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# The Twelve Prophets and Work

Theology of Work Project

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## The Twelve Prophets and Work

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### Introduction to the Twelve Prophets

The Book of the Twelve Prophets covers a range of conditions in the life of Israel, each of which brings its own challenges. The unifying theme of these prophets is that in God there is no split between the work of worship and the work of daily life. Nor is there a split between individual wellbeing and the common good. The people of Israel are faithful or unfaithful, in varying degrees, to God's covenant with them, and degree of their faithfulness is immediately apparent in their worship or their neglect to worship. The people's faithfulness, or lack of faithfulness, to God's covenant, is reflected in not only the spiritual environment, but also the social and physical environment, including the land itself. The people's degree of faithfulness is also visible in their ethics in life and work, which in turn determines the fruitfulness of their labour and their consequent prosperity or poverty. In the short term the wicked may prosper, but both God's discipline and the natural consequences of unjust work will eventually reduce the unjust to poverty and despair. But when people and societies work in faithfulness to God, he blesses them with an integrated spiritual-ethical-environmental health and prosperity.

These final twelve books of the Old Testament are usually referred to in the English-speaking Christian tradition as the Minor Prophets. In Hebrew tradition these books are contained in a single scroll called "The Book of the Twelve." It forms a kind of anthology with a progression of thought and coherence of theme. The essential background of the collection is the covenant that God has made with his people, and the narrative told within the collection is the story of Israel's violation of the covenant, God's response in punishing or disciplining of Israel, and God's slowly-unfolding restoration of the Israelite nation and society.<sup>[1]</sup>

That being the case, five of the first six books of the Twelve—Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah—reflect on the effect of the people's sin, both on the conduct of the covenant and on the events of the world. Then the next three—Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah—concern the punishment for sin, again with respect both to the covenant and to the world. The last three prophetic books—Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi—concern the restoration of Israel, yet again with respect to a renewal of the covenant and partial restoration of Israel's standing in the world. Finally, Jonah is a special case. His prophecy does not concern Israel at all, but with the non-Hebrew city-state of Nineveh. Both its setting and its composition are famously difficult to date reliably.

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## Historical Backdrop of the Twelve Prophets

There is much debate about the background and dating of the prophets of Israel and Judah. See [Introduction to the Prophets](#) for an overall discussion of the major issues and context of their writings. With respect to the Twelve, let us give a brief outline. Within the first cluster, there is a broad consensus that Hosea, Amos and Micah were situated in the eighth century BC. By that time, the United Kingdom of Israel ruled over by David and then Solomon had been split for some time into a northern kingdom, known as Israel, and a southern kingdom, known as Judah. Micah was a southerner speaking to the south; Amos was a southerner speaking to the north; and Hosea was a northerner speaking to the north.

As the eighth century opened, both the northern and southern kingdoms were enjoying a prosperity and security of borders unprecedented since the time of Solomon. But the clouds were gathering for those with eyes to see, such as our prophets. Internally, the economic and political situation became ever more precarious as dynastic struggles preoccupied the ruling class. Externally the gradual re-emergence of Assyria as a superpower in the region would become an ever-growing threat to both kingdoms. In fact, the northern kingdom was effectively eliminated by the Assyrian army circa 721 BC. It never reappeared again as a political entity, although traces of its existence remain to this day in Samaritan identity (2 Kings 17:1-18). The prophets lay the blame squarely on the people of Israel, and to a lesser extent Judah, for abandoning the worship of Yahweh in favour of idolatry, and for violating the ethical requirements of the Law. Despite these failings, the people lulled themselves into a false sense of security because of their covenant with Yahweh to be his people.

The south, under King Hezekiah, somehow survived the Assyrian threat (2 Kings 19), but faced an even greater challenge in the rise of the Babylonian empire (2 Kings 21). Unfortunately, Judah did not repent of her idolatry and ethical violations after her close escape from the Assyrians. Final defeat came at the hands of the Babylonians in 587 BC. This culminated in the destruction of Judah's societal infrastructure and the deportation of its leadership into exile in the Babylonian empire (2 Kings 24-25). The prophets regarded this defeat as evidence of God's punishment of the people. This is most sharply etched in the books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah amongst the prophets of the Twelve. They mirror the prophetic writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who also date from this period. Separate books of the Bible record their prophetic careers (see [Jeremiah & Lamentations and Work](#) and [Ezekiel and Work](#)), and we will not discuss them here.

The great Persian king, Cyrus, defeated Babylon and took over her hegemony. In line with Persian policy, the empire permitted the Jewish people to return to their land and, perhaps more importantly, to re-establish their temple and other key institutions (Ezra 1). All this took place, it seems, at the pleasure of the Persian empire.<sup>[2]</sup> The prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi did their work during

this phase of Israel's history.

In summary, the Book of the Twelve Prophets spans a wide range of background circumstances in the life of the people of God. Accordingly, it reflects several different paradigms within which faith at work needs to be expressed.

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## Faith and Work Before the Exile—Hosea, Amos, Obadiah, Joel, Micah

Hosea, Amos, and Micah were active in the eighth century when the state was well developed, but the economy was declining. Power and wealth accreted to the upper strata and left a growing disadvantaged class. There is some evidence of a trend towards cash cropping as a way of meeting the growing urban demand for food. This had the destabilising effect of reducing the risk spreading inherent in the subsistence farming it supplanted. [3] Farming communities became vulnerable to annual variations in production, and the cities were correspondingly subject to vagaries in their food supply (Amos 4:6-9). As the prophets from this period begin to speak, the glory days of opulent building projects and territorial expansion are well past. Such circumstances provide the soil for corruption on the part of those desperate to hold on to their power and diminishing wealth, and a widening gap between the rich and the poor. As a result, God's prophets from this period have much to say to the world of work.

