in the present time? Clearly there is a Gospel commission/mandate

⁵⁶ These and other points argue against the recent attempt of Alexander E. Stewart to read Ps 110:1 in the NT, particularly in 1 Corinthians 15 and Heb 2:5-9, to argue that the prophets' millennial kingdom is happening now in the age of the church. See Alexander E. Stewart, “The Temporary Messianic Kingdom in Second Temple Judaism and the Delay of the Parousia: Psalm 110:1 and the Development of Early Christian Inaugurated Eschatology,” *JETS* 59 (2016): 255–70.

⁵⁷ Russell Moore claims it a matter of consensus today among evangelicals that Christ is presently “reigning” in his session at the right hand, although he and others in this camp have difficulty explaining the reason why explicit “reign” language for Christ (βασιλεύω) and cognate is missing in the epistles (until Revelation) and why Christ as “king” (βασιλεύς) follows the same pattern (*The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2004], 39–42). See Darrell Bock's attempt at these difficulties in “The Kingdom of God in New Testament Theology,” in *Looking into the Future* (ed. David W. Baker; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 53 n. 47.

⁵⁸ Dunn, “Towards the Spirit of Christ,” in *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism* (ed. Michael Welker; Cambridge/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 11 n. 30: “Luke specialists note that Acts is characterized by an ‘absentee Christology.’”

⁵⁹ Such a paradigm fits other NT descriptions of Christ's posture toward his enemies. Namely, Christ's present focus appears to be most directly concerned with the calling out (plundering the strongman's house, Matt 12:44–45) and building up his elect ones in the church for life in the present age, an age which has not yet seen the full advent of the prophetic vision. While the cross clearly marks decisive action against Satan (Col 2:15: disarming; Matt 12:44: binding; 1 John 3:8: destroying his works; John 12:31: judging, etc.), Christ operates presently only to contain their activities insofar as they concern his primary objectives with his saints. In the meantime, the enemies of Christ are allowed to retain their kingdom (Col 1:13) and to have their work over the sons of disobedience (Eph 2:2) whose eyes they have blinded to the truth of Christ (2 Cor 4:4), not to mention the schemes they are allowed to enact against believers (1 Pet 5:8; 2 Cor 2:11).

the King promotes through his servants to the “uttermost parts of the earth” (Matt 28:19–20, Acts 1:8), but the NT writers do not see the cultural goods of converted workers in the present achieving the societal, institutional, and national cultural goals of the prophets’ vision. Three broad lines of evidence may be marshaled to such a conclusion:

(1) The witness of believers (and their work) is not from a position of being “on top” culturally in this age. Paul wishes his Corinthian brothers and sisters were already in fact the reigning kings their view of the Spirit (and the prophets) entailed, but they are not. Like him they are still in fact social-cultural nobodies, the world’s dirt and scum (1 Cor 4:8–13). Thus, the cross and suffering define the believer’s work in the present age, and like the faithful at Thyatira believers must wait for the return of the One who was crucified, raised, and exalted (Rev 2:25–27) to effect this social dominance. Meanwhile, Paul’s “master story” (Phil 2:5–11) identifies a fundamental *cruciformity* as the context for the believer and also her work in the present (cf. Col 1:24).⁶⁰ Strength is manifest in weakness (2 Cor 12:9) as the Lord’s presence offers comfort in tribulation and suffering (John 16:33).⁶¹

(2) The “powers” continue to resist and prevail culturally until the return of the King. This is the substance of John’s warning against and definitions of the “world” system and its “ruler” (1 John 2:16–17; John 16:11), as well as Paul’s characterization of the present as an “evil age” where the “prince of the power of the air still works in the sons of disobedience” (Gal 1:4; Eph 2:2–3).⁶² And regardless of one’s reading of Revelation as preterist or futurist, the picture of the world’s present culture is one where martyrdom (Rev 9:6) and persecution of God’s people continue (Revelation 2–3) and even escalate (Revelation 17–18) to the coming of Christ (Revelation 19). Thus, believers and their experience in work now “groan” still weighed down in futility of Noahic limits (Rom 8:19–23; 2 Cor 5:2, 4).

