

Go Deeper Issue 4



Priests in the workplace

“The sanctuary poses a question to the worker: If God is working in the world for beauty, justice, craftsmanship, abundance, and healing, how might you join that work?” writes Matthew Kaemingk in *Work and Worship*.

The Bible overflows with stories of workers, tradespeople, artisans, professionals and priests. In these stories we witness work in its many forms: from meaningful, life-enhancing callings to soul-destroying anxiety-addled drudgery.

Given how distant the Biblical characters can often feel to us, it is refreshing to see them as workers much like ourselves. Whether it is Lydia trading in purple cloth or Joseph making his way in Pharaoh’s court, these characters are often subject to the same day-to-day pressures we are, struggling with the compromises necessary to survive in a fallen world.

Read the story of the midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, in Exodus 1:7-22. It paints a harrowing picture of the Israelites as humiliated and dehumanised slave labourers, living under Pharaoh’s exploitative regime.

The glimmer of hope comes not from the men, but the female workers, engaged in a subtle form of rebellion. They refused to comply when directed to murder the newborn Israelite boys. It would, after all, have been a massive distortion of their work. Their roles were dedicated to the flourishing of life, not the extinguishment of it.

Kelly Nikondeha write in her magisterial book *Defiant: What the women of Exodus teach us about Freedom* (Errdman, 2020), “Tender and tough in turn, their gift of discernment must have been well honed. As co-chairs of the midwifery guild, they would have been teachers, mentors and leaders. The king, no doubt, put emphasis on their lowly Hebrew status, but their neighbours would have recognised their standing as midwives. So these women

worked between their assumptions, most days unconcerned with the king's opinion of them as they went about their business. Until the day he summoned them expecting their obedience."

Without their brave act of subterfuge in their professional lives, the grand story of liberation that we see through the life of Moses and his people would have been snuffed out.

Reflections

- Can you remember a time when you felt you were doing 'God's work' and, if so, can you recall why you felt like that?
- Are certain roles more 'Godly' than others and, if so, why?
- Thinking about the story of Shiphrah and Puah, at what point are Christians called to be subversive in their daily lives rather than compliant?
- How many different jobs can you recall in the Bible and what do those various roles tell us about the characters involved?

Resources

Heaven

We recently looked at the topic of heaven in our small group. This podcast with Jamaican theologian, J Richard Middleton, was crucial in offering a Biblical understanding of heaven: <https://hebraicthought.org/podcast/go-to-heaven-resurrection-j-richard-middleton/>

Middleton's book, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Baker Academic, 2014) is essential reading for those exploring the topic. Tom Wright's *Surprised by Hope* (SPCK, 2011) is an undisputed classic in the area too.

Work

For those looking for a study in how worship can enrich your working life and visa versa, this podcast interview with Matthew Kaemingk is essential listening: <https://hebraicthought.org/podcast/integrated-liturgy-work-worship-matthew-kaemingk/>

Kaemingk's book (co-authored with Corey Wilson), *Work and Workship: Reconnecting Our Labour and Liturgy* (Baker Academic, 2020) is an earth-shaking looking at how faith and daily life connect.

A lighter, if no less profound, take on this topic is found in John Mark Comer's *Garden City: Work, Rest and the Art of Being Human* (Zondervan, 2015).

Jeremiah

The world is not short of books about Jeremiah. An excellent entry-level commentary is Chris Wright's *The Message of Jeremiah* (IVP, 2014). Kathleen O'Connor offers a crushingly beautiful appraisal of the prophet in the context of trauma studies in *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Fortress Press, 2011).