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## God Demands Change (Hosea 1:1-9, Micah 2:1-5)

God puts the blame for Israel's corruption on the people as a whole. They have abandoned God's covenant, which both breaks their connection with God and breaks the just social structures of God's law, leading directly to corruption and economic decline. "Whoredom" is the term the prophets often used to describe Israel's breaking of the covenant (e.g., Jeremiah 3:2, Ezekiel 23:7). To dramatize the situation, God takes the metaphor literally and commands the prophet Hosea to "take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord" (Hosea 1:2). Hosea obeys God's command, marries a woman named Gomer, who apparently fit the requirement, and has three children with her (Hosea 1:3). We are left to imagine what making a household and raising children with a "wife of whoredom" must have been like.

Although the prophets use the imagery of prostitution and adultery, God is accusing Israel of economic and social corruption, not sexual immorality.

Alas for those who devise wickedness and evil deeds on their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in their power. They covet fields, and seize them;

houses, and take them away; they oppress householder and house, people and their inheritance. (Micah 2:1-2)

This makes Hosea's family situation a dramatic example for those who work in corrupt or imperfect workplaces today. God deliberately put Hosea in a corrupt and difficult family situation. Could it be that God deliberately puts people in corrupt and difficult workplaces today? While we may seek a comfortable job with a reputable employer in a respectable profession, perhaps we can accomplish far more for God's kingdom by working in morally compromised places. If you abhor corruption, can you do more to fight it by working as a lawyer in a prestigious firm or as a building inspector in a mafia-dominated city? There are no easy answers, but God's call to Hosea suggests that making a difference in the world is more important to God than keeping our hands clean. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it in the midst of Nazi control of Germany, "The ultimate question for a responsible man to ask, is not how to extricate himself heroically from the affair, but how the coming generation is to live."<sup>[4]</sup>

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## God Makes Change Possible (Hosea 14:1-9, Amos 9:11-15, Micah 4:1-5, Obadiah 21)

The same God who demands change also promises to make change possible. "A harvest is appointed when I would restore the fortunes of my people, when I would heal Israel" (Hosea 6:11-7:1). The Twelve Prophets carry a fundamental optimism that God is active in the world to change it for the better. Despite the apparent triumph of the wicked, God is ultimately in charge, and "the kingdom shall be the Lord's" (Obadiah 21). Despite the calamity the people are bringing upon themselves, God is at work to restore the goodness of life and work that he intended from the beginning. "He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love" (Joel 2:13). The closing oracles of Joel, Hosea and Amos (Hos. 14; Amos 9:11-15) illustrate this in explicitly economic terms.

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. And my people shall never again be put to shame. (Joel 2:24, 26)

[Israel] shall again live beneath my shadow, they shall flourish as a garden; they shall blossom like the vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon. (Hosea 14:7)

I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and 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 9:14)

God's word to his people in times of economic and social hardship is that God's intent is to restore peace, justice, and prosperity, if the people will live by the precepts of his covenant. The means he will use is the work of his people.

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## Unjust Work (Micah 1:1-7; 3:1-2; 5:10-15)

[A compelling discussion on God's view of work \(Click to listen\)](#)

Despite God's intentions, work is subjected to human sin. The most egregious case is work that is inherently sinful. Micah mentions prostitution, probably in this case cult prostitution, and he promises that the wages from it would be burned (Micah 1:7). A straightforward application of this would be to rule out prostitution as a legitimate occupation, even if it might be an understandable choice for those who have no other way to provide for themselves or their families. There are other jobs that also raise the question, should this job be done at all? We can all think of various examples, no doubt, and Christians would do well to seek work that benefits others and society as a whole.

But Micah is speaking to Israel as a whole, not only to individuals. He is critiquing a society in which social, economic, and religious conditions make prostitution viable. The question is not, "Is it acceptable to earn a living as a prostitute," but "How must society change to eliminate the need for anyone to do degrading or harmful work?" Micah calls to account not so much those who feel forced into doing bad work, but the leaders who fail to reform society. His words are scathing. "Listen, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel! Should you not know justice?—you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin off my people, and the flesh off their bones" (Micah 3:1-2).

Our society is different from Micah's, and the specific remedies God promises to ancient Israel are not necessarily what God intends today. Micah's prophetic words reflect the connection between ritual prostitution and idolatrous cults in his day. God promises to end the social abuses centered at the cultic shrines. "I will cut off your images and your pillars from among you, and you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands; and I will uproot your sacred poles from among you and destroy your towns" (Micah 5:13-14). In our day, we need God's wisdom to find effective solutions to current social factors leading to sinful and oppressive work. At the same time, like the prophets of Israel, we need to call individuals to repent of wilfully engaging in sinful labour. "Seek good and not evil, that you may live, and so the Lord, the God of hosts will be with you" (Amos 5:14).

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## Working Unjustly (Hosea 4:1-10; Joel 2:28-29)

When the prophets speak of prostitution they are seldom concerned merely with that particular line of work. Typically they are also using it as a metaphor of injustice, which by definition is unfaithfulness to God's covenant (Hosea 4:7-10). In a broad reminder that wages may be unjustly earned, Amos indicts the merchants who use inferior products, false weights, and other deceptions to reap a profit at the expense of vulnerable consumers. They say to themselves, "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).

Many otherwise-legitimate ways of making a living may become unjust by the way they are performed. Should a photographer takes pictures of anything a client asks, without regard for its effect on its subject and viewers? Should a surgeon perform any kind of elective surgery a patient might be willing to pay for? Is a mortgage broker responsible to ensure the ability of a borrower to repay the loan without undue hardship? If our work is a form of service under God, we cannot ignore such questions. We need to be careful not to imagine a hierarchy of work, however. The prophets' claim is not that some types of work are more godly than others, but that *all* types of work must be done as contributions to God's work in the world. "Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit," God promises (Joel 2:29).