(3) Even the Gospel mission in the world does not achieve its final end in the present time. Paul’s *a fortiori* argument in Romans 11 is clear that even the current successes of the Gospel over the forces of darkness in the spiritual domain *find greater fulfillment after this age*. Following the prophets who saw a spiritually reborn nation of Israel as ground zero to the expansion of God’s culture that included the conversion of the nations, Paul notes that even the gains of the gospel among Gentiles during this present time of Israel’s disobedience will be surpassed when Israel is restored: “Now if their transgression means riches for the world and their defeat means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full restoration bring? ...

⁶⁰ See here especially Michael J. Gorman’s works including, *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); and more recently, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

⁶¹ Moyer Hubbard writes that Paul’s “weakness is strength” in 2 Cor 12:9 is “what Paul considers to be God’s primary *modus operandi* in human affairs. ... Through human weakness and frailty, God’s power is revealed to be utterly his” (“2 Corinthians,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit* [ed. Trevor J. Burke and Keith Warrington; London: SPCK, 2014], 172–73). In 2 Cor 12:9, Paul echoes the thoughts of 1 Cor 1:26–29: it is the foolish ones of this world that God has chosen to shame the wise.

⁶² In chapter 8 of his book, *The Other Six Days*, Stevens explores the implications for the believer’s work in the present conflict against “the powers.”

if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (Rom 11:12, 15).⁶³ Clearly, even more is in store for the gospel mandate this side of heaven's glory.

Given the picture of the present time we get from these points, it is clear why the culture-producing possibilities for work are more muted in the NT documents. Dumbrell's comments for the Pauline corpus seem to catch the sense:

While [Paul] is concerned with social harmony between classes and the preservation of the *status quo* after Christian conversion, and urges a doctrine of submission to authority (Rom 13), Paul himself has no positive interest in work. We search in vain for the evidence in the Bible generally to support the vigorous way in which the mandate to subdue the earth as been applied since the Reformation with all the vigour of the Protestant work ethic behind it.⁶⁴

This is because as we shall see below there still remains a future for work in the NT *for this world* that does accord with the prophetic record. The present time is still the time of Noahic-type work and thus calls for caution in marshaling images of Eden's Adamic cultural mandate to fund a current culture-making project.

2. *Work is truly Adamic on this earth after the Second Coming.* John's Apocalypse completes the canon and finishes the story for work. In this book, the messianic enthronement Psalm of Israel, Psalm 2, charts the way to show the means by which God's anointed King will inaugurate and oversee a culture that is centered on the Way of the Living God as the prophets had foretold.⁶⁵ The fulfillment of Eden's mandate for human work that resists and overcomes evil is at hand.

As the first readers of Revelation and the NT knew (and we do, too!), now the nations rage against God and devise their rebellious plans (Ps 2:1–2), but the Lord's anointed king (Ps 2:6–7) will rule over them with a rod of iron as his inher-

⁶³ On Paul's argument here see Jim R. Sibley, "Has the Church Put Israel on the Shelf? The Evidence from Romans 11:15," *JETS* 58 (2015): 571–81. Other evidence that Israel's disobedience is temporary includes Matt 19:28; 23:37–39; Luke 21:24; Acts 1:6–7; 3:19–21. See pertinent chapters in *The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel: Israel and the Jewish People in the Plan of God* (ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014). William S. Campbell represents a growing trend in biblical studies that calls out supersessionistic readings of Paul where Christ erases ethnic diversity of believers in a universalism without particularity, for decontextualizing and overconceptualizing by means of later theological categories. See *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity* (London: T&T Clark, 2008); T. L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); and M. D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

⁶⁴ Dumbrell, "Creation, Covenant and Work," 21. Miroslav Volf agrees with Dumbrell's assessment and even extends it to the whole NT: "We search in vain in the New Testament for a cultural mandate. . . . The explicit New Testament statements about work view it very soberly as a means of securing sustenance, not as an instrument of cultural advancement" (*Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1991], 93). This Reformational worldview mentioned by Dumbrell continues to fund most of the recent theological reflection on work. See n. 3 above.

