

Book Review – John Weaver

Theology of Work Project:

Theology of Work Bible Commentary Volume 1: Genesis through Deuteronomy

Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2015, ISBN 978-1-61970-660-6

Theology of Work Bible Commentary Volume 2: Joshua through Song of Songs

Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2015, ISBN 978-1-61970-709-2

Calling and Work

Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2015, ISBN 978-1-61970-693-4

In FiBQ 16:1 William Messenger wrote an introduction to the Theology of Work Project. Here John Weaver reviews the first two books to be published in the series.

These three texts are part of the resource offered by the Theology of Work Project (www.theologyofwork.org). This Project started in 2007 with the intention to research and write about what the Bible says about work. The project approached the task in two unique ways: a) to research the whole Bible for every passage that applies to work. b) to include as wide a breadth of the Christian community as possible.

The project has succeeded in creating a commentary covering all 66 books of the Bible as they apply to work, workers and workplaces. On June 12th, 2014 the completed Theology of Work Bible Commentary appeared online. The five-volume print edition was produced in 2014-2015.

To date, the Theology of Work Project has included 138 contributors from 23 countries on five continents, representing about 100 organisations. Responsibility for final approval of every passage was vested in 19 Steering Committee members from around the world.

William Messenger, the founder of the project, notes that his team were amazed at how much the Bible says about work. They found 859 passages of scripture that relate to work in some specific way. Messenger says that he used to think the Bible was a book about religion, with a few applications to work. But it's not. The Bible is a book about God, and it turns out that God shows up where God's people spend their time, which is mostly at work¹. Messenger comments that there are hundreds of millions of workplace Christians around the world, and it is important to work out how to

reach and equip all of God's people in every kind of workplace around the globe. The next step is to create resources for specific occupations and situations.

The commentaries are useful explorations of the biblical texts, but when we add the discussion of the nature of work as it appears in the scriptural text, we have a unique resource for those wishing to explore faith and work.

The first two volumes, reviewed here, explore the major part of the Hebrew scriptures apart from the Prophets.

Some of the biblical books have more direct relevance to a theology of work, such as Genesis, Leviticus, Ruth, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. In some the connection to work-related issues is a little forced. For example, having identified the Song of Songs as a 'racy' love poem, it is surprising to see focus on the agricultural life in springtime as pleasure, and the tenuous connection of passionate sex with the household and work.

Genesis provides us with work as a creation mandate: God creates people to work, to work in God's image, to be in relationship with others: for growth, fruitfulness, and the provision of needs, all within limits – recognising the rhythm of work and rest.

Leviticus provides practical instructions for workers and the workplace. We have some key passages such as the call to love our neighbour (19:18), and the law of Jubilee (chapter 25). The Old Testament laws of Sabbath and Jubilee provide some important principles for farming and food production: sharing – with the poor; caring – for the earth; and restraint – of power and wealth. Jubilees were about sufficiency, recognition of limits, and the need for God's creation to rest. They recognised that creation belongs to all of us and ultimately to God – the concept of