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## Individuals' and Communities' Work are Interdependent (Amos 8:1-6, Micah 6:1-16)

Justice in work is not only an individual matter. People have a responsibility to make sure that everyone in society has access to the resources needed to make a living. Amos criticizes Israel for injustice in this respect, most vividly in an allusion to the law of gleaning. Gleaning is the process of picking up the stray heads of grain that remain in a field after the harvesters have passed through. According to God's covenant with Israel, farmers were not allowed to glean their own fields, but were to allow poor people (literally "widows and orphans") to glean them as a way of supporting themselves (Deuteronomy 24:19). This created a rudimentary form of social welfare, based on creating an opportunity for the poor to work (by gleaning the fields) rather than having to beg, steal or starve. Gleaning is a way to participate in the dignity of work, even for those who are unable to participate in the labor market due to lack of resources, socio-economic dislocation, discrimination, disability, or other factors. God not only wants everyone's needs to be met, he wants to offer everyone the dignity of working to meet their needs and the needs of others.

Amos complains that this provision is being violated. Farmers are not leaving the stray grain in their fields for the poor to glean (Micah 7:1-2). Instead they offer to sell chaff—the waste left after threshing—to the poor at a ruinous price. "You trample on the needy, and bring ruin to the poor," Amos accuses them, "...selling the sweepings of the wheat" (Amos 8:4, 6). Amos accuses them of waiting

restlessly for the end of Sabbath so they can carry on selling this cheap, adulterated food product to those who have no other choice (Amos 8:5). Moreover, they are cheating even those who can afford to buy pure grain, as is evident in rigged balances in the marketplace. “We will make the ephah [of wheat being sold] small and the shekel [selling price] great,” they boast. Micah proclaims God’s judgment against unjust commerce. “Can I tolerate wicked scales and a bag of dishonest weights?” says the Lord (Micah 6:11). This tells us clearly that justice is not only a matter of criminal law and political expression, but also of economic opportunity. The opportunity to work to meet individual and family needs is essential to the role of the individual within the covenant. Economic justice is an essential component of Micah’s famous, ringing proclamation only 3 verses earlier, “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic. 6:8). God requires his people—as a daily matter of their walk with him—to love kindness and do justice individually and socially, in every aspect of work and economic life.

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## Work and Worship (Micah 6:6-8; Amos 5:21-24; Hosea 4:1-10)

Justice is not merely a secular issue, as the prophets see it. Micah’s call for justice in 6:8 follows from an observation that justice is better than extravagant religious sacrifices (Mic. 6:6-7). Hosea and Amos expand this point. Amos objects to the disconnect between the religious observance and ethical action.

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:21-24)

Hosea takes us deeper into the connection between being spiritually grounded doing good work. Good work arises directly from faithfulness to God’s covenant, and conversely, evil work takes us away from the presence of God.

Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel; for the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing.... My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will



forget your children. (Hosea 4:1-3, 6)

This is a reminder that the world of work does not exist in a vacuum, separated from the rest of life. If we do not ground our values and priorities in God's covenant, then our lives and work will be ethically and spiritually incoherent. If we do not please God in our work, we cannot please him in our worship.

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### Apathy Due to Wealth (Amos 3:9-15, 6:1-7)

The prophets criticize those whose wealth leads them to abandon working for the common good and who give up any sense of responsibility for their neighbours. Amos connects indolent wealth with oppression when he accuses the idle rich of wrongdoing, violence and robbery (Amos 3:10). God will bring a swift end to the wealth of such people. God will “tear down the winter house as well as the summer house and the houses of ivory” (Amos 3:15). Amos levels an excoriating blast against the luxuries of “those who are at ease in Zion” (Amos 6:1). They are first in dissolution, he observes, as they, “lounge on their couches” (Amos 6:4) and “sing idle songs to the sound of the harp” (Amos 6:5). When God punishes Israel, they will be “first to go into exile” (Amos 6:7).

Surprisingly similar complaints can be heard today against those who have wealth, but do not employ it towards any good purpose. This applies to individuals and also to corporations, governments and other institutions that use their wealth to exploit others' vulnerabilities, rather than to create anything useful in proportion to their wealth. Many Christians—perhaps the majority in the West—have some ability to change these things, at least in their immediate working environments. The prophets' words serve as a continual challenge and encouragement to care deeply about how work and wealth serve—or fail to serve—the people around us.

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### Faith and Work During the Exile—Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah

Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah were active during the period when the southern kingdom began a rapid decline. Internal incoherence and external pressure from the burgeoning Babylonian empire resulted in Judah becoming a vassal state to Babylon. Shortly afterwards, an ill-advised rebellion brought down the wrath of the Babylonians in 587 BC, leading to the collapse of the state of Judah and the deportation of the elites to the centre of the Babylonian empire (2 Kings 24-25). In exile, the people of Israel had to work out how to be faithful while separated from their key religious institutions, the temple, the priesthood, even the land. If, as we have seen, the first six books are about the effect of the people's sin, these three—Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah—are about the resultant punishment during this period.

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## God's Punishing Hand at Work (Nahum 1:1-12; Habakkuk 3:1-19; Zephaniah 1:1-13)

Nahum's chief contribution is to make it clear that the political and economic disaster is God's punishment or disciplining of Israel. "I have afflicted you," God declares (Nahum 1:12). Habakkuk and Zephaniah declare that an essential part of God's punishment is that the people's ability to make an adequate living is diminished.

The fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls. (Habakkuk 3:17)

All the traders have perished; all who weigh out silver are cut off. (Zephaniah 1:11)

This is seen not only in economic woes, but also in environmental problems (see below under [Haggai: Work, Worship and the Environment](#)).

Are contemporary political, economic, and natural disasters punishments from God? There is no shortage of people willing to declare that particular disasters are signs of God's wrath. The 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan were attributed to divine punishment by both the Governor of Tokyo [5] and the host of an MSNBC television news show. But unless we have joined the ranks of the Twelve or the other prophets of Israel, we should be very reluctant to declare God's wrath in the events of the world. Did God himself reveal the reasons for the tsunami to these commentators, or did they draw conclusions on their own? Did he reveal his intent to a substantial number of people, well in advance, over many years, as he did with the prophets of Israel, or did it come to one or two people the day after? Were the modern-day declarers of God's punishment forged as prophets by years of suffering alongside those afflicted, as Jeremiah, the Twelve and the other prophets of ancient Israel?