⁶⁵ For the significance of Psalm 2 to Revelation, see Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 69. Together with Psalm 1, which rehearses the importance of the Law in Israel's life, this Psalm's focus on the nations summarizes the concerns of the prophets (Stephen Dempster, "An 'Extraordinary Fact': *Torah and Temple* and the Contours of the Hebrew Canon, Part 2," *TynBul* 48 [1997]: 206–7).

itance (Ps 2:8–9). In the original context of the Psalm this submission of the nations was the rule of Lord’s anointed who would come and finally restore the fortunes of the People of Israel on their Land according to the word of the prophets we have seen earlier. In Revelation, this basic plot famously establishes Christ’s royal majesty as “ruler of the kings of the earth” (1:5) and his coming conquest and rule of the nations with the rod of iron (Rev 12:5; 19:15). Further, in Revelation this rule of the Lord’s king awaits a *future* fulfillment on this earth. We read, for example, that believers at Thyatira, if they remain faithful, can expect the same promise as the Lord’s anointed king out of Psalm 2—to have authority over the nations and to shepherd them with the rod of iron (Rev 2:26–27 quoting Ps 2:8–9). As we all know, this was not their present experience, nor is it ours. The Lord’s anointed King does not yet exercise this authority over the nations. No, as we have seen, for the NT now is a time to persevere and press through present tribulations, persecutions, and even martyrdom (Rev 1:9; 6:9; 7:14). Yet when is this co-rule of the believer with God’s anointed King?

In Revelation, the fulfillment of Psalm 2 comes after the second coming of Christ to earth (Rev 19:11–16). This is when he will return and rule over the nations with his saints for a thousand years (Rev 20:4–6). As McNicol says,

Revelation 20.4–6 is a victory celebration. A straightforward reading would indicate that integral to the victory celebration of those who refused to bear the mark of the beast is their assumption of power over the nations. Psalm 2, a paradigmatic text for the Apocalypse, is now fulfilled (1.5–6; 2.26–27; 3.21; 5.10; 12.5 and 19.18). The Lamb (God’s son) is now the evident ruler over the kings of the earth. The martyrs (6.9–11) now have the answer to their prayers.⁶⁶

And we note that in Revelation’s account this rule of the Lord and his saints happens *after* the Second Coming and *before* the final judgment and end of the age (Rev 20:7–22:21). It is an earthly, nationed, and complete rule just as the prophets had said it would be.⁶⁷ Thus, in the interregnum of Revelation 20, not only are the prayers of the martyrs answered, so are the visions of the prophets for work that fully fulfills the cultural mandate given in Eden. Satan is restrained (20:2), and the Messiah rules with his people (20:4), not just the hearts of the individuals but their national cultures, too (20:3). Work is no longer subject to the corruption or the vanity that plagues the children of Noah. The Lord’s workers will bring forth justice and promote cultures that are just and generous.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Allan J. McNicol, *The Conversion of the Nations in Revelation* (LNTS 438; New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 66.

⁶⁷ It is also the view of all other Jewish writers contemporary to John (2 Bar 29.1–30.5; 4 Ezra 6–7; *Sib. Or.* 5.414–30; *Ascen. Isa.* 4.1–18; Justin, *Dial.* 81.3–4).

⁶⁸ This is not to say that work during the millennial period will not be subject to the evil within human hearts, only that this evil will not be allowed to manifest itself in the cultural sphere without just and firm repercussions from the Messiah King. He and his saints will rule the nations with the rod of iron as Ps 2:8–9 says.

IV. CONCLUSION: WORKING THE STORY

The story of work taken up in the NT documents follows exactly the script written by the OT prophets for the new covenant age but within the two phases of Christ's two comings. The first coming marked the presence of Kingdom power in the Holy Spirit to call out and prepare future rulers for the second phase that takes place at Christ's second coming where a transitional, millennial interregnum is unleashed on earth. Reading both of these two phases with the NT is important to avoid the chronocentric collapsing the meaning of work from the second phase into the time of the first. It also means that we understand the NT's picture for work in its own right and not as something needing to bear the weight of the prophecies intended for another phase. We will consider both implications in turn.

