

## **The Big Picture of Work**

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Revelation

The book of Revelation provides some of the keenest insights in Scripture concerning the “big picture” of work. Yet it is a tough nut to crack, not only because of its intrinsic difficulty but because of the myriad interpretations that have grown up around the book.

Perhaps the greatest gap in interpretation is between those who see the book as primarily future, addressing the absolute end of history, and those who see most of the book as relating to events around the time John wrote (generally seen as the late first century AD). The good news is that responsible interpreters who hold the “futurist” view acknowledge that the events in the future are modeled on God’s work in the past, most notably in Creation and the Exodus from Egypt. Likewise, even those who interpret the book primarily from the standpoint of the first century acknowledge that it does talk about the ultimate future—the New Jerusalem. For this reason, no one should object to finding enduring spiritual truths in the images of the book, nor in seeing a significant future orientation in the promises contained within it.

Before the book of Revelation is even a few verses old, John says something that might seem to undercut a robust theology of work: “The time is near!” (Revelation 1:3). Some take this to mean that John thought Jesus was coming right away in his lifetime and that he got it wrong; others believe it means that once the end-time events start happening, they will move quickly. Neither of these fit well with the rest of the New Testament, since it is clear that, in some sense, the “end times” begin with the death and resurrection of Jesus. So it is best to take “The time is near” to mean “God’s kingdom is in your face!” with the implicit question, “How then are you going to live?” The apparent certainties of everyday life must be seen against the kingdom of God, which is already breaking into the world.

This has profound consequences for our view of work. While there is much in Scripture to commend work, nothing in the present state of affairs should be viewed as absolute. As we will see, work done faithfully for God’s glory has enduring value, but God must always be allowed the first and final word. Living in light of his values is critical; there can be no compromise with the world system and its idolatrous ways.