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## Idolatrous Work (Habakkuk 2:1-20; Zephaniah 1:14-18)

The punishment is of the people's own making. The people have been working faithlessly, turning good materials of stone, wood and metal into idols. Work that creates idols has no value, no matter how expensive the materials or well-crafted the results are.

What use is an idol once its maker has shaped it—a cast image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in what has been made, though the product is only an idol that cannot speak! (Habakkuk 2:18)

As Zephaniah puts it, “neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them” (Zeph. 1:18).

Faithfulness is not a superficial matter of uttering praises to God while we work. It is the act of putting God’s priorities first in our work. Habakkuk reminds that “the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!” (Hab. 2:20). This silence is not merely a religious observation, but a silencing of our own broken ambitions, fears, and motivations, so that the priorities of God’s covenant can become our priorities. Consider what awaits those who defraud others in banking and finance.

“Alas for you who heap up what is not your own!” How long will you load yourselves with goods taken in pledge? Will not your own creditors suddenly rise, and those who make you tremble wake up? Then you will be booty for them. (Hab. 2:6-7)

Those who accumulate their ill-gotten gain in real estate—a phenomenon that seems constant throughout all the ages—are similarly traps for themselves.

“Alas for you who get evil gain for your houses, setting your nest on high to be safe from the reach of harm!” You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples; you have forfeited your life. The very stones will cry out from the wall, and the plaster will respond from the woodwork. (Hab. 2:9-11)

Those who exploit others’ vulnerabilities also bring judgment on themselves.

“Alas for you who make your neighbors drink, pouring out your wrath until they are drunk, in order to gaze on their nakedness!” You will be sated with contempt instead of glory. Drink, you yourself, and stagger! The cup in the Lord’s right hand will come around to you, and shame will come upon your glory. (Hab. 2:15-16)

Work that oppresses or takes advantage of others ultimately brings about its own downfall.

Today we may not be literally crafting idols of precious materials before which we bow down. But work also may be idolatrous if we imagine that we are capable of producing our own salvation. For the

essence of idolatry is that “its maker trusts in his own handiwork” (Hab. 2:18, NASB, cf. NRSV above), rather than trusting in the God by whose guidance and power we are created to work. If we are ambitious for power and influence because we think without our wisdom, skill and leadership, or work group, company, organization, or nation is doomed, then our ambition is a form of idolatry. In contrast, if we are ambitious for power and influence so that we can draw others into a network of service in which everyone brings forth God’s gifts for the world, then our ambition is a form of faithfulness. If our response to success is self-congratulation, we are practicing idolatry. If our response is thankfulness, then we are worshiping God. If our reaction to failure is despair, then we are feeling the hollowness of a broken idol, but if our reaction is perseverance, then we are experiencing the saving power of God.

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### Faithfulness in the Midst of Toil (Habakkuk 2:1; Zephaniah 2:1-4)

There is another dynamic at work in the exile. Notwithstanding the emphasis of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah on punishment, people also begin to re-learn how to work in faithful service to God during this period. This is fully explored in Theology of Work Project articles such as [Jeremiah & Lamentations and Work](#) and [Daniel and Work](#), but is also hinted at here in the Book of the Twelve. The key point of this is that even in the wretched circumstances of the exile, it is still possible to be faithful. As he watched the carnage around him, no doubt wishing he could be somewhere else, Habakkuk determined to stay at his post and listen for the Word of God there (Hab. 2:1). But more is possible than simply staying at one’s post, valuable as that may be. We may also find a way to be righteous and humble.

Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness,  
seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the Lord’s wrath. (Zephaniah 2:3)

There are no ideal places of work. Some are deeply challenging to people of God, compromised in all sorts of ways, while others are flawed in more mundane ways. But even in difficult work places, we may still be faithful witnesses to God’s purposes, both in the quality of our presence and the quality of our work. Habakkuk reminds us that no matter how fruitless our work seems, God is present with us in our work, giving us a joy that even the worst conditions of labour cannot completely overcome.

Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines;  
though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food;  
though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls,  
yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation.  
God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
and makes me tread upon the heights. (Habakkuk 3:17-19)

Or, as the paraphrase by Terry Barringer puts it,

Though the contract finishes, And there is no work to be had;  
Though there is no demand for my skills, And no one publishes my work.  
Though the savings run out, And the pension is not enough to live on;  
Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will rejoice in God my Saviour. [6]

As verse 19 suggests, good work is possible even in the midst of difficult circumstances, for “the Lord is my strength.” Faithfulness is not only a matter of enduring hardship, but of making even the worst situation better in whatever ways we can.

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## Faithful Work After the Exile—Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

After the exile ended, Jewish civil society and religious life were restored in the land of God’s promise. Jerusalem and its temple were rebuilt, along with the economic, social and religious infrastructure of Jewish society. The Book of the Twelve now shifts to the challenges of work that follows sin and punishment.

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### The Need for Social Capital (Haggai 1:1-2:19)

One of the challenges we face in work is the temptation to put self and family ahead of society. The prophet Haggai paints a vivid picture of this challenge. He confronts people working hard to rebuild their own houses while neglecting to put resources into the rebuilding of the temple, the centre of the Jewish society. “Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your panelled houses, while this house lies in ruins?” (Haggai 1:4). He says that this failure to invest in social capital is actually diminishing their individual productivity.

You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes. (Hag. 1:6)

As the Lord stirs up the spirit of the people and their leaders, they do begin to invest in rebuilding the temple and the fabric of society (Hag. 1:14-15).

Investing in social capital reminds us that there is no such thing as a “self-made man.” Although individual effort may create great wealth, each of us relies on resources and social infrastructure that

originate ultimately in God. “I will fill this house with splendor, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts” (Hag. 2:7-8). Prosperity is not a matter only—or even primarily—of personal effort, but of a community grounded in God’s covenant. “In this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts.” (Hag. 2:9).