1. *Temptations to avoid for the meaning of work in the present.* The temptation of over-realizing the Bible's future story for work in the present age typically takes two forms—both alien to the NT. First is to speak too boldly about the progress of human work in the present against the NT's picture of a hostile world culture. This is the error of postmillennialism. Second is to comfort ourselves that the “small victories,” the “God traces,” of cultural goods possible for work now from redeemed people somehow fulfill the prophetic vision. Different from the first error which makes too much of the present phase, this second one does not make enough of the *imago Dei's* work *in history*. As we saw in Part One above, Eden's cultural mandate means human work is called not just to battle and resist forces contrary to God's culture; it is called to overcome the Enemy and bring the blessing of Eden's culture to the entire world of men and the creation itself. This aspect of Eden's mandate cannot, therefore, be in reference to the Eternal State where there will be nothing hostile for human work to overcome and rule. No, Adam's commission for this world is completed *in this world* under the patronage of the Last Adam, Jesus Christ. It is a commission for a future millennial period after the return of Christ to earth.

Andy Crouch's significant book, *Culture Making*, with many others, follows this second version of the Bible's story. And clearly his reading of the NT is superior to those voices speaking too boldly for work's promise to be messianic, to redeem and transform culture, and to establish the Kingdom of God now.⁶⁹ But the

⁶⁹ See Philip West's essay, “Cruciform Labour? The Cross in Two Recent Theologies of Work,” *Modern Churchman* 28 (1986): 9–15, where upon examination of the thought of Jürgen Moltmann (*On Human Dignity*) and John Paul II (*Laborem Exercens*), concludes: “Both Moltmann and John Paul II seem to equate too closely the establishment of the Kingdom of God with human progress, and correspondingly underrate the seriousness and pervasiveness of human sin” (p. 13). Likewise, the growing list of publications attempting to recalibrate the church for ministry in the new “post-Christian era” tacitly endorse the NT's picture (e.g. Lee Beach, *The Church in Exile: Living in Hope After Christendom* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015]). Gordon Fee and D. A. Carson rightly observe that the affluence and tolerance of the Western world tends to skew us to overrealized eschatology in our cultural aims (Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994], 823–24; D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* [Grand Rapids/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2008], 216–18, 223–24). In comparison to the global experience of the church, the affluent world knows

chapter he writes, “Why We Can’t Change the World,” cannot be the end of the story for human work either. Neither can we reduce all of Eden and the prophets’ visions for confronting and overtaking darkness just to the spiritual realms of this age.⁷⁰ Rather, this side of Heaven there will be a human-worked culture that mirrors the heartbeat of God in the world as the prophets and the apostles say. There will be a world where sin’s presence is not allowed to dominate the goods of human culture. There will be a world where the martyr gets to reign—and reign effectively, over the havoc and chaos of sin and evil. There will be a world where human work *solves* culture’s issues of justice, peace, and scarcity and does not just toil underneath them. There will be a world where human “ruling” and “subduing” actually extends the order of Eden’s culture to the ends of the earth. The present exiled church need not try and make Babylon into Jerusalem now,⁷¹ but neither should it be consigned to waiting for heaven to experience the glory of God in human culture. Only a proper reading of the NT’s two phases of work can tolerate both realities and the fullness of human life in the image of God.

2. *The meaning of work in the present time.* Scripture’s phased-in eschatology that leaves the fullness of Eden’s mandate for a future phase does not downgrade the meaning of work in the present. It just means we are called to think soberly understanding work’s purpose. Here we will find meaning that fully resonates with the NT’s texts, and we will see a meaning for work now that is *preparatory work*, the work of *exiles*, *sojourners*, and those who are *strangers* to “this world” who work in confident hope of the next phase (Rom 8:24–25; Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 1:1; 2:11; etc.). Considering the NT’s message for work in the present from the three “goods” or values of work—the ontological, the relational, and the instrumental—will allow a convenient framework to proceed.

The *ontological* good of work now means that all legitimate work is indeed an intrinsic good and worthwhile in its own right. It is human to work. Thus, redeemed humans will indeed work and they will do their work differently. Empowered by the new covenant Spirit, believers already begin the process of becoming more human outward from the heart.⁷² This means their work can witness to the presence of the Kingdom’s power in the Spirit to manifest the generous, forgiving character of God even in the most inhumane working conditions, including the work of the indentured servant or slave (Eph 6:5; Col 4:1; Philemon). It means they

little of persecution and suffering that informs the biblical theology of the cross. In the new post-Christian culture, it may know more.

⁷⁰ This is the thesis of G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth*.

⁷¹ The image is from VanDrunen (*Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 95) regarding the posture of the exiles in their work in Babylon according to Jeremiah 29. He is correct to suggest later that “we would do well, I believe, to discard familiar mantras about ‘transformation’ [of culture] and especially ‘redemption’. Nowhere does Scripture call us to such grandiose tasks. They are human dreams rather than God-given obligations” (*ibid.*, 171).

⁷² Steven Guthrie’s recent and excellent pneumatology captures the Spirit’s project for the present in making us progressively more human (*Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011]).

see their work as a delight to their Master when it produces a good for others and when it is responsible toward the creation. At this level, work in the present age is in some measure Edenic because it is human to work and to work God's way and for his glory. But it is still less than Eden's Adamic mandate because of the limitations of Noahic work that still remain—work that cannot yet rule and subdue by means of dominating human culture still subject to sin.

The *relational* good the NT gives to work also rings true in the present time of preparation. Work appears within the NT's well-known "household codes" as a nexus of relationships where the believer has an opportunity learn to "put on love" (Col 3:14; cf. Col 3:18–23; Eph 5:22–29; 6:1–9). Together with the marriage relationship (husband and wife), the family relationship (parent and children), the community of Christ (the church), our work (slave and master references) and the relationships there are where our heart's condition will be revealed and where it can be formed to the image of Christ as we learn to live out our forgiven status with others. But the relational good of work is not only for the transformation of the believer. As Christ said, it is practiced self-giving love that witnesses to the outsider of a supernatural power among them (John 13:35).⁷³ Thus the relational good of work in the present time is for both *calling out* and *preparing* future rulers and culture-makers in the kingdom of God.

The final value of work in the NT also interfaces with the previous two. Just as the ontological value of work is inherently also relational and vice versa, so the *instrumental* good of work is also a piece with the ontological and relational goods of work. As we have seen according to the NT's two-phased establishment of the prophetic hope, the products of the believer's work will not dominate and define human cultures in the present age. But this is not a tale of despair and woe as we all just crater together in a "Babylon" culture to some kind of final anti-Christ end. On the contrary! Because the present phase still is preparatory, we *work* in hope (Rom 8:24–25). We proclaim and model another coming kingdom when we dedicate the fruit of work to being generous and providing for the needy of society (Eph 4:28; 2 Cor 9:9), and when we support our families so as to not burden society (1 Thess 4:11–12). Beyond even this, present achievements of our work do bring traces of God's culture to our conflicted world—increases of knowledge, discovery, beauty, and service for the common good of our fellow man—and, we can be assured, will one day contribute to a culture that dominates and rules evil, injustice, inequality, and scarcity *God's way*. When the Son of Man returns in glory to bring final conversion to the nations, to rule and suppress his enemies, then the capacities of his redeemed workers will bring Eden's culture to this earth for the good and blessing of all.

⁷³ The explicit aims of the new covenant Spirit in the NT are to raise the fame of the crucified one in the world (Luke 24:46–47; Acts 1:8) and to form and sustain the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12–13) in unity (Col 3:13; Phil 2:5–11) with manifestations of God's grace (1 Cor 2:12; 12:1–31) to unify the body. See further in Mark Saucy, "Regnum Spiriti: The Role of the Spirit in the Social Ethics of the Kingdom," *JETS* 54 (2011): 89–108.

The eschatology turn for work we have traced here from Scripture's story allows for neither the futility of Sisyphus or the despair of Qoheleth for our work in the present time. Far from it! The power of the Age to Come is present and working in the believer's work. It is power that cannot be thwarted, that never suffers setback, and that never stands static. It is power this world does not know and cannot answer. And it is power that will one day take over all of the cultures of men when the King of Kings takes his reward personally and visibly on earth. This is a story of work worth believing.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ This article was supported by a Talbot Kern Grant.