How foolish if we think we must provide for ourselves before we can afford to take time for God and the society of his people. The truth is that we cannot provide for ourselves except by the grace of God’s generosity and the mutual work of his community. This is the same concept behind the tithe. It is not a sacrifice of 10% of the harvest, but a blessing of 100% of the amazing yield of God’s creation.

In our own day, this reminds us of the importance of putting resources into the intangible aspects of life. Housing, food, automobiles, and other physical necessities are important. But God provides richly enough that we can also afford art, music, education, nature, recreation and the myriad things that feed the soul. Those who work in the arts or humanities or leisure industries, or put money towards the creation of parks and playgrounds and theatres are making every bit as much of a contribution to the world of which God dreams as the businessman or carpenter.

This also suggests that investing in churches and church life is crucial to empowering Christians’ work. Worship itself is intricately tied to doing good work, as we have seen, and perhaps we should engage in worship as formation for good work, rather than merely as private devotion or leisure. Moreover, the Christian community can be a powerful force for economic, civic and social well-being if it can learn to bring the spiritual and ethical power of God’s word to bear on matters of work in the economic, social, governmental, academic, medical, scientific and other matters of work.

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## Work, Worship and the Environment (Haggai 1:1-2:19; Zechariah 7:8-14)

Haggai connects the economic and social well-being of the people with the state of the environment. By means of a play on words more obvious in Hebrew than in the English translation, Haggai links the desolation of the temple (“in ruins,” Hebrew *hareb*, Hag. 1:9) with the desolation of land and its harvests (“drought,” Hebrew *horeb*) and the consequent ruination of the general wellness of “human beings and animals, and all their labours” (Hag. 1:11). The linchpin of this link is the health of the temple, which becomes a kind of cipher for the religious faithfulness or unfaithfulness of the people. So there is a three-way link among worship, socio-economic health, environment and worship. When there is disease in the physical environment on which we depend, there is disease in human society, and one of the marks of an unhealthy society is its contribution to the disease of the environment.

There is also a link between the way a community worships and cares for the land, and the economic and political condition of those who occupy the land. The prophets call us to re-learn the lesson that a respect for the creator of the earth we occupy is a starting point for peace between the earth and its

inhabitants. For Haggai, the drought of the land and the ruin of the temple are inseparable. True and whole-hearted worship ushers in peace and blessing from the land. “Since the day that the foundation of the Lord’s temple was laid, consider: Is there any seed left in the barn? Do the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree still yield nothing? From this day on I will bless you” (Hag. 2:18-19). Zechariah, too, draws a link between human sin and desolation of the land. Those in power “oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien or the poor” (Zechariah 7:10). “They made their hearts adamant in order not to hear the law and the words that the Lord of hosts had sent” (Zech. 7:12). As a result, the environment became degraded, and thus “a pleasant land was made desolate.” (Zech. 7:14). Joel had observed the beginnings of this degradation long before the exile, in fact. “The vine withers, the fig tree droops. Pomegranate, palm, and apple—all the trees of the field are dried up; surely, joy withers away among the people” (Joel 1:12).

Given the importance of work and work practices to the wellbeing of the environment, if Christians were to do their work according to the vision of the Twelve Prophets, we could have a profoundly beneficial impact on the planet and all those who inhabit it.<sup>[7]</sup> It is the urgent environmental responsibility of the faithful to learn in concrete ways how to ground their work, in the worship of God.

Haggai’s long oracle on purity (Hag. 2:10-19) also suggests a link between purity and the health of the land. God complains that because of the people’s impurity, “with every work of their hands...what they offer there is unclean” (Hag. 2:14). This is part of the more general link between worship and the health of the environment. One possible application is that a pure environment means an environment being treated in sustainable ways by those to whom God has given responsibility for its wellbeing, namely humanity. Thus purity entails a fundamental respect for the integrity of the whole created order, the health of its ecospheres, the viability and wellbeing of its species, the renewability of its productivity. And so we return to the theme of Christians and responsible work practices.

Accordingly, if desolation is part of God’s punishment for the sin of the people reported in the Book of the Twelve, then productive ground is part of their restoration. Indeed, in quite different circumstances, Zechariah has a very similar vision to that of Amos during the time of Israelite prosperity: people experiencing wellbeing in the form of sitting under the fig trees that they planted. “On that day, says the Lord of hosts, you shall invite each other to come under your vine and fig tree” (Zech. 3:10). Peace with God includes care for the earth that God has made. Productive land, of course, has to be worked in order to yield its fruit. And so the world of work is intimately connected with the realisation of abundant life.

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## Both Sin and Hope Remain Present in Work (Malachi 1:1-4:6)

Even in the time of restoration, human sin is never far away. Malachi, the third of the restoration

prophets, complains that some of the people begin to profit by exploiting the most vulnerable in society (the “lame or sick,” Malachi 1:13), in particular by defrauding labourers of their wages (Mal. 3:5). “You are robbing me!” God accuses them (Mal. 3:8). Not surprisingly, such people also pollute the temple worship by stinting what they contribute in offerings (Mal. 1:8-19), and as a result the environment is also degraded (Mal. 3:11).

Yet the hope of the prophets remains, and work is at the centre of it. It begins with a promise to restore the religious/social infrastructure of the temple. “See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts” (Mal. 3:1). It proceeds with the restoration of the environment. “I will rebuke the locust” (Mal. 3:11a), God promises, and then “you will be a land of delight” (Mal. 3:12). People go about their work ethically (Mal. 3:14, 18), and as a result the economy is restored, including “the produce of your soil” and “your vine in the field” (Mal. 3:11b).

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## Jonah and God’s Blessing for All Nations

As noted in the [introduction](#), the Book of Jonah is an outlier among the twelve prophets. It does not take place in Israel. The text gives no indication of its date. It does not contain prophetic oracles, and the focus is not on the people to whom the prophet is sent, but on his own personal experience.<sup>[8]</sup>

Nonetheless, it shares the perspective of the other prophets that God is active in the world (Jonah 1:2, 17; 2:10), and that faithfulness to God (or lack of it) underlies a three-fold link among worship, socio-economic health and the environment. When the sailors pray to the Lord and obey his word, the sea is calmed, and God provides for the wellbeing of the sailors and Jonah (Jon. 1:14-19). When Jonah returns to proper worship, the Lord returns the environment to its proper order: fish in the sea, people on dry land (Jon. 2:7-10) When Nineveh turns to the Lord, the animals and humans band together in harmony, and the socio-economic violations cease (Jon. 3:4-10). Jonah’s setting is different from the rest of the Twelve Prophets, but not his theology. The unique contributions of the book of Jonah are 1) the focus on the prophet’s call and response; and 2) the recognition that God is not working to bless Israel against the other nations, but to bless the other nations through Israel.<sup>[9]</sup>

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## Jonah’s Call and Response (Jonah 1:1-17)

As is typical with Twelve Prophets, the Book of Jonah begins with a call from God to the prophet (Jon. 1:1-2). Unlike the others, however, Jonah rejects God’s call. Foolishly, he attempts to flee the presence of the Lord by taking a ship to foreign shores (Jon. 1:3). This imperils not only him, but his shipmates, for—as we have seen throughout the Book of the Twelve—[breaking covenant with God has tangible](#)



consequences, and the actions of individuals always affect the community. God sends a storm. First, it ruins the mariners' commercial prospects, as they are forced to throw all the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship (Jon. 1:5). Eventually it threatens their very lives (Jon. 1:11). Only when Jonah offers to be thrown into the sea—which the sailors reluctantly accept—does the storm abate and the danger to the community subside (Jon. 1:12-15).

The purpose of a call from God is to serve other people. Jonah's call is for the benefit of Nineveh. When he rejects God's guidance, not only do the people he was called to serve languish, but the people surrounding him suffer. If we accept that we are all called to serve God in our work—which is probably different from Jonah's work, but no less important to God (see Theology of Work Project article [Vocation Overview](#))—then we recognize that failing to serve God in our work also diminishes our communities. The more powerful our gifts and talents, the greater the harm we are apt to do if we reject God's guidance in our work. Undoubtedly we can all bring to mind people whose prodigious abilities enabled them to do great harm in fields of business, government, society, science, religion, and all the rest. Imagine the good they could have done, the evil they could have avoided, if they had submitted their skills first to the worship and service of the Lord. Our gifts may seem puny in comparison, yet imagine the good we could do and the evil we could avert if we did our work in service to God over the course of a lifetime.

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## God's Blessing for All Nations (Jonah 1:16, 3:1-4:2)

Jonah disobeys God's call because he objects to God's intent to bless Israel's adversaries, the nation of Assyria and its capital city, Nineveh, and when he ultimately relents and his mission is successful, he resents God's mercy to them (Jon. 4:1-2). This is understandable, for in time Assyria was to conquer the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 17:6). Jonah is being sent to bless people he despises. Nonetheless, this is God's will. Apparently, God's intent is to use the people of Israel to bless all nations, not just themselves (see "[Blessing for All Peoples \(Jeremiah 29\)](#)" in [Jeremiah & Lamentations and Work](#)).

Is it possible that we each try to place our own limitations on the reach of God's blessings through our work? We often assume we have to hoard the benefits of our work for ourselves, lest others gain an advantage over us. We may resort to secrecy and deception, cheating and cutting corners, exploitation and intimidation, in an effort to gain an advantage over rivals at work. We seem to accept as fact the unproven assumption that our success at work has to come at others' expense. Have we come to believe that success is a zero-sum gain?

God's blessing is not a bucket with limited capacity, but an overflowing fountain. "Put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing" (Malachi 3:10). Despite the competition, resource constraints, and malevolence

we often face at work, God's mission for us is nothing so puny as survival against all odds, but the magnificent transformation of our places of work to fulfill the creativity and productivity, the relationships and social harmony, and the environmental balance God intended from the beginning.

Although Jonah initially refuses to participate in God's blessing for his adversaries, in the end his faithfulness to God overcomes his disobedience. Eventually he does warn Nineveh, and to his dismay they respond passionately to his message. The entire city, "everyone great and small" (Jon. 3:5b), from the king and his nobles to the people in the streets to the animals in their flocks, "turn from their evil ways and the violence that is in their hands" (Jon. 3:8). "The people of Nineveh believed God" (Jon. 3:5a) and "when God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it" (Jon. 3:10). This is dismaying to Jonah because he continues to want to dictate the results of the work God called him to. He wants punishment, not forgiveness, for Nineveh. He judges the results of his own work harshly (Jon. 4:5) and misses out on the joy of others. Do we do the same? When we lament the seeming lack of significance and success in our work, are we forgetting that only God can see the true value of our work?

Yet even Jonah's small, halting moments of obedience to God lead to blessings for those around him. On the ship, he acknowledges, "I worship the Lord, the God of heaven" (Jon. 1:9) and sacrifices himself for the sake of his shipmates. As a result they are saved from the storm, and moreover, they become followers of the Lord. "The men feared the Lord even more, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows" (Jon. 1:16).

If we recognize that our own work in God's service is hobbled by disobedience, resentment, laxity, fear, selfishness or other ailments, Jonah's experience may be an encouragement to us. Here we have a prophet who may be even more of a failure at faithful service than we are. Yet God accomplishes the fullness of his mission through Jonah's halting, flawed, intermittent service. By God's power, our poor service may accomplish everything that God intends.

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## God's Care for Those Who Respond to His Call (Jonah 1:3,12-14, 17; 2:10; 4:3-8)

In light of Jonah's experience, we might fear that God's calling will lead us into calamity and hardship. Wouldn't it be easier to hope God doesn't call us at all? It is true that responding to God's call may require great sacrifice and hardship.<sup>[10]</sup> Yet in Jonah's case, the hardship arises not from God's call, but from Jonah's disobedience to it. The shipwreck and the 3-days burial at sea in the belly of the great fish arise directly from his attempt to flee God's presence. His later exposure to the sun and wind and his despair almost to the point of suicide (Jon. 4:3-8) are not hardships imposed by God. They come because Jonah refuses to accept the blessings of "a gracious God [who is] merciful, slow to anger, and

abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing” (Jon. 4:2).

The truth is that God is always working to care for and comfort Jonah. God moves people to compassion for him, as when the sailors try to row the ship to land rather than accept Jonah’s offer to be thrown overboard (Jon. 1:12-14). God sends a fish to save Jonah from drowning (Jon. 1:17) and then speaks to the fish to tell it to expel Jonah back to dry land (Jon. 2:10). He grants Jonah favour among the enemy population of Nineveh, who treat him with esteem and heed his message. He provides Jonah shade and shelter at Nineveh (Jon. 4:5-6) in his time of greatest need.

If Jonah’s case is any example, God’s call to serve others in our work need not come at the expense of our own well-being. To expect otherwise would be to remain trapped in the mindset of the zero-sum game. Given the extraordinary measures God takes to provide for Jonah when he rejects God’s call, imagine what blessings Jonah might have experienced if he had accepted the call from the beginning. The means to travel, friends ready to risk their lives for him, harmony with the world of nature, shade and shelter, the esteem of people among whom he works, and astounding success in his work—imagine how great a blessing these might have been if Jonah had accepted them as God intended. Even in the diminished form that Jonah forces upon himself, they show that God’s call to service is also an invitation to blessing.

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## Conclusions to the Twelve Prophets

The Book of the Twelve Prophets brings a unified perspective on work to a diversity of times and situations in the life of Israel. At all times they demonstrate that God is at work in the world, ready to bring about the best for his people, if they will only keep his covenant. Before the exile, the prophets challenge the elites of Israel about their use of power and their faithfulness in worship. Their constant theme is that no worship is acceptable to God unless it is accompanied by economic and political justice, for God does not recognize a split between the work of worship and the work of daily life. He does not accept that some may prosper while doing nothing for the common good and for the poorest and most vulnerable members of society.

Israel’s failure to work/worship as God commands leads to the national catastrophe and exile in Babylon. During the exile, the prophets call the people to confront their failures, and in doing so discover that even in the worst of times they had the opportunity to be faithful. Again, their faithfulness is seen as much in their work as in their worship. Those who work only for selfish interest are no better off than those who worship idols. Indeed, by elevating work and the resultant wealth to ends in themselves, work in this fashion *is* idolatry. But those who work justly, according to God’s covenant, will find that even in the worst circumstances God is present in their work, bringing joy and fruitfulness.

After the return from exile, the prophets challenge Israel to maintain godly priorities as they

re-establish themselves in the land and rebuild it from a place of desolation. Once more, economic development, just commerce, government that provides for the common good, and work in the service of others form the basis of true worship. Everyone is called to work in cooperation with God and the community of faith towards the peace and wellbeing that God longs for in his creation.

This is still our call today as much as it was in ancient Israel. In the Hebrew ordering of the Old Testament, which Christians also observe, the Book of the Twelve Prophets has the last word before the pages of the New Testament open. Thus they point towards Jesus, who came to fulfill the hopes of the prophets for abundant life in every sphere of human activity, including work, and in doing so brings into being the promise God made to Zechariah, “Thus says the Lord of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity” (Zechariah 1:17).

### Key Verses and Themes Cross Reference in the Twelve Prophets

Verse	Section
<b>Hosea 1:2</b> When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, “Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord.”	<b>God demands change</b>
<b>Hos. 4:3</b> Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing.	<b>Work and Worship</b>
<b>Hos. 4:7-10</b> The more they increased, the more they sinned against me; they changed their glory into shame. They feed on the sin of my people . . . They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply; because they have forsaken the Lord . . .	<b>Work and Worship</b>

<p><b>Hos. 14:1-9</b> Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take words with you and return to the Lord; say to him, “Take away all guilt; accept that which is good, and we will offer the fruit of our lips. Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; we will say no more, ‘Our God,’ to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy” . . . For the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.</p>	<p><b>God Makes Change Possible</b></p>
<p><b>Joel 2:28-29</b> Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.</p>	<p><b>Working Unjustly</b></p>
<p><b>Amos 3:13-15</b> Hear, and testify against the house of Jacob, says the Lord God, the God of hosts: On the day I punish Israel for its transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground. I will tear down the winter house as well as the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end, says the Lord.</p>	<p><b>Apathy Due to Wealth</b></p>
<p><b>Amos 5:14</b> Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said.</p>	<p><b>Unjust Work</b></p>
<p><b>Amos 5:21-24</b> I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them . . . I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.</p>	<p><b>Work and Worship</b></p>

<p><b>Amos 6</b> Alas for those who are at ease in Zion, and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria, the notables of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel resorts! Cross over to Calneh, and see; from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? . . . Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile, and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.</p>	<p><b>Apathy Due to Wealth</b></p>
<p><b>Amos 6:7</b> Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile, and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.</p>	<p><b>Apathy Due to Wealth</b></p>
<p><b>Amos 9:11-15</b> On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name, says the Lord who does this . . . I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land that I have given them, says the Lord your God.</p>	<p><b>God Makes Change Possible</b></p>
<p><b>Obadiah 21</b> Those who have been saved shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.</p>	<p><b>God Makes Change Possible</b></p>
<p><b>Jonah 4:2</b> He prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing.</p>	<p><b>God's Blessing</b></p>
<p><b>Mic. 2:2</b> They covet fields, and seize them; houses, and take them away; they oppress householder and house, people and their inheritance.</p>	<p><b>God Demands Change</b></p>

<p><b>Mic. 4:1-5</b> In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths" . . . For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.</p>	<p><b>God Makes Change Possible</b></p>
<p><b>Mic. 4:3</b> He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.</p>	<p><b>God Makes Change Possible</b></p>
<p><b>Mic. 6:6-7</b> With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?</p>	<p><b>Work and Worship</b></p>
<p><b>Mic. 6:8</b> What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?</p>	<p><b>Work and Worship</b></p>
<p><b>Nah. 1:1-12</b> An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh. A jealous and avenging God is the Lord, the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and rages against his enemies. The Lord is slow to anger but great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet . . . Thus says the Lord, "Though they are at full strength and many, they will be cut off and pass away. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more."</p>	<p><b>Faith and Work</b></p>

<p><b>Hab. 2:1</b> I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint.</p>	<p><b>Faith and Work</b></p>
<p><b>Hab. 2:6-7</b> “Alas for you who heap up what is not your own!” How long will you load yourselves with goods taken in pledge? Will not your own creditors suddenly rise, and those who make you tremble wake up? Then you will be booty for them.</p>	<p><b>Faith and Work</b></p>
<p><b>Hab. 2:15-16</b> “Alas for you who make your neighbors drink, pouring out your wrath until they are drunk, in order to gaze on their nakedness!” You will be sated with contempt instead of glory. Drink, you yourself, and stagger! The cup in the Lord’s right hand will come around to you, and shame will come upon your glory.</p>	<p><b>Faith and Work</b></p>
<p><b>Hab. 2:18-19</b> What use is an idol once its maker has shaped it— a cast image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in what has been made, though the product is only an idol that cannot speak! Alas for you who say to the wood, “Wake up!” to silent stone, “Rouse yourself!” Can it teach? See, it is gold and silver plated, and there is no breath in it at all.</p>	<p><b>Idolatrous Work</b></p>
<p><b>Hab. 2:20</b> But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!</p>	<p><b>Idolatrous Work</b></p>
<p><b>Hab. 3:17-19</b> Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights.</p>	<p><b>Faithfulness in the Midst of Toil</b></p>



<p><b>Zeph. 1:18</b> Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath; in the fire of his passion the whole earth shall be consumed; for a full, a terrible end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.</p>	<p><b>Idolatrous Work</b></p>
<p><b>Zeph. 2:1-3</b> Gather together, gather, O shameless nation, before you are driven away like the drifting chaff, before there comes upon you the fierce anger of the Lord, before there comes upon you the day of the Lord's wrath. Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the Lord's wrath.</p>	<p><b>Faithfulness in the Midst of Toil</b></p>
<p><b>Zeph. 2:3</b> Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the Lord's wrath.</p>	<p><b>Faithfulness in the Midst of Toil</b></p>
<p><b>Hag. 1:2-4</b> Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house. Then the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai, saying: Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?</p>	<p><b>Faithful Work</b></p>
<p><b>Hag. 1:9</b> You have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says the Lord of hosts. Because my house lies in ruins, while all of you hurry off to your own houses.</p>	<p><b>Faithful Work</b></p>
<p><b>Hag. 1:10-15</b> Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills . . . on human beings and animals, and on all their labors . . . And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month.</p>	<p><b>Faithful Work</b></p>

<p><b>Hag. 1:11</b> And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the soil produces, on human beings and animals, and on all their labors.</p>	<p><b>Faithful Work</b></p>
<p><b>Hag. 1:14-15</b> And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month.</p>	<p><b>Faithful Work</b></p>
<p><b>Hag. 2:7-8</b> I will fill this house with splendor, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts.</p>	<p><b>Faithful Work</b></p>
<p><b>Hag. 2:18-19</b> Since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider: Is there any seed left in the barn? Do the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree still yield nothing? From this day on I will bless you.</p>	<p><b>Faithful Work</b></p>
<p><b>Zech. 1:17</b> Thus says the Lord of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity.</p>	<p><b>Conclusions</b></p>
<p><b>Zech. 3:10</b> On that day, says the Lord of hosts, you shall invite each other to come under your vine and fig tree.</p>	<p><b>Faithful Work</b></p>
<p><b>Zech. 7:9-14</b> Thus says the Lord of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another. But they refused to listen . . . Therefore great wrath came from the Lord of hosts. Just as, when I called, they would not hear, so, when they called, I would not hear . . . and I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations that they had not known. Thus the land they left was desolate, so that no one went to and fro, and a pleasant land was made desolate.</p>	<p><b>Faithful Work</b></p>

<p><b>Mal. 1:7-14</b> By offering polluted food on my altar. And you say, “How have we polluted it?” By thinking that the Lord’s table may be despised. When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not wrong? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not wrong? . . . I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hands . . . Cursed be the cheat who has a male in the flock and vows to give it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished; for I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name is revered among the nations.</p>	<p><b>Faithful Work</b></p>
<p><b>Mal. 3:1</b> See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.</p>	<p><b>Faithful Work</b></p>
<p><b>Mal. 3:11-12</b> I will rebuke the locust for you, so that it will not destroy the produce of your soil; and your vine in the field shall not be barren, says the Lord of hosts. Then all nations will count you happy, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts.</p>	<p><b>Faithful Work</b></p>

## ENDNOTES

- [1] P.R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 346-48.
- [2] C.L. Meyers and E.M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 25B; New York: Doubleday, 1987), xxxi-xxxii.
- [3] See the analysis of M.L. Chaney, ‘Bitter Bounty: The Dynamics of Political Economy Critiqued by the Eighth-Century Prophets,’ in *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (rev. ed.; eds. N.K. Gottwald and R.A. Horsley; Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), 250-63.
- [4] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Updated. (Touchstone, 1997), 7.
- [5] Brad Hirshfield, “Where is God in Suffering?” *Washington Post*, 16 March 2011.

- [6] Cited in Gordon Preece and Simon Carey Holt, eds., *The Bible and the Business of Life* (Adelaide: ATF, 2004), 215.
- [7] For a further exploration of this link, see T.J. Meadowcroft, *Haggai* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 238-42.
- [8] Douglas Stuart, vol. 31, *Word Biblical Commentary: Hosea-Jonah* (Dallas: Word, Inc., 2002), 431.
- [9] Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 434.
- [10] A classic exploration of this topic is Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), originally published in 1937.